

I live with Parkinson's

“Alli Ooops”, the most subtle of voices illustrates the humour inherent how Joyce Millward tackles the things that used to be thoughtless endeavours but are now much less so. Her legs swing up off the ground and her posterior makes contact with the seat of the armchair, momentarily she is caught in mid air. In another place she would have clearly fallen backwards into the chair, in this one, her own home, it is a practised manoeuvre, the real give away being in how long it takes her to actually say those words.

Parkinson's is classically described as a tremor in the hand or leg, but the effects can include limbs that will not move at command, tongues that swell, lips that refuse to form words, eyes that blink and decline to open again. All and many more describe the Parkinson's suffer.

Mrs Millward was first diagnosed in 1991, one of 10,000 people who are each year in the UK, confirming a suspicion she had for at least a decade before, "I remember playing Badminton and thinking that something was just not right" she commented. It is worth noting that she shrugs at this story, it is not as important to her as losing her husband,



Ivor, six years later, this is the real thing that she feels that life has cheated her over, not the disease, they just didn't have enough time together she confides.

Conversation is difficult, some days uttering the first sentence becomes the whole exchange. She tries hard, but the

frustration is evident, certain letters causing more problems than others. Some words starting but never quite finishing, though “oh bugger” comes clearly down the telephone line. One of our five consecutive calls falls on a good day and she is quite chatty, the words flowing with out too much of a stutter. She has a daughter and two sons, all of whom have families and she is now a great grandmother twice over.

These are the things that she wants you to know, not that she is close to the point where her six daily pills will no longer hold the progressive symptoms at bay.

Lesley, her daughter, is happy to provide more information. Her mother lives alone. Her days are filled with visits to the local shops, lunch at the social centre and other trips with her Parkinson's group, things to keep the loneliness and boredom at bay. Once a week her eldest son takes her shopping and helps around the house. Her family are her focus and they have adjusted to her needs. When they are out together, I am told, she looks like a head of state, surrounded at each corner by a family member ready to move people out of the way when she gains momentum or to subtly place a foot in front of hers so she can step over it when she stops, a tried method used to re-coordinate her walking.

What is readily obvious is that there is support and humour in Mrs Millward's life, as yet there is no suggestion that she should be in full time care, though that unfortunately is being discussed. Her life is still her own, she will not let things get her down; she comments "When I fall over I just bloody well have to get up again don't I silly fool". There are family stories of the Red Baron, a reference to a family

present of a plum coloured electric cart, and her occasionally devil may care attitude to the clothing racks in Marks and Spencer, her favourite shop. Next year she wants to go back to Australia, her fourth visit, her best friend lives out there and this friend paints a vivid picture of Ms Millward as a mischievous young woman.

When asked how she feels about having Parkinson's, her reply is simple and honest "It is a bloody nuisance". She wants people to understand the condition more and though initially it sounds like towing the party line; during every campaign week she can be found doing her bit, standing collection tin in hand, she then comments that she is not stupid, and through several stammers and long pauses a clearer picture of what it is to be a Parkinson's sufferer appears. The stammer, the emotionless face, the slow uncoordinated movements to most people are signs of a mental health issue and they have no time to consider otherwise. Mrs Millward is not deaf or stupid, she knows what she is doing, as every movement has to be almost superhumanly willed into action. She knows that more than most and she is still as sharp as a tack. It will just take time and she would prefer it if you would too.