

# Giving Back

by Jane M. Martin as told by Harry Vanderhule

For COPD patient Harry Vanderhule, benefiting from all the help and support he has received for his disease is not enough. Inspired by a story he read about a man with COPD, Harry decided that he should share his own story to help others.

Living all his life in or near Schenectady, New York, Harry, now 73, worked as a Lithographer.

“I worked with film and a lot of chemicals, which I guess didn't help me in the long run. Both my parents have passed away with this disease, and I was a smoker but haven't smoked in over twenty years. I was diagnosed with COPD sixteen years ago after the fumes from a new carpet sent me to the hospital. During that sixteen years I have been in and out of the hospital once or twice a year, usually with acute bronchitis.

“I have been through pulmonary rehab several times; most recently, when I was put on oxygen therapy almost two years ago. I have also attended exercise classes at Sunnyview Rehab Hospital for the last three years, which have helped me very much. They have been a great support for me. They are very caring respiratory therapists.

Harry is a member of not one, but two pulmonary support groups.

“One group is Better Breathers and we always have speakers who give us information and show us new equipment that is out or coming out. When I went to the first meeting I felt at ease because we were all in the same boat. The other group I attend is a smaller group that has been through the Pulmonary Rehab program. Carol, the person who leads it, usually picks on me first to tell the other members how I have been doing this month; this is the purpose of this group, to find out how everyone has been handling themselves for the month.

“This disease has slowed me down... but it hasn't stopped me! My wife and I go out to dinner, I still mow my lawn and enjoy gardening, and we also have fun visiting our children. My wife, Joann, and I go to church every Sunday. Yesterday I found out that I have been a member for over 50 years and they were celebrating members of 50 years or more! I was thinking to myself that when I die I won't have any more breathing problems – so I guess that's why I don't have a fear of dying.

“I'm on a few meds: Spiriva, Foradil, Flovent, and Oxygen – but my pulmonary therapists tell me one of the best medicines is EXERCISE, EXERCISE, EXERCISE!

“I read the story Lori Palermo told about her dad, and she was the inspiration for me to tell my story. She just touched me as a very caring person. Now I hope that telling my own story will help others know that they can get through it too. When you're 73 and you need help getting your socks on and run out of breath walking up stairs, it helps to know you're not the only one. You *need* to know you're not the only one. I collect all the information I can on my computer about COPD and Emphysema and pass it on to my Better Breathers' group and some of the pulmonary therapy nurses at the hospital. They have helped me deal with this disease, and helping them in return... well, its sort of my way of giving back. And sharing my story with everybody else out there just keeps it going.