



Scleroderma Society of Ontario
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Joseph's Story

Joseph is a family man, born and raised in Hamilton. With a wife and three children, he has always prided himself on being able to provide for his family. So in January 2004, when pain and tightness in his hands and forearms began to affect his ability to perform his physically demanding job, Joe was worried.

Joe had an MRI in the fall of 2004 and was diagnosed with Scleroderma early in 2005.

He describes the onset of the disease as both rapid and physically devastating. His range of motion was limited so quickly and completely, and the pain and fatigue that accompanied it was almost unbearable. Joe describes it as “a bone-weary tiredness.”

Within 6 months, Joe was unable to continue working his current job as a technician for Bell Canada. The job exposed him to the elements too frequently, and the cold, damp weather aggravated his condition. The demands of his daily work were also becoming more and more of a challenge.

While the physical effects of living with Scleroderma were hard on Joe, he says it is nothing compared to the mental effect the diagnosis can have. “It was frightening. It all happened so quickly. At first, I was certain I only had a year or two to live, even though my doctor tried to reassure me that wasn't the case at all.”

He remembers driving through the city one day when he saw a sign for the Hamilton Walk for Scleroderma. He pulled over right away and soon found himself in the Hamilton Office of the Scleroderma Society of Ontario. There, he met Maureen Sauve, the Society President, who introduced him to a host of other Hamiltonians who were living with Scleroderma too.

“They were a great group of people from all different walks of life. They made me realize that things could be better...but they could also be a lot worse. Seven years later, I'm still adapting to living with Scleroderma. But I've realized you can't dwell on it. It's so important to stay positive.”

When asked what advice he has for people who are newly diagnosed with the disease, Joe offers three succinct tips:

- 1) Meet other people with Scleroderma—they're both a reality check and an inspiration.
- 2) Try the medications—everyone is different so what doesn't work for some, may indeed work for you.
- 3) Stay positive, laugh often, live your life...and adapt.