

Parkinson's Won't Keep Kingsley Manor Stand-Up Comedian Down



“Did you hear the one about the man who robbed the bank in a wheel chair? He made an easy escape because the security guard jumped up to hold the door open for him.”

From anecdotes about bank robbers who slide past bank security in their wheelchairs to observations on by-stander’s reactions when one takes an unexpected fall, comedian and Kingsley Manor Retirement Community resident Mark Siegel has an unusual, and possibly unique, source for much of his stand-up routine: his Parkinson’s disease.

“I figured if I’m going to get on the stage people are going to wonder why I’m talking soft and slurring my words,” Mark said. “I decided I’d talk about the Parkinson’s at the beginning and see where it goes. I think I got a good response.” Mark has been living with Parkinson’s disease, a neurodegenerative disorder that often affects speech and movement, for the past 18 years. But Mark doesn’t let a disease get in the way of good “shtick.”

After a long career as a communications officer for a labor union, he decided to pursue his childhood dream: comedy. One night after watching a friend perform at an open mic, Mark had a revelation.

“It’s not that hard,” he said. “There’s little risk involved other than a little humiliation.” He signed up for a class and eventually tested his material at open mic nights. So far he’s played to crowds at The Comedy Store, Flappers and, of course, Kingsley Manor. He has been performing for about a year

and a half.

“He gets some pretty good laughs,” said Kingsley Manor’s Life Enrichment Director Viktoria Selmsler. “He’s not afraid to put himself out there.”

He chose Kingsley, partly for its great location. He loves having ready access to all that the city has to offer, including the local comedy clubs.

Mark appreciates the personalized and respectful care he receives for his Parkinson’s at Kingsley. “There’s a balance between privacy and having somebody there to help you. Kingsley gives me exactly what I need.”

But the thing that’s surprised him most are the relationships that he’s developed at Kingsley. “Of my closest friends, one’s a dancer, one is a poet and another is in publishing. They give me the extra push to do something positive and creative,” he explained.

Mark finds having friends and neighbors with common interests helps keep him engaged with his pursuits. “It gives you the extra push to do something,” he explained.

He encourages others with Parkinson’s to figure out a way to explore those things that interest them.

In addition to participating in regular dance and exercise classes offered at Kingsley, Mark runs a political discussion group and is very involved in the *Parkinson’s Community LA*, an organization which raises money for home care, exercise programs and transportation services for individuals living with Parkinson’s.

And just in case you were wondering ... “After the robber escaped from the bank, a police helicopter spotted his wheelchair abandoned in an empty lot. He figured he could elude police by switching wheelchairs,” Mark quipped.

VIDEO: <https://youtu.be/uX7fAyRnmTs>