

## To be reborn with Parkinson's: the story of Valentino Grassi

“Several years before it was diagnosed, I suffered from depression which left me completely drained. Now I'm full of life»

“I feel like a flooding river. I have so much to do. I've hundreds of projects to carry out”.

Sitting in the shade of a large oak tree in the Bargo Park, Valentino Grassi tells his story. Cerulean eyes and a lively, attentive expression, he covers the last few years of his life, from the time he learnt he was ill. Grassi, who is 60 years old and lives in Seano, is a Pratese doc. After obtaining a diploma from the Buzzi Institute, he took part in the fortunate *Riviste delle Pagliette*, and for many years had a yarn company. Three years ago the bitter surprise, he was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

“That's when I was reborn”, he bravely states, “and though it may seem a paradox, that's how it was for me”. He goes on to explain, “Three or four years before I was diagnosed with Parkinson's, I fell into mild depression but I didn't know why. I had no desire to do anything. My family encouraged me but I was not able to do anything, not even the smallest thing. It was as though my batteries were missing. It was a condition that I had never experienced before, because my temperament is completely the opposite. In actual fact, I now know that it was the effect of the early stages of the disease”.

“The suffering of those years is difficult to describe: it is something too intimate and now it is a thing of the past. There are moments that can create irreparable factures, but luckily for me, I had a splendid family behind me”.

Then, exactly when he was not expecting it, his rebirth took place, the explosion of life that brought with it new projects. It was just after the summer holidays that his hands began to shake and so Grassi went to the outpatients of Neurology department of the Misericordia e Dolce.

“After the diagnosis, I had an immediate reaction”, he explains, “I finally understood the reason behind those years. And that is why I think an early diagnosis is essential. Passing all that time without knowing why you are no longer yourself, is stupid. Finally, after the diagnosis, I found myself again and I also had greater verve”.

His walk through life has been unusual and highlights his determined character and strong spirit. In fact, the usual reaction that accompanies those who are diagnosed with a neurological disease is of refusal of themselves and the disease, and as a result, they tend to isolate themselves at home.

“Instead I didn't hide myself, on the contrary, I went straight out to tell everyone I knew. It was almost like a challenge for me”, he says.

A fundamental point in his path was his encounter, first on a human level, and then as a patient, with the operating unit of the Neurology department, directed by Dr. Pasquale Palumbo. “I discovered splendid people,” he declares, “from the Director to Dr. Enrico Grassi. I felt that they understood me and this gave me great confidence”.

Another important moment was when he joined the Association Parkinson's and Us, of which he is now a member of the executive council. “My encounter with the association was also wonderful, and strengthened me. I found very positive, vital people here too. We mutually recharge each other”.

And, as he likes to say “Between me and the old people (yes, “old”, because the word ‘elderly’ gives hope, while ‘old’ has its suffering and economic and health difficulties), there's a fruitful exchange of energies. Rather, they don't realise it, but they give me far more than what I give them”, he explains with emotion.

And emotion is the clearly visible and constant element on his face and in his eyes, that springs from having found a new dimension, like the emotion that comes from having led an ‘intense life’.

“I’m a great sports lover”, he says, “I’ve done horse-riding, windsurf, skin-diving. And I have an indelible memory of the island of Elba. It was a sunny day and the limpid light filtered through the water. I was skin diving and underneath me, just like on a football field, a posidonia meadow with its living silence”. However, sport is not his only passion. His father (Remo) was a portrait painter, so art is also what inflames him. It keeps the disease at a distance. “I’m on the minimum therapy”, he explains, “my hands shake, my limbs are a little stiff, but I don’t mind, it’s as though I didn’t have the disease. What matters to me now is to carry out my projects, and I have so many in store”. This therefore, is the great commitment of the Association Parkinson’s and Us, and the numerous initiatives he organises. The most recent, by the way, was last Sunday: a whole day in the Bargo Park amidst adapted physical activities, demonstrations of oriental disciplines, music concerts, and yoga, all of which reaped a huge success with the public.

The disease doesn’t scare him: “I’ve seen tragedies”, he says, “and I take them into consideration. If it happens to me, then I’ll accept it”.

On the other hand there’s no time to lose in being scared and conjecturing about the future. Life goes on with renewed lymph and there are numerous new goals that Grassi has set for himself. Such as creating other art initiatives, helping other associations to approach voluntary work, and involving young people. Because as he says, “life always wins”.