



Scleroderma Society of Ontario

136 Kenilworth Avenue North, Hamilton, Ontario, L8H 4R8

Toll Free: 1-888-776-7776

www.sclerodermaontario.ca

Isabel's Story

Isabel has always relied on her hard-working hands, making a living by cleaning homes in the city. So when her hands started to swell and become painful, Isabel wasn't overly surprised and simply thought she was developing arthritis, or perhaps retaining water.

She went to her doctor in May 2009 and was diagnosed with a mild case of carpal tunnel. Isabel began wearing wrist supports to thwart the pain, but instead, it just got worse. Her doctor then wondered if Isabel's hands were becoming sensitive to the cleaning products she used so regularly. Once again, in an attempt to try and remedy the soreness, Isabel started wearing gloves when she worked...but the swelling continued, and so did the pain.

"I remember feeling as though my skin was about to burst," Isabel recounts.

In July, her doctor became so concerned about the swelling and pain that was slowly creeping its way up Isabel's arms, that he made an urgent referral to Dr. Matsos, a local rheumatologist.

Dr. Matsos knew upon seeing Isabel that she was living with Diffuse Scleroderma.

Diffuse scleroderma develops quickly, and begins with skin thickening and joint pain that can present in the face, neck, torso, hands, arms, feet or legs of its sufferers. Scleroderma can also manifest inside the body, hardening and potentially damaging key organs like the esophagus, the digestive tract, kidney, lungs, and/or heart.

Because there are so many ways Scleroderma symptoms may present, it's often difficult to get a speedy diagnosis. In fact, it can take up to three years for some patients to be diagnosed. Isabel credits her team of physicians for their diligent care. Their close attention to her evolving symptoms helped to catch the disease before it had time to progress significantly to other parts of her body.

Isabel readily admits that her diagnosis was a life-altering moment, but she manages to keep a positive outlook. When asked to describe living with the disease Isabel states, "It's painful, inside and out. It's sometimes hard to get moving in the morning. But I stretch and visit my chiropractor to stay flexible. I always have Tylenol on hand, and I'm taking methotrexate to help treat the disease. I've managed to keep working...I like to



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keep my mind and body busy. That way my disease doesn't control me...I control it instead."

A member of the Scleroderma Society of Ontario's Hamilton branch, Isabel says the support of other Scleroderma patients has been immensely helpful to her. "Those ladies are my rock. We're a positive group. We make fun of ourselves. It helps to keep our challenges in perspective. Joining the group was the best thing I ever did."