



COPD people

Sherry Wolfson

Sherry was born and raised in Toronto and attended Vaughan Road Collegiate. When she was 17, she came down with a terrible case of pneumonia. Her grandparents were so concerned that they took her to Florida to convalesce. They had a home there and Sherry ended up in boarding school while staying with them for a year. When she returned home, she attended the University of Toronto for certification as a nursery school teacher. She taught nursery school for 10 years. Sherry has two sons who both have successful careers. One is in sales, selling radio and TV time. The other runs a youth counselling service, Blake Boulton Youth Outreach. When her kids were older, she was encouraged by a friend who was in the advertising business to leave teaching and join his firm. She was hired there as a production coordinator working on commercials for a couple of years. From there, she moved into the motion picture business. Sherry was a second assistant director in feature films, and her first movie in Canada was produced by Ivan Reitman. She knew right away that he was going to go far. Someone suggested that because she knew Toronto so well, she should become a locations manager, which she did for the next 25 years. She was diagnosed with COPD in 2004.

How did you discover there was something wrong with you?

Whenever I got a cold it would turn into bronchitis and then often into pneumonia. My friends and I had been rock-climbing. We were in Nevada near Las Vegas when I got sick. Fortunately, it was at the end of the trip. When I got home it was determined that I had pneumonia again.

What did your doctor do?

My doctor sent me for some scans. She called me at home later that night and asked me if I was still smoking. I hadn't smoked in 25 years. She told me I have COPD. I had never even heard of COPD.

How were you diagnosed?

I had a chest X-ray that detected hyper-inflation in the lungs. That led to further testing. They determined that I had COPD.

Did anyone in your family smoke?

My dad was in the air force. He came back from England after the war and smoked three packs a day. He died of emphysema. I believe my exposure to second-hand smoke while I was a child was how it started. I was also married to a man who smoked two packs a day. The first 33 years of my life was spent living in second-hand smoke. I've never smoked around my kids.

Do you take extra precautions to protect your health?

I won't touch elevator buttons with my bare hands. I use my house or car keys, never my finger. I will not grab the poles in subway cars. I never touch bannisters going up and down stairs. I avoid contact with public surfaces as much as possible. Fortunately, my balance is still good. I think my rock-climbing helps.

the work.

You're still rock-climbing?

What I like about rock-climbing is that it's not competitive so you can take as much time as you want.

How high do you get?

About 35 feet. Indoors we have a harness on. My last outdoor rock-climbing trip was at Rattlesnake Point but I think the outside stuff has come to an end. I'm also a sailor and have sailed out of the National Yacht Club in Toronto for years. Sailing has been a very important part of my life. I have many friends at the club and enjoy cruising with them in the summer. In 2002 I sailed the south of France, which was fantastic.

Do you travel?

My next trip will be to Cannes for a couple of weeks with a girlfriend. We have a close friend who has a home there. We'll be met in Nice. I feel better when I'm by the water. My muscles don't ache as much and my breathing is better.

Were you adventurous in your youth?

I backpacked on my own through Asia. I started in Burma, then went to Bangkok and Phuket in Thailand. I travelled to Bali, then Penang in Malaysia. I sailed a lot back then. I've sailed in Greece, the British Virgin Islands and the Grenadines. I've also visited Guadalupe and Martinique. My dad was British so growing up I was back and forth to London more times than I can count.

Your favourite place?

Penang is beautiful but I really love the south of France.