



## Paddling for Parkinson's by Joseph Forrester

In 2005, my grandfather, Joe Forrester Sr., was officially diagnosed with Parkinson's and in July of 2009, my grandfather's brother died from complications due to Parkinson's disease. My grandfather has an incredible legacy; not only has he taken care of his six sons and daughters, he also has supported his nephews and grandchildren in times of need. Moreover, he has always been extremely supportive of my own personal adventures.

What is "Paddling for Parkinson's"? It was my solo kayak descent of the Missouri-Mississippi River to increase awareness about Parkinson's disease with a goal of raising \$20,000 for the National Parkinson Foundation. On June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009, I entered the Missouri River at its headwaters in Three Forks, MT. My journey would take me 3,461 miles down the fourth longest river in the world, through 13 states, and would serve as a tribute and thanks to my grandfather.

Just over three months after entering the Missouri River in Montana, I arrived, at the end of the Mississippi River, exhausted. My journey took me through the northern plains, the Midwestern heartland, and much of the southern United States. I had the opportunity to not only share my family's experience with Parkinson's, but also to listen to the experiences of others. I expect that when I look back late in life on what I learned from this trip, these are the experiences that will have a lasting impact on me.

While I had the pleasure of meeting so many people, one in particular stands out. In Pierre, SD, after completing Lake Oahe, a 240 mile long reservoir, I was met by a gentleman named Kelly Lane. Kelly is 58 years old and was diagnosed with Parkinson's in 1997. What made my bond with Kelly so unique was that before he had been afflicted by Parkinson's he had been an extremely

active kayaker, rock climber and science teacher—passions I also enjoyed. Watching him move, understanding what had been taken from him really impacted me; I could only imagine the frustration he experienced losing these activities. Kelly was undeterred by Parkinson's, and even though so much of what he loved had been taken, he fought back with equal tenacity holding onto what he could and adapting to what he couldn't. He was truly an inspiration.

Personally, I experienced an incredible voyage, not only through America, but also into myself. Alone for so long, I had to face my own fears, had to push myself past the point of pain, and reject failure with the conviction that I would eventually savor the sweet smell of the Gulf salt water. I knew that my grandfather, family, friends and so many followers believed that I could complete the trip; their support, care and kind words helped me through the many dark hours.

I would like to thank the National Parkinson Foundation for all of the support they provided during this experience and all of the people that donated along the way to help me exceed my fundraising goal.

***Joseph Forrester is a medical student  
at the University of Virginia.***

***Visit his web site [www.paddlingforparkinsons.com](http://www.paddlingforparkinsons.com)  
to read his blog entries throughout the trip.***

***Left Photo:*** Joe Forrester, Joe Forrester, MD, and Grandpa and Grandma Forrester before the trip started.

***Center Photo:*** Joseph Forrester kayaking.

***Right Photo:*** Kelly Lane helping Joe with kayak repairs in South Dakota.