



Deb Kelleher

2012 Indianapolis Jingle Bell Run/Walk Honoree

Deb Kelleher not only knew the warning signs of arthritis, it was her job to teach the community about them. But when it came time to take care of herself, the Carmel resident failed to practice what she preached.

A North Central High School graduate, Deb moved from Indianapolis to Cincinnati after graduating college in 1980. She managed to work herself up through the ranks of the Arthritis Foundation - first as a fundraising director, then as an outreach coordinator and finally as the chapter's Executive Director. She held that title for nearly a decade.

"It was my job to help people recognize the symptoms of arthritis and to find them the resources they needed to alleviate the pain," Deb recalls. "Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would one day need the help myself."

A failed marriage and ailing parents brought Deb home to Indianapolis in 1998. A single mother of two, Deb busied herself taking care of everyone around her and failed to recognize the early symptoms of the disease that was ravaging her own body.

"I had always suffered with back pain," Deb recounts. "But I had started to notice a slight bit of turning in my hands. And my hip had started to bother me. I finally requested blood work for arthritis."

But doctors found none of the usual markers and treated Deb with over-the-counter pain relievers. Three months later she threw her hip out. It happened several more times before doctors were forced to change their approach.

"One day I was walking across the kitchen and my hip gave out. I fell and hit my head and blacked out," Deb says. "The doctors did x-rays and found I had rheumatoid arthritis. They said from the looks of it I had been living with it for nearly 10 years. I was floored."

Since then, this 54-year old firecracker has had two bilateral hip replacements, bi-lateral knee replacements and faces future surgeries to her back, shoulders and elbows. She now

relies on the help of a cane to get around, but tries to ensure arthritis doesn't slow her down. She exercises regularly, participating in the Arthritis Foundation's aquatics programs.

It's a lesson that's come full-circle for Deb and one she's anxious to share with others.

"No one will ever see me stop trying," Deb says. "Arthritis is a devastating disease and one you shouldn't have to face alone. And now I just want to give back to others because I'd like to offer a hand to hold."