

I Am!TM Poem Project for Support Groups

A collaboration between
PMD Alliance and
Supernus Pharmaceuticals
BE icONic with PD[®] campaign



PMD Alliance
Parkinson & Movement Disorder Alliance

I AM impacted by a movement disorder.

I AM resilient.

I AM putting my best foot forward.

**I AM ready to learn, live more fully
and connect with others.**

I AM icONic.



Dear Support Group Leader,

PMD Alliance is excited to collaborate with Alison Miller at Supernus to bring you the I Am!™ Poem Project for Support Groups. Alison is coordinating an exciting art installation called the Parkinson's Tulip Project to be presented at the 2023 World Parkinson Congress in Barcelona, Spain. The installation will consist of an immersive exhibit of photographs of people impacted by Parkinson's who are posing with tulips of all varieties, along with a collection of I Am!™ poems written by PMD Alliance community members. We hope you will join us in celebrating our interconnected Parkinson's community by allowing us to display your poems alongside the beautiful tulips and faces of Parkinson's from around the world.

The I Am!™ Poem Project is an engaging and creative activity intended for anyone living with a movement disorder and for those who care for them. PMD Alliance has distributed this activity to support groups across the country in hopes of wide participation. Those community members who wish to submit their I Am!™ poems for inclusion in the 2023 World Parkinson Congress tulip exhibit may do so by visiting PMD Alliance's website. All participants who submit their poems by the deadline will also be entered into a drawing to win PMD Alliance merchandise!

We hope you and your group members enjoy this fun and contemplative activity. Please let us know about your experience using the booklet with your group, and we greatly look forward to reading your poems! Thank you for all the important work you do for the movement disorders community! If you are interested in additional resources for your support group, please visit our website: <https://www.pmdalliance.org/support-group-leader/>

Best,



Shannon Elliott, MA, NASM-CPT
Manager, In Sync!® Network
Parkinson & Movement Disorder Alliance

Special Thank You! Alison wishes to express her gratitude to Mr. Brandon Janes, an English teacher at Newbury Park High School, CA, who helped inspire this project. The I Am!™ Poem Project for Support Groups activity guide was also inspired by the work of George Ella Lyon and the many teachers and writers who've shared their "I Am!™" poem creative processes online.

GUIDE FOR SUPPORT GROUP LEADERS

1

Make copies of the activity booklet (pages 9-14) for each group member

2

Hand out the activity booklet during a support group meeting

3

Read the I Am!™ Introduction aloud and follow the instructions in the Pre-Writing Activity

4

Allow time for group members to work on their Pre-Writing Activity during the meeting and give them the opportunity to complete their poems at home

5

Ask group members to bring their poems to the next meeting for sharing (explained in the I Am!™ Poem Sharing Activities section)

6

Encourage group members to participate in the 2023 WPC Parkinson's Tulip Project by uploading their completed poems to the PMD Alliance website. Poems can be anonymous or may include the writer's name, but please include the City and State in which the writer lives, plus the name of the Support Group they belong to, if applicable.



NOTE: It is suggested that you as the Support Group Leader do this exercise yourself before leading your group. That will open up possibilities and perhaps show you ways you want to adapt the process.

I AM!™ POEM PROJECT: A GUIDE

I Am!™ Introduction

When people are faced with a chronic and degenerative disease, it is easy to lose track of all that makes them who they are, and instead become their diagnosis. We know that we are more than our diagnosis, whether we're a person living with the disease, a care partner, or another loved one.

From time to time, it is important to remind ourselves of who we are. The I Am!™ poem is a tool that enables us to engage with ourselves in a creative way, which results in a poem that captures who we are, where we come from, and what matters in life. Sharing our poem can be a profound way to connect more deeply with others and reveal what makes us special.

What Are I Am!™ Poems?

An I Am!™ poem is meant to help you express yourself as an individual. It might entail an exploration of your character, likes, values, cultural background, and family traditions. In this process, you'll identify items from your home and family that tell a story about who you are. Writing about where we come from helps to honor our own voice, our own complexity and history—the variety of our lives creates a rich tapestry that should be celebrated!

How Do I Write an I Am!™ Poem?

By talking about yourself, of course! It's helpful to use colorful words that evoke distinct images and illuminate your uniquely personal traits. I Am!™ poems don't have to follow a specific meter or be a certain length. They are filled with insight, feelings, and observations you have. The first line of the poem is repeated throughout to give it continuity and structure.

I Am!™ poems are most powerful when they have strong sensory language—smells, tastes, sights, sounds, and things you touch that make you think of your home, your family, and your life. Poems are often more meaningful when they use language that is surprising and fresh—your own words—rather than words or phrases that you often hear others using.

Remember that we come from experiences, not just locations. We are from our family and its history, from the food we eat, the songs we sing, the houses we live in. No one else sees the world as you do; no one else has your material to draw on. You don't have to know where to begin. Just start. Let it flow. Trust the work to find its own form. And most importantly, don't be afraid to express who you really are.

I AM!™ POEM PROJECT: A GUIDE

PRE-WRITING ACTIVITY

Read an example “I Am!™” poem aloud to the group. George Ella Lyon’s “Where I’m From” poem is a classic example that influenced many other writers to compose their own “I Am!™” poems – find it in the Examples page at the end of this guide. Another suggested poem to read to your group (or have them volunteer to take turns reading sections) is one that was crowd-sourced by National Public Radio (NPR) in 2019 – it is a compilation of stanzas written by many writers, and therefore demonstrates a multitude of styles and approaches to this kind of poem. NPR offers a recording of this compilation poem if you prefer to play it for your group from your computer or smartphone.



Ask your group members to think of three significant experiences from their lives and write them in their booklet, then choose the one that has the most energy for them.

Invite them to take a second look at what they’ve chosen to see if they can make it more specific, e.g. I’m from flowers might be I’m from daffodils that grew in my best friend’s yard. Have them write their new line in the appropriate space in their booklet.

Provide an opportunity for volunteers to share their lines with the group.

Ask your group members if they would be comfortable sharing their poems – this should be voluntary.

SHARING OPTIONS:

- Group members may read their poems aloud. Encourage people to read them as poems, not as a list of statements.
- You can break them up into smaller groups where members can share amongst themselves.
- You can have the members exchange poems, so they are not reading their own.
- You can hang the poems in your meeting space and allow time for a gallery walk.

Recognize the level of sharing that people have done, and ask them to reflect on their writing process by posing some of these questions:

- Describe the experience of writing this poem. Was it easy or difficult?
- Describe the experience of reading the poem aloud. How did you feel?
- What did you notice in the poems read aloud by others?
- What similarities and differences did you notice between your poem and that of other group members?
- What did you learn about yourself in this activity?
- Was there anything that surprised you, either in writing your poem or sharing it with the group?
- What was valuable or interesting about this activity?
- Is there anything you feel you have lost track of for yourself in your life that you’d like to reclaim?

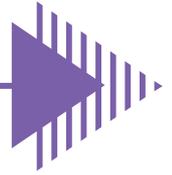


by George Ella Lyon

I Am From

I am from clothespins,
 from Clorox and carbon-tetrachloride
 I am from the dirt under the back porch
 (Black, glistening
 it tasted like beets)
 I am from the forsythia bush,
 the Dutch elm
 whose long gone limbs I remember
 as if they were my own.
 I'm from the fudge and eyeglasses,
 from Imogene and Alafair.
 I'm from the know-it-alls
 and the pass-it-ons,
 from perk up and pipe down.
 I'm from He restoreth my soul
 with a cottonball lamb
 and ten verses I can say myself.
 I'm from Artemus and Billie's Branch,
 fried corn and strong coffee.
 from the finger my grandfather lost
 to the auger
 the eye my father shut to keep his sight.
 Under my bed was a dress box
 spilling old pictures,
 a sift of lost faces
 to drift beneath my dreams.
 I am from those moments—
 snapped before I budded—
 leaf-fall from the family tree

NPR's A Morning Edition Crowdsourced Poem of Remembering



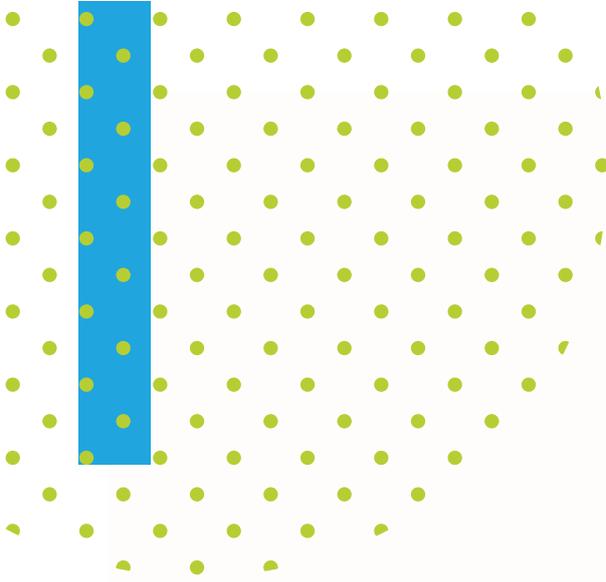
WHERE I'M FROM

I am from travelers and adventure
 from "Be seen, not heard!"
 from ritual and plainsong
 from England and exile
 from mint sauce and lamb.
 I am from casseroles and canned tuna
 Kennedys and Saturday morning cartoons
 I am from Tang in a Daffy Duck glass
 from wall phones with mangled cords stretched
 during private calls in a room too far
 I come from popcorn ceilings
 dining rooms of glossy mahogany
 I am from bed sheets
 Draped over our dining room chairs.
 from the trees Littering the backyard
 The sweet taste of mulberries Staining my fingers
 red
 I'm from big hats under rainbow umbrellas
 Buckets of wet sand and unstable castles
 I'm from orange and vanilla custard
 with a pizza slice the size of your chest
 From hot July days and cool summer nights
 I am from Sunday night pizza and Monday Night
 Football
 I am from marbles
 From empanadas cooking in the street
 I am from orchids and mango trees
 I am from la torta tres leches and ruana
 I am from happy and serious
 From hard work and sweat
 I'm from grit, respect, and discipline.
 from big family reunions and endless laughs.
 I am from houses never locked
 from the projects in Brooklyn
 and dominoes in the park
 I am from salsa and the car horns blaring

 I am from diners and malls and accents that put an
 "aw" in coffee.
 from silky lingerie and sweat socks, bruised knuckles
 and scars I gave myself
 from longing to be someone, somewhere else.
 I am from a mother who was still a girl;
 whose beauty kept her shy
 I am from dirt and fences
 from strength and toughness

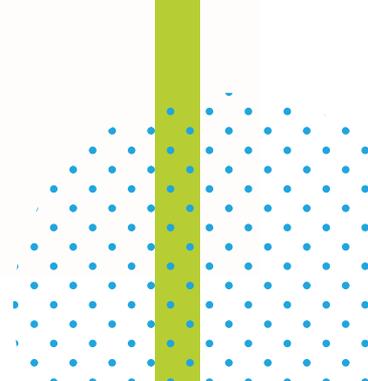
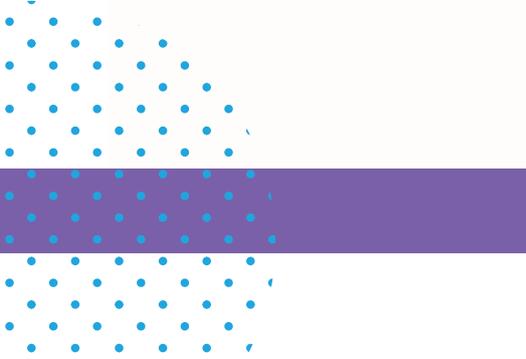
I am from ashes flicked into the tray
 the despair of divorce
 bonds gone unappreciated
 eviction and being thrown away
 running and begging to stay
 I am from a little girl who just needed a break
 I am from a time when my mother went to the hospital
 and never came back;
 when my toys were in a box by the curb as we drove
 away.
 I am from singing in the darkness of night
 Putting myself to sleep with the sound of my own voice.
 I am from playing backyard baseball with tennis balls,
 Wiffle balls, even roundish gourds.
 from weekend sleep-overs
 from orange push-ups
 from fallen leaves kicked up in swirls on walks to school,
 from early morning radio announcements of a snow day
 — no school!
 I am from the South and the North.
 from immigrant grandparents and Civil War soldiers.
 I am from the red dirt clay of Virginia
 From the sounds of the fiddle to the beauty of a choir
 From the jig and the reel
 to the cloggers and the dancers.
 From collard greens and fat back,
 chitterlings and white bread
 I'm from hymns learned on Sundays,
 hypocrisy displayed on Mondays.
 I am from Tom Petty
 and baby oil in the hot sun
 rye bread and salami.
 I am from black cows,
 tacos, bicycles, and
 The gentle lure of crickets.
 I am from James Brown and Santana.
 from Groovin' on a Sunday Afternoon
 and Crystal Blue Persuasion.
 I am from endless steps,
 from California and Texas, and Durango, Colorado.
 From unknown ancestors of the ancient Southwest,
 cliff-dwellers and puebloans.
 I am from the earth --

 from from cityscapes and sleepy suburbs
 from cicada clicks and firefly sparks
 from the call of books and breathing through struggles.
 I am from you
 and you are from me
 We are love
 We are home
 We are from this day forward.



COMPOSING YOUR I AM!TM POEM

Select from the pages above the items you wish to include in your poem. You do not have to include everything that you listed, and you can always add more categories or items to include in your poem. Recall from the example “I Am!TM” poems you read or listened to that it is perfectly okay if there are items, people, and situations mentioned in your poem that are unfamiliar to others.



Activity Booklet

LIST THREE PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Example: tall, brown hair, like to read

Now, choose one and embellish it - can you provide more details and use more evocative language? Incorporate smells, tastes, all five of your senses, the more specific and descriptive, the better. Write your new line here:

In the following sections, use the sample categories to brainstorm and embellish specific details related to your life. The key is making these as specific and personal to you as possible. Use nicknames or words that only you or your family use. Don't worry about others not knowing what you're referring to. The sample categories are just a place to start- feel free to use the back of the page to branch out beyond those provided!

RELATIVES' NAMES AND TRAITS

CHILDHOOD ROOM, HOME, OR HOMETOWN



SPECIAL DISHES, FOODS, AND MEALS

PHRASES, QUOTES, OR MOTTOS

NOSTALGIC SONGS OR LYRICS

FAMILY CUSTOMS, TRADITIONS, VALUES

FAMILY STORIES OR ANECDOTES



NATURE, FLORA, OR OUTDOOR MEMORIES

RELIGIOUS OR SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS

SIMPLE PLEASURES THAT BRING YOU JOY

MEMORABLE HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

HEIRLOOMS, KEEPSAKES, MEMENTOS, OR GIFTS

Use the following template to create your unique poem.



I am _____ and _____
(2 special characteristics you have)

And I am from _____
(a phrase describing your childhood home)

And _____
(more description of your childhood home)

I wonder _____
(something you are curious about)

I am _____ and _____
(repeat first line)

I am from _____
(family tradition)

And _____
(another family trait or tendency)

And from _____
(another family trait or tendency)

And I am from _____ and _____
(family or loved one's name) (another family or loved one name)

I am from _____
(something you were told as a child or that you believe)

And _____
(a song that has meaning to you)

And I am from _____ and _____
(place of birth) (detail about something in your home)

From _____
(story about a family member)

(detail about the story or person)

(description of memento, picture or treasure) (location of memento, picture or treasure)

The _____ whose longstanding growth I experience as if my own.
(plant or tree near your home or in your home)

I understand _____
(something you know to be true)

And experience _____
(something that brings you joy)

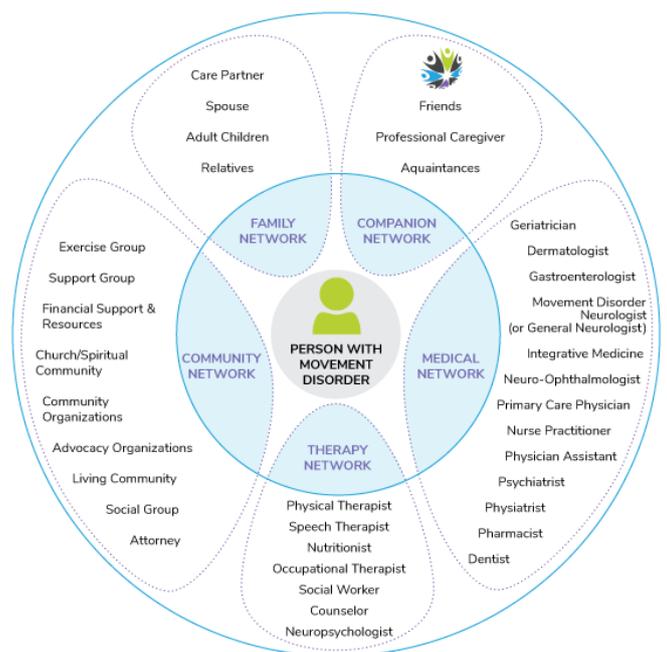
I am _____ and _____
(repeat first line)



A collaboration between PMD Alliance and Supernus Pharmaceuticals BE icONic with PD® campaign

We're the
Parkinson & Movement Disorder Alliance,
"PMD Alliance" for short — an
independent, national nonprofit dedicated
to providing opportunities for
people to learn, live more fully
and spark meaningful connections
around them.

Visit our website for additional support
group leader resources, and much more!



PMD Alliance
Parkinson & Movement Disorder Alliance

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