In the summer of 1996, when Hal Kahn picked up his many prescriptions at his local pharmacy his eyes lingered on a tin of watercolors. He wanted to buy one but didn’t know why. By 1997, Hal had to stop working due to ME/CFS and he gave in and purchased the paints. He could no longer hike or go birdwatching and found that painting lifted his spirits in an unexpected way.

A new passion seized him, helping him deal with the frustrations of ME/CFS: photography. He started with flowers, then a long series of models and finally what became his true calling—faces of the elderly.

“I found meaning in the deeply weathered faces that mirrored my own physical and emotional exhaustion,” Hal shared.

Hal found that photography supplied three key ingredients for dealing with his ME/CFS. It gave him learning, short-term visitors who didn’t stay long enough to tire him out, and personal growth that allowed him to find a new identity.

“In my photographs, I strive for meaning rather than beauty... Today, art is the most enriching part of my day. And in the struggle against this illness that brings so many negatives, it is important to find the positives.”

To submit an item to Patient Voices, please email Emily Taylor at ETaylor@SolveCFS.org.