

My mom has Alzheimer's

January is Alzheimer Awareness month and this year's campaign theme is #StillHere.

Although dementia is progressive and ultimately fatal, the symptoms and rate of progression varies from person to person. Dementia can last between eight and 10 years, or even longer. Each person living with dementia is different. Getting to know the person and their life is important in order to give them the support they need and want. Like anyone else, it takes time to get to know the person well. It's important to understand that the person living with dementia will change with the progression of the disease as will their abilities, wants and needs. Seeing the person and not their disease helps focus our attention on what they can do rather than what they can't do. Assumptions about dementia can interfere with the well-being and quality of life and care of people it affects.

Encouraging positive attitudes and engaging people with dementia in activities that build on their strengths and life history will foster their self-worth, maintain their identity and prolong their independence.

During this month, a few caregivers in the North Hastings have agreed to share some of their thoughts on supporting a loved one who is dealing with Alzheimer's disease.

My mom has Alzheimer's. She is 94, and was fortunate to be a vibrant healthy woman for most of her life. Mom moved from Quebec to Bancroft to be closer to me about eight years ago. It was about that time when she began to experience memory lapses. Her two brothers were afflicted with the illness at a much earlier age, and both died in their early 80s. We have been travelling a very interesting journey since the onset of the symptoms. Along the way Mom and I have both had to make many adjustments and have experienced many changes.

Mom has moved from an independent dwelling to a retirement home, and now resides in Hastings Centennial Manor. I looked at moving her to somewhere like [Banfields Aged Care](#) facility, but I wanted her to be as close to me as possible. The manor is a couple of minute's drive away so it works out quite well for visits etc. She has gone from walking downtown to the bank, hairdresser, post office, restaurants, drugstore, etc., to mostly staying put at the manor. She only goes out two or three times in a month. She prefers to stay at the Manor and only goes to activities occasionally when she can be persuaded. One of the only activities she does now is bowling. This is something she has always enjoyed and so it's just about the only thing I can persuade her to do. She stopped for a while, because she was struggling with her joints and her wrists were giving her pain, but I headed over to <https://skilledbowlers.com/bowling-supplies-equipment/best-bowling-wrist-supports/> and found her a wrist support which has helped no end. She's now back to playing bowling, but only occasionally.

Mom was once a very social woman and enjoyed all the events and activities that were offered at the residences. Mom always enjoyed writing and sending cards for all special occasions especially Christmas.

She is no longer able to focus long enough to complete this exercise. It has become meaningless to her and so this is a tradition that I have to let go. Social events like special dinners and family get togethers used to be some of her favourite times. Now these functions are overwhelming and confusing for her. For the first time ever, Christmas Day for Mom was spent at the Manor and the family made a short visit to share gifts and take some pictures. She wasn't part of the hustle bustle back home and she was not at our Christmas table. This saddened me, but I knew that for Mom's benefit and well-being a quieter day would be more comfortable and enjoyable.

When a loved one has Alzheimer's it is like experiencing the grieving process. At first I denied the problem, then I got angry and then after much frustration for both of us I finally accepted the inevitable. Previously, I kept correcting her and losing patience when she repeated herself or forgot details that I thought she should remember.

When I began accepting I was able to enjoy the moment when I was with her. We were both much happier and less stressed. She is usually content in the moment and I am pleased when she shows joy and happiness. I am thankful that she still knows me and I get the greatest welcome when I visit. She tells everyone that I'm the Boss. It is important to her that I'm in charge and am making decisions for her. I think this makes her feel safe.

Attending the monthly Alzheimer's society meetings has really helped me learn from other people who are going through the same struggles. Hearing other people's stories and talking about the illness with qualified people such as Sarah Krieger has made me more compassionate and knowledgeable, and has alleviated much guilt that as a caregiver I often carried.

Bancroft is fortunate to have an active, vibrant organization that offers information and resources for people and their families dealing with the illness. Mom's skill levels may have changed, but she is still my mom and I continue to love her and always will. As the illness progresses I know that I will continue to have the support of my local organization. Just as this group supports individuals, they too need the public's support. The 2016 Walk for Alzheimer's is once again coming to Bancroft in January. Please

be there!

by Kathleen Partridge

Sixth annual Walk for Alzheimer's

Saturday, Jan. 30 NHHS Gym 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Register online at www.walkforalzheimers.ca or pick up a pledge form at local real estate offices or the NH office of the Alzheimer Society. Call 613-332-4614 or 613-332-3842 for more information