

Speaking Notes – January 30, 2008

*Brenda Hounam, Board Member, Alzheimer Society of Canada
Person Living with Alzheimer’s Disease*

Thank you Scott.

I was a single mother of two when I was diagnosed at 53 with early onset Alzheimer’s disease. I had already had to leave my place of employment where I was working as an industrial accountant and my son Heath quickly made the decision to move into the home because my daughter was away at school at the time. And this has allowed me to be able to stay in my home for much longer.

When I was first started on the Alzheimer’s medication, I noticed a marked improvement in my daily functioning but most importantly I noticed an improvement in the levelling out of my emotions and this allowed me to take back some control of my own life.

One of the first things I started to do was to make lifestyle changes. That included for me, the most important thing was to do brain exercises on a daily basis for at least an hour a day and those exercises involved playing the keyboard, video games and a variety of puzzles. And I do those to make sure that I am stretching my brain every day.

I also changed my diet to include foods that were high in antioxidants, Omega-3 and everything else that I needed to keep a healthy body. It is so important to make sure that my blood pressure and cholesterol are kept in check.

I work very hard to minimize stress from my life. If I am agitated, I don’t function well. So I have had to learn to say no and walk away from things. I rely very greatly on my sense of humour to get me through each and every day.

I can’t begin to tell you in a few minutes how drastically my life has changed since this diagnosis. From the very early morning when I first get up to late at night when I finally go to bed. I can no longer look after my finances. In fact, I can’t even make change in a store when I go shopping.

I have to be supervised when I’m cooking. Even the smallest venture for me takes three times longer than it does for you to accomplish, even making a simple sandwich. I rely very heavily on a support system of family, friends and the Alzheimer Society to be able to function to the best of my abilities for today.

I only have two priorities now in my life. The first is to spend as much quality time with my family and friends as possible. And the second is to raise awareness and advocate for Alzheimer's and related diseases.

I now live one day at a time, but I still watch and appreciate the gifts that come my way. Since my diagnosis I received one of the best gifts that can be received, and that was my young granddaughter, who has just turned two years old this month. In the mornings when it is so difficult and so hard for me to find motivation to get moving and I feel so sluggish, she comes up and says to me: "Grammy, Grammy, wake up. Follow me." And she grabs my hand. She says, "Come on, it's supper time." All meals to her are supper time.

This for me is the hardest. These are treasured memories and I have two extra gifts that are coming my way the first of April, as a brother and a sister for Alison are coming into my home.

I ask you today to please remember, as our minds slowly forget, that our hearts are steadfast and true. I hope you have listened with your hearts today and keep in your mind this memory.

Thank you.