

January is Alzheimer's Awareness Month in Canada, and the Alzheimer Society of B.C. is joining a nationwide campaign to bring information to the many people who are touched by dementia across the country.

January is also a month where people like to consider setting goals or "resolutions" for the year to come. In this issue of *Insight* people living with dementia share some of their personal resolutions and we offer tips to help you plan and achieve your own goals in the New Year. We also introduce you to Alec Burden, a new member of the Society's Board of Directors.



PLANNING MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES FOR THE NEW YEAR

Each January, many people make a New Year's resolution to inspire something meaningful in their life. However, in the weeks to come, it can be challenging to find the time or motivation to stick to the goal you have set for yourself.

The following tips might help you stay on track:

- Ensure that your New Year's resolution involves something that you enjoy doing! This will make it more likely that you will continue with it.

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- Tell your family and friends about your goal and ask them to support you in your efforts. For example, if your goal is to go to a pottery class, ask a person close to you to join you. Involving another person can help with your motivation and enjoyment.
- Consider keeping a journal to record how things are going with your goal.
- Start with small changes – this will help to ensure that your goal is attainable. For example, if you would like to exercise three times a week, start by trying to exercise at least once a week before increasing your activity level.



PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS

We asked people living with dementia from around the province to share their resolutions for the New Year. Here are their responses.

SOCIAL

- “Reach out to mates that I used to meet regularly but have since lost contact with.”
- “Spend more time with friends and family.”
- “Continue to grow in my relationship with my husband.”
- “To keep coming to this support group where we support and enjoy each other.”
- “Spend more time watching my children and grandchildren ski.”
- “Attend more school and work reunions.”
- “To not let my world shrink by giving up things that I can no longer do at the level I used to.”

ACTIVITIES AND HOBBIES

- “Piano playing – experimenting with different cords using both hands.”
- “Gardening – achieving more colour by planting colourful annuals.”
- “Learn to play the ukulele.”
- “Teach English as a second language.”
- “Oversee students in writing a book about the life of immigrants after World War II.”
- “Buy cheesecake (New York style).”
- “Re-join a painting group.”
- “Spend more time enjoying metalwork and woodwork.”

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HEALTH AND WELLNESS

- "I would like to join more balance exercise groups at the Seniors' Centre."
- "I want to ski Grouse Mountain for free after turning 85 years old."
- "Walk my dog."
- "Continue to have three good meals per day."
- "Meditate."
- "Sleep better."
- "Continue to play tennis, which is how I met my husband about 30 years ago."
- "Continue with my volunteer work and look for new volunteer opportunities."
- "Keep going to the Adult Day Program."
- "I would like to swim more lengths."
- "Continue to laugh often."
- "Take each day as it comes."
- "Continue to follow-up on the latest information, research and new possibilities for people living with a diagnosis."
- "I don't make New Year's resolutions. I try to live life to the fullest each day!"

Have you made a resolution for the New Year?



MEET ALEC – A NEW MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY’S BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Alec Burden is best known for his regular travel segment *Alec’s Best Bets*, which ran on Global TV (at the time BC TV) for over 20 years. His career grew out of a lifelong love of performing on the stage and for television that dates back to his childhood in England and continues today.

In addition to his career as a performer, Alec served with both the Royal Air Force and the Royal Canadian Air Force. Eventually, Alec moved to Vancouver and took a job with Wardair, where he was promoted to Director of Marketing for Europe and returned to England before becoming the head of operations for British Columbia.

It was after holding this role for several years that Alec made the move into performance. Alec is currently semi-retired but continues to be involved in theatre and radio.

A few years ago, Alec was diagnosed with mild cognitive impairment. He candidly shares how the diagnosis has affected his life, as well as his connection to the Alzheimer Society of B.C.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST START NOTICING PROBLEMS WITH YOUR MEMORY?

As an actor and performer, I am required to learn scripts. I could normally knock off about 80 pages of scripts for a three-act play without too much trouble. Then, very slowly, I would sometimes have a pause before I spoke. The



Alec Burden, a member of the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s Board of Directors

pause then got to be a gap and that’s when we realized there was something wrong. I saw my doctor several times over the course of a year and I eventually received a diagnosis of mild cognitive impairment.

HAVE THINGS CHANGED SINCE YOUR DIAGNOSIS?

To this day nothing has really changed. I still do a bit of background work and I’ve done the odd commercial where I have to remember one line. I love being with the people who are acting and the atmosphere, but basically my

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acting career has sort of wound up – and I’ve come to grips with being on the other side of the fence. I am 82 years of age and I’ve had a damn good run at being an actor. I have enjoyed every moment of it and I wish that everyone has had as much excitement in their days working as I have.

HOW DID YOU FIRST BECOME CONNECTED WITH THE ALZHEIMER SOCIETY OF B.C.?

About a year ago, I started going to a support group run by the Society. There, I found 15 to 20 people – all who have some form of memory loss – who laugh, tell jokes and tell stories. We also have serious conversations, but there is no doom or gloom in the room at all. There is an incredible amount of laughter to the point that we are sometimes almost crying with laughter.

YOU RECENTLY JOINED THE ALZHEIMER SOCIETY OF B.C.’S BOARD OF DIRECTORS. WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO JOIN THE BOARD?

A staff person from the Society let me know that the board was searching for a person with dementia or another form of cognitive impairment to join them as a member. After a meeting, they invited me on the Board. I am delighted to do absolutely anything to help!

DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE LIVING WITH DEMENTIA OR ANOTHER FORM OF MEMORY LOSS?

Quit worrying about it because it will do nothing but depress you! It doesn’t matter whether you have Alzheimer’s disease or mild cognitive impairment, or whatever – you can’t

start regretting what you are or what you have. Life is certainly too short to start worrying about something you can do absolutely nothing about.

There was a short time that I thought "Oh my God, now what?" But then I remembered lyrics from a song by the great jazz pianist George Shearing, "Pick yourself up, Dust yourself off, And start all over again."

So that’s what I did, and that’s pretty well what you have to do. You have to say "Okay, that’s that, now what else can I do?" I haven’t stopped doing anything I want to do, I just stopped a couple of things I didn’t like doing!

ON AN END NOTE, WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVOURITE ROLE TO DATE?

My favourite role of all time was playing Alfie Doolittle in the musical *My Fair Lady*. I wasn’t Alec Burden playing Alfie Doolittle, I was Alfie Doolittle. I felt that every pore in my body was in that role and my fellow actors have said the same thing – that the role was written for me. It was Alec Burden at his finest.

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. would like to thank Alec for sharing his story with *Insight*.

AN OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEER IS HONOURED

This past September, the Alzheimer Society of B.C. celebrated several outstanding volunteers in an awards ceremony. These volunteers best represent the Society's core values of compassion, integrity and respect, leadership and teamwork.

One recipient, Myrna Norman, received the Mike Crowe Award of Hope. Recipients of this volunteer award are living with dementia and have demonstrated courage, leadership and support for others, as well as having acted as a role model while raising awareness.

Myrna has certainly shown these values in her years as a volunteer with the Society. She has co-facilitated the Maple Ridge Early Stage Support Groups for several years and has regularly represented the Society at community wellness events, distributing materials, taking donations and answering questions. Myrna also publicly shares the ways in which her diagnosis has affected her life with great honesty.

Congratulations Myrna!



Myrna Norman (second from the left) received the Mike Crowe Award of Hope.

"I believe that my involvement in dementia awareness has kept me reasonably well in terms of the degeneration that would normally happen with this disease. If I chose to stay in my home and watch television I wouldn't be able to do the things that I am doing right now. When I tell people that I am eight years into two different types of dementia I want them to know it's still possible to live a good life – this sort of awareness is important!"

– Myrna Norman

TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Are you interested in sharing your skills and experiences to help us in our work nationwide? The Alzheimer Society of Canada is looking for people in the early stage of Alzheimer's disease or another dementia to join their new Advisory Group! With a representative from each province, the Advisory Group members will use their lived experience of dementia to guide the Alzheimer Society of Canada in its work nationwide.

For more information, please complete the application at: www.alzheimer.ca/advisorygroup.

CREATIVE CORNER

A diagnosis of dementia can generate a diverse range of thoughts and feelings. Consider whether participating in a creative hobby such as painting, photography or writing could be helpful to you.

TO MY CHILDREN

If I should not remember
 that I love you
 Please tell me I do
 Remind me how precious you are
 to me
 Flesh of my flesh
 And bone of my bone
 Melding in love
 To make
 You
 And each child
 of my every child
 Is mine
 And his
 For all eternity the gift of love
 If I don't know you
 Tell me who you are
 Tell me that you're someone I love
 With my whole heart
 Forever
 It's just that I don't
 Always
 Remember

– Maryon



Maryon at last year's Abbotsford Tulip Festival

Maryon wrote this poem after she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2008. Her daughter, Christine, submitted this poem on Maryon's behalf.

Christine shares that Maryon loved to write stories and poems, painted beautifully, taught Caribbean cooking and "Oh, could she act!" Her family always thought she should have been on the stage. For Christine, this poem shows the depth of Maryon's love for her three children.

CONTRIBUTE TO INSIGHT

Do you have a topic you would like to see covered in *Insight*? Do you have content you would like to publish such as a personal story, photography or original poem? If so, please contact the Alzheimer Society of B.C.

- Email Insight@alzheimerbc.org
- Mail to the address below, care of *Insight*:

300-828 West 8th Avenue
Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 1E2

All submissions will be considered based on theme and space. Please provide your name, mailing address, phone number and/or email address if you would like to be contacted.

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- Visit our website at alzbc.org/Insight-bulletin
- Call 604-681-6530 or toll-free 1-800-667-3742
- Email Insight@alzheimerbc.org

CALL THE FIRST LINK® DEMENTIA HELPLINE

A confidential province-wide support and information service for anyone with questions about dementia, including people living with dementia, their caregivers, friends, family, professionals and the general public.

- Phone 1-800-936-6033
Lower Mainland: 604-681-8651
Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Email supportline@alzheimerbc.org

ARE YOU A CAREGIVER?

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. also publishes *In Touch*, a bulletin for caregivers of people living with dementia or cognitive impairment.

To subscribe:

- Visit our website at alzbc.org/In-Touch-bulletin
- Call 604-681-6530 or toll-free 1-800-667-3742
- Email In-Touch@alzheimerbc.org



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