



Walk with us this spring!

There are many ways to get physically active and access support this spring. As we continue to work on resuming in-person programming and events in line with provincial health guidelines, including our upcoming *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's*, we want our community to know we will continue to offer online options for all support and education.

This issue of *Insight* looks at ways to stay active and engaged, including ideas for spring activities from our early-stage support group members and tips to help navigate seeking a dementia diagnosis. We also share research on the benefits of horticultural therapy, alongside ideas

from a horticultural therapy practitioner on how to reap the benefits of gardening at any stage of the dementia journey.

We are grateful to share new poetry from contributor Myrna Norman, as well as an interview with Candy Porter, who is being honoured at the *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's* in Victoria. We are excited to welcome everyone back to these essential fundraisers, and we hope to see you in a community near you on May 29!

Want to get active while supporting the Society? Join people across B.C. at our *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's* on May 29. Learn more at walkforalzheimers.ca.

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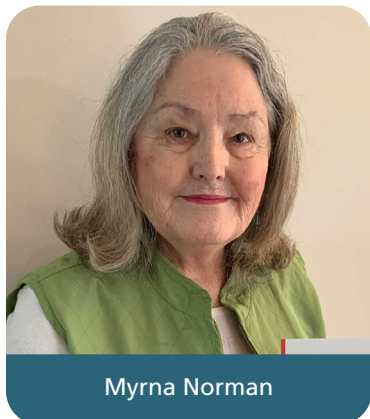
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Reimagining dementia taught me lessons

By Myrna Norman



Myrna Norman is a member of the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s advisory group of people living with dementia and a regular contributor to this newsletter. Here is one of the poems she's written about her experience.

Embracing joy and happiness without question.

Being creative in ways that stimulate.

My brain calls out for nutrients that spark neurons and share jubilation.

It is my responsibility to be happy, my job to find joy and to find reasons to smile.

I cannot accept the myth that happiness, joy, contentment and connections are not deserved with a diagnosis of dementia.

The committee of jerks with a home in my brain keeps trying to make the case that it's over.

To curl up, to live in darkness, choose inactivity, dullness, and wait to die. Get out of my head, you messenger of doom.

I have the right and responsibility to use my choice of ambivalence or of certainty. My choice of living well and being productive, finding the spark of life enabling acceptance.

And choosing to live with full throated delight.

Join the conversation

Do you have advice or reflections about living well with dementia? Perhaps you are open to being interviewed to share your story in this newsletter. Add your voice to the pages of *Insight*.

We welcome all ideas and contributions from people living with dementia. Please provide your name, mailing address, phone number and/or email address if you would like to be contacted. All

submissions will be considered based on theme and space.

Email your ideas or contributions to:

insight@alzheimerbc.org

Call 604-681-6530 or toll-free

1-800-667-3742

Mail to the Alzheimer Society of B.C., care of *Insight*: 300-828 West 8th Avenue Vancouver, B.C. V5Z 1E2

Springtime activity ideas from support group members



We asked some of our early-stage support group members to share some of their favourite springtime activities. Their responses highlight the feeling of excitement that spring brings. Here are a few activities that might inspire you:

“I love to see new life blooming in the spring flowers.”

“Spring is the start of barbecue season!”

“I am excited to start camping and golfing.”

“I love going to the lake and seeing the plants, birds and running water come back to life.”

“I enjoy seeing strawberry shoots coming up in the field. I also love visiting family on Vancouver Island. The air is so sweet when the trees begin blooming there.”

“I like watching teams playing on local sports fields!”

“I always look forward to being outside in the warmth, without having to wear multiple layers or worry about forgetting a coat.”

“When it’s warm enough, I like to get out on the water and go boating.”

“I am anxious to see my walking group again in the spring.”

“Spring cleaning is always something I look forward to!”

“In May, we take a trip on the long weekend. One of our favourite places is in Osoyoos, where we walk around on the trails.”

Get active!

Spending time being physically active and gardening, both outdoors and in indoor gardens, supports well-being. Check out page 4 for more about the benefits of horticultural therapy. To learn about participating in the upcoming *IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer’s* in your community, visit walkforalzheimers.ca. You can also read about one of this year’s *Walk* honourees, Victoria’s Candy Porter, on page 6.

Reconnect with nature through horticultural therapy

Horticultural therapy uses nature and plant materials to improve well-being. For people living with dementia, it is an opportunity for physical engagement, multi-sensory stimulation and stress reduction. Horticultural therapy also offers a sense of responsibility and achievement when caring for plants. In 2019, a study published in the *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias* explored how horticultural therapy positively influenced responsive behaviours, cognitive functioning and time spent engaged for people living with dementia.

What type of study was it?

The researchers conducted a systematic review and a meta-analysis, which involves reviewing existing studies to identify an overall trend.

What did they find?

Horticultural therapy invites people living with dementia to become close to the natural world. This can help them reconnect with the past and arouse interest in life. Being in a natural environment helps people living with dementia feel relaxed and joyful while relieving emotional tension. Horticultural therapy can boost quality of life, provide emotional stability and help reduce negative emotions. The physical and social interaction can also help maintain cognitive function.

Interview with a horticultural therapy practitioner

We interviewed Bianca van der Stoel, a horticultural therapy practitioner who is passionate about providing person-centred care to people living with dementia.



Bianca van der Stoel is a horticultural therapist who works with people living with dementia.

How did your journey with horticultural therapy begin?

I started as a recreational therapist working with people living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. The centre where I worked had unappealing and overstimulating outdoor spaces, which can be confusing for people

Interview with a horticultural therapy practitioner, continued

living with dementia. I became passionate about giving others meaningful and low-stimulating experiences in nature, which led me to horticultural therapy.

What are the benefits of horticultural therapy?

It offers a sense of contribution and control over one's environment. You choose what to plant, or what you want to see on your windowsill. By encouraging standing, flexibility and motor movement, it is also a good alternative to traditional exercise. The sensory and cognitive

stimulation is also helpful for late-stage dementia. Horticultural therapy is always beneficial, regardless of ability, mood or behaviours.

What do you do to create activities with a person-centred approach?

I use leisure, family and living history to tailor what plants a person will use. I even consider someone's socializing preferences. If they prefer working solo, I can set up a windowsill garden that allows for leisure at one's own pace.

Tips on creating a green space at home

Plant a DIY herb garden.

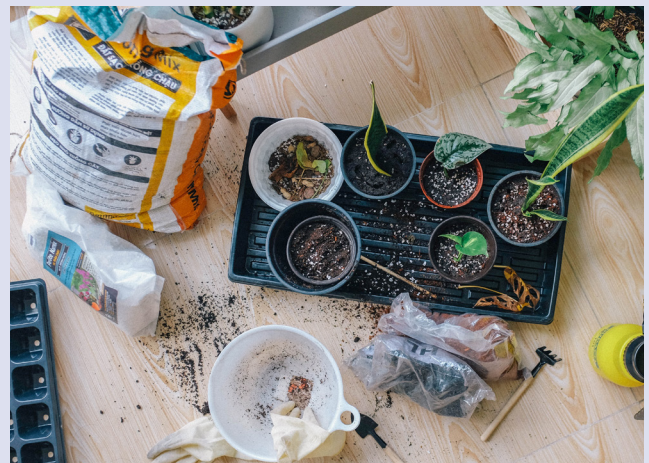
- Purchase stem herbs, like cilantro, mint or thyme, from a local market or grocery store. These plants are weather-resistant and can withstand colder houses.
- Strip the bottom leaves and place in water for one to two weeks to allow roots to grow.
- Using planter pots, or even plastic cups, transplant the herbs into soil.

Create your own green space.

- Houseplants, like spider or goldfish plants, are easy to purchase and propagate. If you have friends with these plants, ask them to share cuttings with you!
- These plants are easy to care for and allow you to observe life growing in your home.

Make DIY lavender or herb bags.

- Purchase dried lavender or herbs on the stem from a local market or grocery store.
- Carefully strip and harvest the lavender or herbs by hand.
- Place the stripped leaves into muslin bags, and smell for a stimulating sensory experience!



Honouree interview: Staying social and accepting help



Candy Porter is the IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's honouree in Victoria.

"I'm strong and I survive it all."

When Candy Porter describes living with dementia, she exudes confidence, positivity and gratitude for the life that she has lived – and all that's left ahead.

"I'm very social, very positive with lots of support in this world," Candy says.

Candy was a daily runner for 40 years with excellent health when she fell ill in 2018 with a sudden infection that caused inflammation in her brain that led to dementia. The diagnosis came with fear of the unknown.

"I was shocked because I've never had to deal with anything limiting," says Candy, a retired social worker. "It was very scary initially, but I'm starting to get used to it being a part of my life."

Accepting dementia as a part of her life means making time to attend programs and services, alongside a full and connected social life. Candy continues to volunteer in the community as a support group facilitator for men committed to non-violence, runs daily and hosts family dinners with her three children, five grandchildren, extended family and close friends. As someone who has dedicated

her life to helping others, the transition also means opening herself up to accepting help from the strong network she has built over the years.

"She was the best friend anyone could have for 20 years," says Brenda, her friend and care partner. "I owe her 20 more years, then we'll reevaluate."

The pair attend the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s Minds in Motion® online social and fitness program together, and recently signed up to take watercolour classes, something Candy was inspired to do after learning about other women in the early stages of dementia who began exploring new artistic outlets after initially feeling frustrated with changes in their cognitive abilities.

"How powerful is it to see that there is a barrier – and something after it?" Candy says. "It's profound. You're not powerless. I want to pass that along any chance I can get."

Candy is both grateful for the warm childhood memories of growing up in a happy family with three older brothers, and the moments she's making every day with her close family nearby. Receiving an invite to her granddaughter's 25th birthday party and three generations enjoying a night out at the pub together is a recent highlight.

"I'm creating all of these new memories," she says. "I feel very fortunate. Not everybody makes it to this part."

Support is available while seeking a diagnosis

In the last issue of *Insight*, we looked at takeaways from Alzheimer's Disease International's World Alzheimer's Report 2021, which paints a grim picture of the state of receiving a diagnosis and accessing health care for people living with dementia around the globe. The report estimates that as many as 75 per cent of people living with dementia are not yet diagnosed.

If you are seeking a diagnosis, there are actions you can take and resources you can access through the Alzheimer Society of B.C. You can:

- Start keeping a journal to document changes in function and ability and learn about how to get tested for dementia at alzbc.org/diagnosis.
- Access the "Getting a diagnosis toolkit," a guide to help prepare for a conversation with a health-care provider about a possible dementia diagnosis at alzbc.org/DiagnosisToolkit.
- Call the First Link® Dementia Helpline. Society staff members provide support to anyone with questions or concerns about dementia, regardless of whether they have a diagnosis. They educate and support families about how to access dementia education workshops, Minds in Motion® groups or any of the Society's other programs and services. Information is also available about advance care planning, including drafting wills, powers of attorney and representation agreements.

Dementia around the world: France

Postal workers in France are finding new ways to keep busy with less mail being sent. "Veiller sur mes parents," which translates to "Watch over my parents," is a service where postal workers check in on older clients who live alone, including people who live with dementia. During this check-in, postal workers have a casual conversation with the resident and ask them a series of questions during their mail rounds. These questions include asking if the resident needs groceries or needs to see a doctor. Responses are recorded on an app where relatives of the resident can be notified and react if there is a problem. Visits can range from one to six times per week, and postal workers are

trained to respond to a variety of client needs. This service can be used by anyone, anywhere in the world, as long as the senior relative lives in France. This service is one way that France is helping seniors remain living in their homes.



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- Call 604-681-6530 or toll-free 1-800-667-3742

Contribute

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Call the First Link® Dementia Helpline

A confidential, province-wide support and information service for anyone with questions about dementia. Our English Helpline runs from 9 a.m. until 8 p.m., Monday to Friday. Cantonese or Mandarin and Punjabi Helplines are open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday to Friday.

- English: 1-800-936-6033
 - Punjabi: 1-833-674-5003
 - Cantonese or Mandarin: 1-833-674-5007
- Email supportline@alzheimerbc.org

Are you a caregiver?

Connections is a quarterly print and digital publication produced by the Alzheimer Society of B.C.

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- Call 604-681-6530 or toll-free 1-800-667-3742



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