

June 2020

My name is Cathy. I am 68 years old and I have been living with dementia since 1980 when my mother was diagnosed with the strange sounding disease called Alzheimer's. My mother passed away in 1994 but Alzheimer's was tracking my family. In 2015 my sisters, Barbara and Lillian, were both diagnosed with the now familiar Alzheimer's disease. My sister Barbara has passed away and Lillian is now in long term care but thanks to the Alzheimer Society, their story and mine as a caregiver, was vastly different from my mother's.

In 1980 there was very little information available to our family. We had to go to Chedoke Hospital in Hamilton for assistance. My mother ended up in the Norris Wing of the St. Catharines General Hospital. She quickly lost her ability to speak and she did not recognize her family. I lost my mother and my children never knew the fun loving grandmother that she had been to my niece and nephew. When my sisters began exhibiting symptoms of dementia, we all knew and feared what was happening.

But now our situation would be different. We connected with the Alzheimer Society of Niagara Region where dedicated counsellors and volunteers guided us through the next steps of life. I became knowledgeable of the phrases -"I'm still me"; I'm still here" and "It's the disease not the person." - The mantras that caregivers cling to every day.

It's often challenging to believe these words. If you're still you - my big sisters – why don't you know my grandchildren? What will happen to our laughter, our dancing, and our crazy trivia games?

Well, they may not have recognized their grandnieces and nephew, but we still laughed, played and danced. Thanks to programs provided by the Alzheimer Society. It wasn't the same but it was wonderful.

There were tears but lots of laughter too. I had help wiping away the tears of my loss. The Alzheimer Society sustained me and many other caregivers as our loved ones went through the stages of dementia. Thanks to the Society we can all look forward to tomorrow's dance.

The programs that keep us all going – Art Expressions, Caregiver Wellness, Brain Wave Cafés, and social functions are largely due to the financial support of generous donors. Every dollar raised is the music of our dance and our laughter, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

It is because I have received so much from the Alzheimer Society that I have made a legacy gift in my Will. It is my hope that many others will benefit from my gift, as I have benefited.

Sincerely,

Cathy Carmichael