

## By MAC MORRISON

Good Morning & Welcome, Everybody

My name is Mac Morrison and I live in Owen Sound, where we located last November after living for over 40 years in Chatsworth. I am 70 years old and a retired truck driver. My wife and I have been married for 49 years have a son and a daughter, and two little grandsons.

Our house was located on about 3 acres of land, and I had a very large workshop where I liked to tinker and putter. I could fix things, take things apart and put them back together. I did a fair amount of woodworking – all the kitchen cupboards, some furniture items, including a large china cabinet, my wife’s computer workstation, and a number of cedar chests for my daughter and nieces. I designed and drew the plans for all of these items. I also did maintenance on our vehicles, as well repairs on our camper.



In 1972 we bought our house in Chatsworth. Through the years we completely renovated and modernized the interior, doing the work ourselves. This involved gutting to the bare cement blocks, tearing out interior walls, insulating and dry walling. Wiring and plumbing was upgraded. I installed some new windows; an installer replaced others. Most of this work I did myself.

My workshop was built as a shell where I finished the interior – insulating the walls and installing in-floor heating for which I made my own solar panels. The workshop was where I liked to spend my spare time.

My real hobby was yard sales – going to them and having them. For many years I enjoyed running yard sales out of my workshop. You meet great people that way, as well make a few extra dollars.

As I mentioned, I was a truck driver – have been all my life, working for the same company (with a couple breaks on my own) most of the 45+ years I was driving. Nothing I liked better than being out on the road. I did mostly long hauls of virtually everything, from furniture during household movings as well as to retail stores, to glass from the local PPG plant, to loads of Coke or Pepsi from Toronto to Owen Sound. These jobs took me all over Ontario and into Quebec and the Maritimes, as well as to locations in Michigan. I was often away from home overnight and occasionally for several days at a time. We estimate that I had driven – if not over – at least close to 3 million miles.

In the early years, we would take our two children camping during holidays, and as they got older we started traveling to parts of Ontario, as well as into Quebec and the Maritimes. Later, my wife and I started hauling the trailer all over the country from coast to coast. These are called “Trucker’s Holidays”. Of course, I did all the driving.

In January of last year (2012) I was diagnosed with early Dementia, and the first thing the doctor did was take away my driver’s license!

I had begun to make mistakes while driving, including driving on the wrong side of the road. My wife was starting to get real nervous, but I couldn’t believe that I was making so many mistakes. After all, I

had been driving all my life. But when I think back, I remember having trouble making out my logbooks – it was getting harder to cheat!

For the past couple of years or so, I found that I was often getting confused about things. My wife would ask me to do a couple of things, but I couldn't remember one of them, and sometimes either one. I also was starting to get confused about money – paying for things or making change. Sometimes I found it hard to remember my pin number for Visa. I would get confused about the order of the numbers in my pin.

It seemed that I had lost my depth perception. I couldn't always tell exactly where things were placed, or see them correctly. When trying to measure a board or something, I had trouble correctly seeing the mark – or would forget what it was and have to measure again.

We always like to play cards when visiting with friends, but for the past couple of years or so, it became more and more difficult for me to understand what card to play or to remember what was trump – or even tell the difference between clubs and spades. Basically, I was losing my math skills. It was also difficult to follow conversations with a group or even individuals. If people were talking too fast I couldn't follow everything being said. I also have trouble following fast-action TV programs.

I found that I was getting upset over the least little thing, and that I felt very frustrated with myself, wondering why I couldn't remember anything. I kept asking myself what was the matter with me – why I was having so much trouble remembering things.

Finally, while watching TV one night, a commercial came on outlining some of the symptoms of Alzheimer's, urging you to see your doctor if some of the symptoms applied to you. I told my wife that I thought I should be tested. The next day we made an appointment. I did not do well on the tests and was told that I had early dementia. I am now on medication that seems to help.

Of course, I was disappointed at being diagnosed with dementia, but relieved at the same time. It helps to know what you're dealing with, so you can find ways or learn what you need to know to make the best of things. For example, in 1995 I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. I had radical surgery and weeks of radiation treatment. Although I continue to suffer certain effects, I basically can live my life normally and continue to do the things I enjoy. I just had to adapt to the changes that surgery has made in my body.

Having Dementia has changed my life. I lost my license to drive; I am not able to look after the finances; I need someone to monitor my medications – any number of things. So I need to and can adapt to these changes, and still have some independence. My wife does all the driving, but I can walk or ride a bike to places I want to go. I can still putter around in the garage doing the things I like to do or make minor repairs, but sometimes I need my wife or son to help with complicated tasks. I have a pill tray with days of the week for medications, which my wife checks to make sure I don't forget. I still make my own breakfast, or can find food in the fridge or cupboards if I get hungry. I have been doing a lot of yard work on our new property, as well as some painting outside. (My wife won't let me paint inside!) I never really had time while working to have many hobbies, but I can still find yard sales to go to.

I am still learning my physical and mental limits. I try not to take out my frustrations on my wife or family. I am concerned about how much of a load I'm putting on my wife, since she now has to do all

the driving, looking after the finances (and looking after me!). We use humour a lot – it is a great reliever of frustrations.

I can still go out on my own, such as to the coffee shop in the morning, to the hardware store, or visiting neighbours or friends living within walking or biking distance. My wife and I enjoyed spending weekends at the trailer this summer, where we have a permanent site. I have met new people at the park and we both have made new friends there. Everyone knows of my diagnosis, but we still have good times together and lots of laughs.

I would say to anyone who has been diagnosed to be open and honest about your illness to your family and friends, and anyone you meet. Some people may have a hard time handling this. It doesn't mean they don't care about you – they just maybe can't handle it or are afraid. Don't try to hide it. People need to understand you are still who you are—you are still the same person they always knew before. You are not the disease. It is just something you have. Don't be afraid or ashamed to ask for help.

The best way you can support someone who has been diagnosed with dementia is to be understanding and sympathetic. Include the person in activities as you have in the past. Take the person for a drive or include him on a trip. For example, one of my former co-workers will call me occasionally to see if I would like to go with him in the truck for a short day-trip. Offers of help are appreciated. For example, some of the fellows in Chatsworth were great helping me clean out my workshop, loading the pick-up and driving me to the dump, as well as moving my workshop “treasures” to our new home in Owen Sound.

Take your friend or relative who has been diagnosed out for a cup of coffee or a drive. Visit once in a while. In other words, BE A FRIEND.

I'm Mac Morrison.

I have dementia, but I'm still me.

And I still enjoy life.

Thank you for listening to my story.