

Forget-Me-Not Garden honours people impacted by dementia

When Sandi Jones was invited to the Alzheimer Society of York Region's Donor Appreciation event in October 2019, she was honoured to see her mom's name in the new Forget-Me-Not Garden, located in the Welcome Centre in the lobby of the Aurora location.

"It, of course, made me sad, but it also gave me comfort," said Sandi, whose mother Mary Nagypal died in 2016 from dementia. She was 88.

But Sandi also wanted a flower for her husband Bill, who passed away July 29, 2019. Bill lived with Alzheimer's disease/vascular dementia. He died four days after his 77th birthday.

"It gives me some peace that my mom and Bill are side by side."

The Forget-Me-Not Garden grows on the wall at Aurora location. It consists of forget-me-not flowers of various sizes and colours with people's names – either in memory or in honour – etched on.

"The flower is a legacy and a symbol that my mom and husband will not be forgotten," Sandi said. "They were both cremated so it is nice that there is some permanent recognition of them. It honours their journeys, which, as difficult as they were, should never be forgotten. Perhaps the flowers also symbolize life and hope."

Colleen Abbott agrees.

"(The Garden) is a positive, cheerful depiction of remembrance of people and lives well lived."

Colleen's husband Peter, who lives with Alzheimer's disease and currently resides in a long-term care home in Aurora, has a flower honouring him in the Garden.

"It is helpful to know that Peter is remembered through the Garden and will continue to be so."

Both women said it's important to support the valuable work the Alzheimer Society of York Region (AS York) does.

"It's the only community specifically supporting people with Alzheimer's and their families," Colleen said. Peter used the Aurora D.A.Y. program, helping out in the kitchen and participating in the music. While Bill was too far along in the disease to access the program, Sandi said she gives to AS York to ensure others can access the services provided.

"I am hoping that by giving, I can help support other families who are dealing with this horrendous disease. Being a caregiver 24/7 is very draining and a difficult job. The D.A.Y. program is a lifeline for caregivers. It gives them that much-needed respite to be able to deal with their loved one when they are at home. The support groups are wonderful as well. My social worker was my lifeline. I could say anything to her and she would understand."

Dementia, Colleen said, is an isolating condition for both the person diagnosed with the disease and their family.

"Having the opportunity to connect with others travelling the same road is very reassuring and helpful."

The Forget-Me-Not Garden, Sandi said, "is a wonderful way to honour a loved one."

To learn more about the Forget-Me-Not Garden and how you can honour someone special, connect with Yolanda Mol Amelink, fund development coordinator, at ymolamelink@alzheimer-york.com

