

Dementia Champion -- Bill Heibein

More than a decade after an Alzheimer's disease diagnosis, this active 70 year old is busy running a farm and playing bass in a band

It has been more than ten years since Bill Heibein received a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease. He was 55 years old, and was having a hard time in his job as a public accountant -- missing meetings, forgetting names, and losing his train of thought. "I was angry", says Bill of the diagnosis, "and I wasn't looking forward to everything they said was supposed to happen with the disease. I was told that with my early diagnosis, based on average, I could expect maybe five good years left."



At the time of his diagnosis, Bill and his wife Heather were already active in raising quarter horses. Bill remembers going into the barn after his diagnosis: "I told the horses 'I have Alzheimer's disease!' and of course they weren't too interested in anything but the hay. I figured if they didn't care, I'd try not to either."

Bill sought medical and pharmaceutical treatment; he opened up to all his friends and contacts about his condition; and he reached out to the Alzheimer Society of Thunder Bay for information and support. "Heather and I were too busy with the horses to dwell on things. But we did read everything we could about the disease".

Bill remembers how he decided that Alzheimer's disease "wasn't going to stop me from doing what I wanted to do, for as long as I could do it." A decade after being diagnosed, Bill is still busy raising, training, and showing horses, running Amethyst Farms, and playing the bass in the popular local band 'the Bottom of the Barrel'. "I say, if there's something you want to do, by George, you go out and do it. Heather and I decided we weren't going to one day be sitting in our rocking chairs saying 'I wish we did that' -- we want to be looking back at all the things we *did* do -- and thinking 'wasn't that great?'"

It is important, Bill says, for families affected by Alzheimer's disease to reach out to others for help. "I think some people are still reluctant to contact the Alzheimer Society," he muses; "It's that same old story of not wanting to acknowledge that there's a problem." But being open about the disease and reaching out can make a great difference, he reports. "I have strong support around me -- I feel like a lucky man."

How to become a Champion

Contact your [local Alzheimer Society](#)

OR

Email speakout@alzheimeront.org with your name, email address and the name of your community so we can link you with the appropriate local Alzheimer Society.

Time commitment

May 15, 2011- October 31, 2011

Less than 1 hour per week

We'll help you with materials, training and support along the way.

Read about [our Champions](#).