

Caregiver talks about the importance of support, information and a friendly ear

September is World Alzheimer's Month, a time to raise awareness about the more than 17,000 York Region residents impacted by dementia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AURORA, ON (Aug. 28, 2020) – While Cheryl Bahen's husband Gerry, who lives with symptoms of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, has been in a rehab hospital after a fall, the Holland Landing resident has been able to just breathe.

“You don't know the strain you are under until it is gone,” Cheryl said. “When Gerry is home, I do everything myself. A year ago, he had a fall and I could no longer leave him by himself. Now I can catch my breath. I can catch up with friends...and relax because I can't do that when Gerry is home.”

Gerry's vascular condition is the direct result of a car accident in 1970 when someone cut him off. He swerved to miss the car, hitting a hydro pole, which flattened his vehicle. Other than losing that day “he has no memory of it, that day is gone” and seizures, which Gerry eventually recovered from, Gerry seemed to walk away from the accident. Until about 10 years ago, when Cheryl started noticing some weird behaviours from her husband including him forgetting where he was and not recognizing anything around him.

Gerry now needs help showering and dressing, doesn't talk as much as he used to and requires the use of wheelchair. He is waiting for a long-term care bed to open up as he now needs two people to lift him, and Cheryl is unable to do that.

“Our journey together continues.”

That journey is one that constantly changes. Caregivers, Cheryl said, require support and help, both physically and mentally, and someone to talk to. Gerry used the Alzheimer Society of York Region's Aurora DAY program, which provided routine and socialization for Gerry and respite for Cheryl. Both took part in the Minds in Motion program for people living with early to mid-stage dementia and their caregivers held last year. Caregivers also to know about services available to them, Cheryl said.

“If more people talked about it (Alzheimer's disease, caregiver support)” more people would know of the help available to them.

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Cheryl Bahen is available to be interviewed. Contact Tammy Bucci, director of philanthropy, at tbucci@alzheimer-york.com to arrange an interview. Reporters are invited to take needed information from this story: bit.ly/BahenWAM

Pictures courtesy of the Cheryl Bahen family: Cheryl and Gerry Bahen. Photo of Gerry with balls courtesy of Jaime Cruz, AS York public education coordinator, taken at Minds in Motion in-person program last year, funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Minds in Motion is for people in early to mid-stage dementia and their care partners. Minds in Motion is now virtual and is funded by Katherine Booth and Michael Kirk, Alzheimer Society of Ontario and family and friends and Tarik and Feroze Mohammed.

About the Alzheimer Society York Region (AS York)

The Alzheimer Society of York Region is a leader in actively supporting individuals and families living with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Our quality, dementia-specific DAY program services, enriched social work program and education opportunities are well respected.

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