

## Diagnosis inspires the trip of their lifetime

I've always thought of myself as an athletic person. In 1986 I headed west from Toronto to get a taste of the ski slopes of Western Canada. It was everything I had ever imagined. The majestic peaks of the Rockies fueled my love of adrenalin by pushing my meagre skiing ability to the maximum. At the end of a season of following the local boys around the mountain, I felt I could truly call myself a skier. After several years back in Ontario finishing off my studies, I made the permanent move to the West to enjoy the mountains in all seasons.

For over nine years I defined myself as a professional mountain bike racer, hurtling myself down steep mountains on my bicycle. Winning the BC Cup in 1996 was the pinnacle of my racing career. In the winter, my time was spent teaching adults and children to downhill ski, until it was time once again to pack up my little car and hit the road for the next bike racing season.

As my chronological age approached the third decade, I began to experience an emotion that I had not experienced before on my bike; fear. It was time to end my racing career and focus on other pursuits.

I more seriously followed my chosen profession, graphic designer, and finally settled in the beautiful mountain city of Revelstoke. It was and still is my version of paradise and it's here that I met my husband and where we have chosen to raise our two beautiful daughters. The lush Columbia valley, surrounded by majestic peaks, provide an ever-changing display of light and colour. Recreational opportunities abound, and I continued to spend my spare time skiing, biking, mountain and rock climbing, and hiking.

So, in 2009, when I noticed I was not performing to my athletic ideal, I began to wonder what was wrong. It was so subtle; tired legs from only a half day of skiing, or staying at the springtime fitness level for biking even though it was mid summer. Since it was a hot summer I thought the twitching in my leg muscles must have been due to chronic dehydration and a lack of certain minerals in my body. After consulting my physician, the results of my blood tests pointed me to a neurologist. After the blood test the doctor said it could be one of a thousand things, including a virus, so I had myself convinced I was going for another routine test and it was going to be a virus and that would be the end of that. It didn't happen that way at all.

Instead I was told that I had ALS. The technician in Kamloops had a few words for me that I thought were very wise, she said, "None of us knows when we're going to die. And in a way — I know it sounds like a cliché — it's as though you've



Pauline Hunt and her family; Photo Lea Story

been given a gift. You have this window of time in which you can really live your life while the rest of us are just screwing around."

So my husband and I took those sage words of advice. We didn't sit around and grieve very long, we focused on creating a new plan for our lives. My main goal was to create lasting memories for our young daughters, ones that they would cherish in the coming years.

So we set off on a year of travel and adventure. Word of our plans leaked out to friends and strangers in our small city and the other mountain towns that myself and my husband had lived in over the years. The communities and co-

workers rallied around us to make our dreams a reality. It was the trip of a lifetime.

I was able to show my eldest daughter the Aurora Borealis, after which she is named, in her birthplace of Yellowknife. I went helicopter-skiing, dog sledding and visited the beaches of Mexico with extended family. After that we set off for Asia; spending time living in China for four months, then visiting Tibet, Nepal, Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Deciding that we may as well keep heading west, we criss-crossed Europe visiting friends and family along the way.

We made it back to Canada 11 months later with big grins on our faces and so many fabulous experiences; including having taken our then 3 and 5 year old daughters around the world. I would hope that our travels have opened their eyes to all the possibilities around them, the differences yet similarities we all share, and how fortunate we are to be living in Canada.

Now that we are all back at home, life has taken on a more 'normal' role. Our daughters are busy with school and friends, but seem to value spending time as a family. They do not see me as 'different'. Sure, mommy doesn't run like she used

### What is ALS?

Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), often referred to as "Lou Gehrig's Disease," is a progressive neurodegenerative disease that affects nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord. Motor neurons reach from the brain to the spinal cord and from the spinal cord to the muscles throughout the body.

The progressive degeneration of the motor neurons in ALS eventually leads to their death. When the motor neurons die, the ability of the brain to initiate and control muscle movement is lost. With voluntary muscle action progressively affected, patients in the later stages of the disease may become totally paralyzed.

to, but I am still otherwise the same person I was three years ago.

Having ALS has forced me to slow down, in a figurative and literal sense. While I may not be teaching my children how to hurl themselves down the mountain at breakneck speeds, as I once envisioned; I am able to share with them my appreciation of life and the beauty of nature around us. I am teaching them to meditate and do yoga; and there is almost always time for a good book. My heart is warmed when they notice the pink blush of a sunset or the delicate colours of a budding flower. To me, that is reward enough.



"ALS is a devastating disease that affects the person living with ALS, their family and caregivers. There is no known cause or cure for ALS—yet. Your participation will help us to raise funds to support people living with ALS, and research to find the cure. Join me in the war against ALS" —Wally Buono, GM and VP of Operations of the BC Lions, and official spokesperson for the BC & Yukon Walks for ALS.



YEAR	EVENT	LOCATION	DATE	COORDINATOR	EMAIL	PHONE #
1	ALS CRUISE OF HOPE - Walk for ALS	Onboard the Golden Princess Cruise Ship	Mon. May 21	Dave Gurney	dgurney@cruiseshipcenters.com	604-278-1600
3	Dawson Creek Walk for ALS	Walter Wright Pioneer Village	Sat. Sept. 8	Shirley Dubois	dawsoncreekwalk@alsbc.ca	250-786-0107
6	Fraser Valley Walk for ALS	Mill Lake Park, Abbotsford	Sat. June 16	Irene Waldack	fraservalleywalk@alsbc.ca	604-313-7514
3	Kamloops Walk for ALS	Bandshell, Riverside Park	Sat. June 23	Colleen Smailes & Deanna Patterson	kamloopswalk@alsbc.ca	250-577-3769
7	Mid-Island Walk for ALS	City Hall Square, Parksville	Sun. June 10	Ray Walker	midislandwalk@alsbc.ca	250-228-8683
9	Okanagan Walk for ALS	Rhapsody Plaza, Waterfront Park, Kelowna	Sat. June 16	Stacy Nyeste & Bryn Nyeste	okanaganwalk@alsbc.ca	250-826-9457
6	Okeover-Powell River Walk for ALS	Laughing Oyster Restaurant, Okeover Inlet	Sat. April 14	Frankie Kellner & Susan Hanson	okeoverwalk@alsbc.ca	604-483-2277
9	Prince George Walk for ALS	Fort George Park	Sun. June 24	Helene Rohn & Kim Magnant	princegeorgewalk@alsbc.ca	250-964-1782
7	Richmond-Vancouver Walk for ALS	Garry Point Park, Steveston	Sat. May 26	Vandhana Misri	richmondvancouverwalk@alsbc.ca	604-880-0561
5	Surrey Walk for ALS	Special Events Area, Bear Creek Park	Sun. June 17	Amy Graham	surreywalk@alsbc.ca	778-320-8148
2	Tri-Cities Walk for ALS	Town Centre Park, Lafarge Lake, Coquitlam	Sat. Aug. 11	Vanessa Keist	tricitiewalk@alsbc.ca	778-994-2429
2	Vernon Walk for ALS	Polson Park	Sat. June 16	Nichoel Crawford	vernonwalk@alsbc.ca	250-503-4741
11	Victoria Walk for ALS	University of Victoria, Parking Lot 6	Sun. Sept. 16	Rasool Rayani & Adele Watson	victoriawalk@alsbc.ca	778-885-2111
11	West Kootenay Walk for ALS	Lakeside Rotary Park, Nelson	Sun. June 3	Gord Shannon	westkootenaywalk@alsbc.ca	250-354-8585
4	Whitehorse Walk for ALS	Shipyards Park	Sun. Sept. 30	Donald C Watt	whitehorsetwalk@alsbc.ca	867-332-3669
1	Williams Lake Walk for ALS	TBD	Sat. June 23	Eileen Campbell & Heather Robertson	williamslakewalk@alsbc.ca	250-989-0092



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