

A diagnosis of ALS is a frightening one

Living with ALS, Bob Duncan

Fresh from High School in 1960, I joined the Royal Canadian Air Force. I met my future wife and life companion (Barbara) in PEI in 1962 and we married in 1964. Then we departed on a four year posting to Europe. First stop was in north eastern France, where we lived with many other Canadians in Belgium and commuted to France for work. It was here where I stood on parade with hundreds of other Canadian Airmen on February 15, 1965 and proudly watched as our new Maple Leaf flag was unfurled for the first time.

In 1968 we were transferred to St. John's, Newfoundland. It was here that my wife was first diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. Fortunately, she has been able to keep the disease in remission for most of the last forty years. From St. John's we moved to Ottawa, from where I traveled extensively across Canada and back to Europe. In 1980, with a fourteen month old son in the back seat of our small car, we traveled to the wilds of Northern Vancouver Island, where we enjoyed the quiet life of a small military radar station.

Our last move was to Kamloops, this time with two little boys in the back seat of the same little car. Here, I was a military recruiter. After 27 years, and two young sons entering the education system, it was time to look at options. In 1987 I left the military to work for the Government of BC.

In 2003 my job in government disappeared due to reorganization and so I "retired" yet again, this time to become a volunteer at the Kamloops Food Bank and Outreach Society. Retirement also gave me time to do landscaping in our gardens, but I soon found that I needed an afternoon rest, and that my right hand was frequently weak. Carpal tunnel I thought, from too much use!

In the autumn of 2010, I noticed that the toes on my left foot were tingling when I awoke in the morning. Soon I had the same sensations in my right foot too. Neither my family doctor nor I thought there was anything seriously wrong, as I was still splitting firewood, doing yard work and taking long walks with my wife. By the spring of 2011, I found that my legs burned with fatigue after walking a short distance. By June I had a noticeable "flop" of my left foot when I walked and by August, I was experiencing difficulty in walking any distance. My son bought me a cane to use. I voluntarily stopped driving when I could no longer feel the gas and brake pedals. My family doctor referred me to a neurosurgeon that, after reviewing my CAT scan, referred me to a neurologist at Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops. I was subjected to an hour of electrical impulses and needle probes before he asked if my wife was in the waiting room and could he bring her in. I knew then that my problem



Barb and Bob Duncan with their dog Misty.

was more than a slipped disc that time would heal. The date was October 14th, 2011.

The neurologist spoke with us at length, explaining that I had progressive ALS which was aggressive and that if there was anything I wanted to do, I should do it within the next two months.

My diagnosis of ALS has brought my extended family closer together.

In November my youngest son drove my wife and me back to Southern Alberta, where we spent time with my siblings and their families, cousins and a childhood friend. My sister and my nephew visited for Christmas and two cousins I grew up with spent a weekend with us. Two brothers came to help my wife with wallpapering, tree pruning and railings

installation. A neighbor helped with garden clean up and my son's friend came, with shovel in hand, to clear the walks and driveway after a heavy snow fall. He continues to check in with us to assist as needed. A contractor, upon hearing of my illness, sent a crew (gratis) to finish the front sidewalk which I had started but was unable to complete last summer. The

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.

Community Care staff has been most helpful in their fields of Occupational and Physiotherapy as I adjust to a life of foot braces, canes, walkers, wheelchairs and fall prevention strategies.

What does the future hold? A diagnosis of ALS is a frightening one, but the world does not end with the diagnosis. With support from the Society, friends and relatives there is still much that can be accomplished in life.



"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 #
7	Richmond-Vancouver	Garry Point Park, Steveston	Sat. May 26	Vandhana Misri	richmondvancouverwalk@alsbc.ca	604-483-2277
11	West Kootenay	Lakeside Rotary Park, Nelson	Sun. June 3	Gord Shannon	westkootenaywalk@alsbc.ca	604-880-0561
7	Mid-Island	City Hall Square, Parksville	Sun. June 10	Ray Walker	midislandwalk@alsbc.ca	250-354-8585
6	Fraser Valley	Mill Lake Park, Abbotsford	Sat. June 16	Irene Waldack	fraservalleywalk@alsbc.ca	250-228-8683
9	Okanagan	Rhapsody Plaza, Waterfront Park, Kelowna	Sat. June 16	Stacy Nyeste & Bryn Nyeste	okanaganwalk@alsbc.ca	604-313-7514
2	Vernon	Polson Park	Sat. June 16	Nichoel Crawford	vernonwalk@alsbc.ca	250-826-9457
5	Surrey	Special Events Area, Bear Creek Park	Sun. June 17	Amy Graham	surreywalk@alsbc.ca	250-503-4741
3	Kamloops	Bandshell, Riverside Park	Sat. June 23	Colleen Smailes & Deanna Patterson	kamloopswalk@alsbc.ca	778-320-8148
1	Williams Lake	Boitania Park	Sat. June 23	Eileen Campbell & Heather Robertson	williamslakewalk@alsbc.ca	250-577-3769
9	Prince George	Fort George Park	Sun. June 24	Helene Rohn & Kim Magnant	princegeorgewalk@alsbc.ca	250-989-0092
2	Tri-Cities	Town Centre Park, Lafarge Lake, Coquitlam	Sat. Aug. 11	Vanessa Keist	tricitiewalk@alsbc.ca	250-964-1782
3	Dawson Creek	Walter Wright Pioneer Village	Sat. Sept. 8	Shirley Dubois	dawsoncreekwalk@alsbc.ca	778-994-2429
11	Victoria	University of Victoria, Parking Lot 6	Sun. Sept. 16	Rasool Rayani & Adele Watson	victoriawalk@alsbc.ca	250-786-0107
4	Whitehorse	Shipyards Park	Sun. Sept. 30	Donald C Watt	whitehorsetwalk@alsbc.ca	778-885-2111



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