

## My ALS Journey: Stuart Mckean on living with ALS and what comes next

My name is Stuart Mckean and I am 58 years old. In October of 2017 I noticed some minor difficulties getting up from a squat and some slight stiffness in my fingers. When I had a physical in November, everything seemed normal and I chalked it up to getting older and some minor arthritis. I went to Mexico in January and my wife noticed I was limping on my left leg and had some minor twitching on my right shoulder. Again no cause for alarm as I had experienced sciatica in my left hip for a few years and right shoulder problems for at least 10 years.

Upon returning from Mexico and in to February and March it was becoming apparent that my limp was worse and was having more trouble pushing off on my left foot and walking long distances. I saw my doctor again at the end of March and I was diagnosed with Drop Foot. He did a physical exam ordered blood work, CT scan, etc.

I had a follow up appointment on April 16, and one day prior started experiencing rapid twitching in both biceps. I was referred to a neurologist on April 18, 2018 and was glad to be going to fix the problems I was having and instead came out with a diagnosis of ALS with 95 per cent accuracy. This was confirmed at GF Strong ALS Clinic in June 2018. Nothing can prepare you or your family for a terminal diagnosis and especially not ALS.

I had never known anyone that had ALS but since have found people that have been affected or known people that were affected. ALS is not as rare as you think!

Prior to ALS, I was a grocery store manager on Quadra Island and enjoyed fishing, gardening, building, guitar, travelling going to the beach and many other outdoor activities. It is now the end of March 2020, almost two years to the date of my diagnosis.

My progression has been considered slow to average, which I am thankful for, but still does not make it easy by any stretch. I can no longer walk or stand and am confined to an electric wheelchair. I need a Hoyer lift and sling to be moved from chair to bed to toilet. My core muscles are weak, as are my upper arms and shoulders. My breathing numbers declined from 90 per cent in August 2019 to 66 per cent in February 2020. The good news is that I still have full use of my hands, can eat, drink, talk and breathe unassisted, but for how long I don't know.

Much love to my wife Val who has now become my



Stuart Mckean with his son Kevin and his wife Val.



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full-time caregiver and all the homecare attendants that come in the mornings and evenings. Would like to thank my cousins Jim, Ken and friends Bill and Tom for installing our wheelchair lift and renovating our now beautiful accessible bathroom.

In September of 2018 we formed Team Salmon Guy and participated in the Walk to End ALS in Victoria and raised \$20,000 for the ALS Society of BC and then again in May 2019 at the Mid Island Walk to End ALS in Parksville where we

raised another \$10,000.

All these fundraising efforts would not have been possible without the support of family, friends, colleagues and customers. Big shout out goes to my wife Val and her fundraising raffles for gold and silver first nations jewelry and to my employer TruValue Foods for collecting money through their spirit program at all four stores. A large part of the money raised was due to their efforts.

ALS is expensive and is not covered by BC MSP. The ALS

Society of BC is such a crucial service for people living with ALS – 60 per cent of all money raised goes directly back to the patients in the form of equipment and support.

On another note, I'd like to touch on the subject of M.A.I.D (Medical Assistance in Dying). There can be some controversy over this subject but you can't deny the statistics that 7 per cent of all deaths on Vancouver Island are medically assisted and another 8 per cent were approved but did not follow through. I personally have

### What is ALS or Lou Gehrig Disease?

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) is a rapidly progressive disease. It attacks the motor neurons that transmit electrical impulses from the brain to the voluntary muscles in the body. When they fail to receive messages, the muscles lose strength, atrophy and die.

ALS can strike anyone at any time, regardless of age, gender or ethnic origin. It does not affect the senses, and only rarely does it affect the mind. The equipment cost for each patient is an average \$140,000, while nursing and home care costs can be up to 10 times this amount.

The ALS Society of BC is dedicated to providing direct support to ALS patients, along with their families and caregivers, to ensure the best quality of life possible while living with ALS. Through assisting research, we are committed to finding the cause of and cure for Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS).

gone through the process and have been approved with support of my family and friends. This does not mean I have to follow through but is there if I decide ALS has become too much. I would like to thank Dr. Tanja Daws, who came to our house and talked to me and my family for two hours regarding M.A.I.D and truly made everyone much more comfortable on a touchy subject.

So this has been my Journey, or should I say our Journey as ALS affects not just us but everyone around us.

Much love to everyone who has been affected one way or another by ALS.

Stay Strong  
Stu and Val

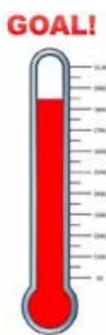
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People living with and affected by ALS know what it means to be part of a resilient, brave and adaptable community.

This year, we're coming together virtually to show our support for the Walk to End ALS!

ALL Walks across the province will be an online experience in light of recent events.

**ALS doesn't stop and neither will we. Join in Saturday June 20 - the day before Global ALS Awareness Day!**

60% of funds raised go to support ALS BC Patient Service Programs and the remaining 40% to the Canadian ALS Research Program. This year, Brain Canada will match funds raised for ALS Research dollar for dollar up to \$1 Million!

**Register online at: [www.walktoendals.ca/british-columbia](http://www.walktoendals.ca/british-columbia)**

**WWW.ALSBC.CA SHOW THE POWER OF HOPE TO PEOPLE LIVING WITH ALS IN BC**

To learn more about the ALS Society of BC or to make a donation online, visit [www.alsbc.ca](http://www.alsbc.ca).

Please email [info@alsbc.ca](mailto:info@alsbc.ca) or call 1-800-708-3228 if you wish to make a stock security donation or make a monthly donation.

**ALS Society of BC**

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