



**A Special BTC Feature**

**Former Teacher**

**Coping With Cystic Fibrosis**

***By Richard Bercuson***

When does lawn care become not just a chore requiring attention but a chore that just cannot be done? How can simply going up a flight of stairs require a chair at the top to rest on for a moment?

Such are the typical daily issues faced by Brooklin resident Alex McCombes, once an active high school physical education teacher and volleyball coach, now reduced to learning how to cope with less than 30% of lung capacity. That's what cystic fibrosis has dealt him. The genetic disease he was born with has gradually choked off many of the activities he regularly did, not the least being his teaching career. That ended on Nov. 7, 2014, when, as phys. ed. department head at Markham's Bur Oak Secondary School, his body finally told him he could no longer properly perform his duties.

"I was so immersed in my life as a teacher to help people," he recalls, "and then suddenly my health declined very quickly. I wanted so much to help the kids and ensure they didn't have a lesser school experience."

## Active lifestyle

Even with the disease, he spent his childhood and teens playing hockey and soccer, able to hold the disease's effects at bay. Into his 20s, he says, the lung issues gradually became more pronounced and then within a few years, it became noticeable. In the latter part of his teaching career, his lungs worked at around 50% and he mostly kept the condition hidden from colleagues. In fact, he continued to coach the school team for a few days after stopping teaching and won the regional tier 2 championship.

The gradual and steady decline of his lung capacity have obviously greatly limited his ability to perform even the simplest tasks. Folding

laundry, for instance, can exhaust him. But, as he points out, he's very much a never quit, half glass full type of guy. With an extensive home gym, he still works out as much as he can bear, between physiotherapy sessions and clearing out the lungs.

## Importance of exercise

"Allocating my energy is one of the biggest things I deal with," he says. "Exercise is paramount. I go on the stationary bike and make sure my oxygen level is at around 90%." He also does some weights, yoga, stretching and more "functional" exercises, usually about three times a day.

Part of it is to keep moving and maintain a proper mindset. However, it's also to prepare his body for the possibility of a double lung transplant for which he's been fully evaluated and is regarded as a strong candidate. While the prospect of such a major surgery is ever present, a more short term and perhaps practical solution lies with new medications which may be no more than a few months down the road. These might raise his lung capacity to 50% or so, which would enable him to live a more functional and normal life.

On his blog for Cystic Fibrosis Canada, he writes, “I do not have words to describe the difficulties, pain and angst it causes. It is awful, increasingly difficult daily physically, emotionally and mentally. Look it up – it’s terrible. Let’s count that as understood for this.”

He's learned to ignore certain types of pain, like physical which he deems as merely bothersome

## Positive outlook

He further writes, "My perspective toward my future is positive. Even though I am scared and I am chal-

*continued on page 5*



**SPECIAL 2018 Coupons**

# Hear in the New Year!

**Don't delay – take advantage of these limited-time, 2018 coupon offers!**

**Difficulty hearing over the holidays?** Start off your 2018 with the resolution of better hearing. The first step is to **Book your FREE hearing test!** As an added bonus, we are offering these special new year coupons. Combine and redeem them at more than 200 participating locations in Canada!

**THESE COUPONS CAN BE COMBINED**

**FREE EAR WAX REMOVAL KIT**

Receive a **FREE** ear wax removal kit when you complete your first hearing test.



**HearingLife**

While quantities last. Kit may not be exactly as shown. This offer is valid for one Ear Wax Removal kit upon completion of your first hearing test. No substitutes. Expires 01/31/18. New customers only, limited to one-time use.

**FREE BATTERIES & CHECK-UP**

Receive a **3 month** supply of batteries and a **FREE** clean & check of your hearing aids.



**HearingLife**

Offer is valid regardless of make, model, or where you bought your hearing aids. Get a 3 month supply of batteries (12 cells per hearing aid) when you join our battery club. No purchase required. See clinic for details. Expires 01/31/18. New customers only, limited to one-time use.

**1000 AIR MILES® REWARD MILES**

Earn up to **1,000 AIR MILES®** reward miles with your purchase of select hearing aids.



**HearingLife**

Reward mile value is non-transferable and depends on select models purchased. Please allow up to 45 days for the reward miles to appear in your collector account. ®™ Trademark of AIR MILES International Trading B.V. Used under license by LoyaltyOne Inc. and HearingLife Canada Ltd. Expires 01/31/18. Limit one offer per customer.

**10% OR MORE off HEARING AIDS FOR MEMBERS**

Members of our trusted partners **SAVE 10% or more** on everyday or promotional pricing!



**HearingLife**

Please see clinic for the full list of member discounts. See below for the trusted partners we offer this discount to. Present membership card at time of purchase. Expires 01/31/18. Limit one use per customer per year.

Over 200 locations nationwide - Call a nearby clinic below or visit [HearingLife.ca/NYcoupons](http://HearingLife.ca/NYcoupons) to Book your **FREE** Hearing Test.

- Ajax** | 235 Bayly Street West | Call Samia at 1-877-236-6070
- Oshawa** | 470 King Street West | Call Lyndsay or Abigail at 1-877-233-4627
- Pickering** | 1848 Liverpool Road | Call Jennifer at 1-877-233-4580
- Whitby** | 604 Garden Street | Call Karla at 1-877-234-4708



**ListenUP! CANADA**

Referred by Physicians more than 65,000 times!

Partnered with



**HearingLife**

**TRUSTED PARTNER OF**










**NIHB, VAC and Worker's Compensation Provider**

Promo Code **NSP-NWYR-BRT**