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Community Page

Family not letting Alzheimer's get best of them

Woman moves back in with father to help him battle disease

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**
The Champion

Wally Lynde and his daughter, Lu-Ann, refuse to be victimized by an illness known as a thief of time and memories. Yes, Mr. Lynde is in the early stages of Alzheimer's, but the two aren't going to let that rule their lives.

With a combination of medication, support services through VON Alzheimer Services and his daughter's care, Mr. Lynde, 79, is able to continue doing the things he enjoys.

A diagnosis of Alzheimer's is sure to send a chill down anyone's spine. But Ms Lynde wants to share their story to let people know dementia, although progressive, can be managed.

With January being Alzheimer Awareness Month, Ms Lynde wants people to know the facts about Alzheimer's disease, instead of clinging to fear.

Ms Lynde said she worries some seniors might not visit a doctor to report symptoms for fear of that dreaded diagnosis. As a result, they may suffer unnecessarily.

Mr. Lynde was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease three years ago.

"At age 75, something began to change," Ms Lynde said, adding her father had always worked with his hands and "something made it not pleasurable anymore."

Tasks that used to be second nature began to stump him, his daughter said.

Short-term memory affected

He's now in the early stages of Alzheimer's, with mild cognitive impairment affecting his short-term memory. He can still do the things he enjoys, such as carpentry, but needs a little help sometimes.

"An example is he'll go out to the garden shed because he's going to cut the grass, and halfway there he'll think, 'What did I come for?'" Ms Lynde said.

Last year, he began taking what the pair refers to as "memory pills."

Has life improved since he started the medication?

"I don't remember," said a laughing Mr. Lynde from his living room, his sense of humour intact.

Ms Lynde confirmed that the medication has worked wonders.

"Take dad's dog. Before he was taking the memory pills, he would sometimes forget to fill the water trough. After he started taking the pills,



Photo by BARRIE ERSKINE

Lu-Ann Lynde sits with father Wally, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease.

he remembers every night," she said.

As Ms Lynde knows all too well, a diagnosis of Alzheimer's affects more than one person. It affects an entire circle of family and friends. And in her case, it completely changed her day-to-day life.

Since her father was living on his own, Ms Lynde decided to quit her job and move in with him.

"While mom was ill, I slept here at night," she said, adding her mother passed away a year ago. "It then seemed appropriate that I stay at the house."

Both father and daughter take a practical, no-doom-and-gloom approach to his disease.

"It's life, as far as I'm concerned," Mr. Lynde

said. "You get older, this happens and then eventually you die."

Ms Lynde compares her father's limitations to her own less than perfect vision. She can't see well on her own, so she wears glasses. Her father needs a little help remembering, so he takes a pill.

As her sight worsens, she'll need a stronger glasses prescription. And when Mr. Lynde's Alzheimer's progresses, he'll take a stronger — or different — medication, she said.

Since the diagnosis, Ms Lynde and her father have been taking advantage of the programs offered through VON Alzheimer Services.

Mr. Lynde attends VON's adult day program at Sheridan College in Oakville — there's also a

Burlington site — every Wednesday and Saturday.

"It's something I look forward to," said Mr. Lynde, sitting on a couch in his living room.

There are 20 to 30 people who attend the program on Wednesdays and up to a dozen on Saturdays, Ms Lynde said, adding her father has an improved self-esteem and better quality of life with the day program.

Something else Ms Lynde said she appreciates is VON Alzheimer Services' resource centre, which offers a seminar series plus a lending library with books, tapes and DVDs. There's also a counsellor on staff.

Every third Thursday of the month, Ms Lynde attends a support group for caregivers of people with Alzheimer's in the community room upstairs at Loblaws.

Education crucial

Tiziana Pelusi, recreationist with Alzheimer Services, said education about Alzheimer's is extremely important.

"You often hear people say it's about memory loss. But it's a lot more than that," she said.

And with the aging population, more and more people will be dealing with Alzheimer's in the future, she said.

"It's very important to make people aware so they can be prepared if it ever happens to them," she said.

Support groups for caregivers, such as the one offered by VON, can be invaluable, she said, not just to be with people in similar situations, but also to swap ideas.

"They have to be creative with the way they handle (their loved ones') behaviour," Ms Pelusi said.

As for the day program, it's for the caregivers as much as it is for those with Alzheimer's, she said.

"Caregivers are getting some rest knowing their loved ones are being cared for in a secure (environment)."

There's one other adult day program for Alzheimer's patients in the area. The Region of Halton's Friends Landing is a smaller program for cognitively impaired adults, and accommodates eight people. It's located at Allendale Long-Term care facility on Ontario Street.

Another program run by the Region at Allendale is Milton Place, although it's not specifically for people with dementia-type illnesses. It can accommodate up to 20 clients each day.

For more information on the Region's day programs, visit www.halton.ca/scs/seniors/adp. To find out more about VON Alzheimer Services, call (905) 847-9559.

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Programming Schedule — Tuesday, January 31 - Monday, February 6, 2006

Tuesday, January 31	Wednesday, February 1	Thursday, February 2	Friday, February 3	Saturday, February 4	Sunday, February 5	Monday, February 6
1:00pm SportsZONE Live (Replay)	1:00pm Halton Hills Council Jan 23 2006	12:00pm Swap Talk (Replay)	1:00pm Halton Region Council Jan 18 2006	4:00pm TVC Sports: Jr.A Hockey - Hamilton vs Burlington	10:30am TVC Sports: Jr.A Hockey - Hamilton vs Burlington	1:00pm Milton Council Jan 30 2006
5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	3:30pm - 8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	1:00pm Milton Council Jan 30 2006	5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	6:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	6:00pm Milton Council Jan 30 2006	4:00pm - 8:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA
6:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00pm Swap Talk (Live)	9:00pm Halton Region Council Jan 18 2006	6:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	6:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00pm SportsZONE Live	8:00pm SportsZONE Live
6:30pm Optimist TV Bingo (Live)	9:00pm Milton Council Jan 30 2006	9:30pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA			9:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	9:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA
7:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA						
8:00pm Auto Experts (Live)						
9:00pm Halton Hills Council Jan 23 2006						
11:30pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA						