

## In this issue...

An Exceptional  
Coffee Break

Look in the  
Mirror – We  
Like What We  
See

Goodbye  
Summer picnic

Christmas Past

What would  
you like to tell  
your family and  
friends?

Tips for Coping  
with Dementia

Poetry and  
Thoughts

Notes and  
Events

Introducing  
Jim Mann

For anyone deciding on whether or not to join a support group...

## An Exceptional Coffee Break

by Eigil Jensen



The Alzheimer Society of B.C. facilitates 17 early stage support groups throughout the province. More groups continue to be added each year.

I am aware of the familiar, warm feelings as soon as I enter the room. The members who are already present, and who usually show up early for our meeting, look up and smile; some even wave, as I approach the table. I feel, oh, so welcome.

I am referring to the Early Memory Loss Group here in Abbotsford. Most of the members are at the early stage of Alzheimer's disorder. I am a recoverer from a mild stroke. It wiped out some memory traces and created some temporary and very embarrassing mild dementia. I keep coming to the group because of the wonderful relaxing, warm and friendly atmosphere. Usually eight to twelve people attend the meetings, about two-thirds of whom are women.

The group leader is very special. Never have I come across a more patient and accepting person. She lets people express their joys, troubles, jokes and idle chat without interruption. She radiates kindness and warmth; she listens,

smiles and laughs along with everyone else. When a lull in the conversation occurs, she presents little prepared affirmations and short items of wisdom.

An interesting observation is that, in spite of their memory loss, everyone seems to cope well cognitively in the present – in the here and now. In other words, everyone can understand a quickly stated joke or a wise saying. An outsider walking into the meeting would not suspect that these are people who have memory difficulties. The only clue that something is amiss would be in following the flow of the conversation. The main impression would be of a group of people who laugh a lot and enjoy being together.

All people need to feel valued for good psychological health. This is one of the positive qualities of this close-knit group. No one is considered over and above, or less than anyone else. Everyone shows patience if one person is slow to express a thought or talk out of turn.

Since all are still having a good time, it's probably not easy for our group leader to stop the fun. But some family members have arrived to escort their loved ones home. The session must end and we can all look forward to the next meeting in two weeks.

### Members of North Shore Early Stage Support Group Look in the Mirror — We Like What We See!



It's easy to always look at our own faults, whether it's something about the way we look or the fact we were late for an appointment, or couldn't remember we had an appointment.

The North Shore's Early Stage Support Group (North Vancouver) decided to look at the positive – at what we admire about ourselves. One by one, we answered the question: What's one of my best qualities? What a great group we turned out to be! Here are some of the qualities our members are proud to claim:

- *"I'm a kind person."*
- *"Friends tell me I'm a good friend to them."*
- *"I've always been an organized person."*
- *"I'm patient."*
- *"I'm learning to be less stressed."*
- *"I don't judge other people."*
- *"Even though I've never had a lot of self-confidence about myself, I've been a pretty good mom and wife."*
- *"I make time for what's most important in my life – my family."*

The North Shore Group would like to suggest that other groups try the same thing in your next meeting and let us know, through *Insight*, what your best qualities are.

One last tip: try not to compare yourself to others or even to the way you used to be, before your diagnosis. Remember, "comparison is the thief of joy." Regardless of dementia, you are still you!



Members of the Vancouver Early Stage Support Group and their families enjoying an end of summer picnic. This group meets on the first and third Tuesday of the month.

### Goodbye Summer Picnic

A potluck picnic was enjoyed by Vancouver Early Stage Support group members and family on September 9<sup>th</sup> at Locarno Beach (this group meets on the first and third Tuesday of the month). At the start of the picnic, the tenacity of our group was evident with a cold wind coming off the ocean. Everyone bundled up and we enjoyed the unique opportunity of having the beach to ourselves. The warmth from the sun came through following lunch and we unbundled, all the while chatting, laughing and strolling. What a glorious backyard we have in Vancouver!

## Christmas Past

by Alan Clews, Victoria Early Stage Support Group member



My first memories of pre-WWII Christmas in England with my cousins, aunts, uncles, parents, and grandparents are similar to those of Dylan Thomas in *A Child's Christmas in Wales*—surely the snow was deeper in those days, or was it just that my legs were shorter? Much of our entertainment involved singing around the piano (65 years later, I still have that piano). Were we really so much more musically proficient in those days?

I am sure that we valued family interactions more, in part, because family members lived within a few streets of each other. We provided our own entertainment. There was no TV and no electronic substitutes for reality. Life was lived at a slower pace. Having fewer expectations, we were less often disappointed.

Jump forward 15 years. I am a resident doctor at the busiest maternity hospital in Britain. Hetty and I have been married for six months. I have one night off-call every three weeks. Hetty is not supposed to sleep over at the hospital, but there will be Christmas celebrations at the hospital for staff and spouses. Hetty confers with a married resident – yes they will both break the rules and stay over after the party!

Two years later – I am serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps at the time of the Korean War. We are engaged in fighting Chinese guerrillas in the Malayan jungle. Hetty and I have two children, a boy aged two and a newborn girl. Both children and Hetty are 8,000 miles away in England. Christmas celebrations seem unreal and pointless.

Forward another two years, Libya, North Africa at the end of the Suez Crisis. Again in uniform, but this time only 1,000 miles from home and family and the promise of being “home by Christmas.”

Fast-forward another two years to rural Saskatchewan. We now have three children. This seems like a real Christmas with the pure white, powder snow and the bright blue skies at 40 degrees below. The children love making snow-houses and playing with their new Canadian friends.

Our next-door neighbours are my medical partner and his family whom we now count as family. We spent part of each Christmas together for fifty years and for many years lived together in retirement on Salt Spring Island. Now we look forward to our first post-island Christmas back in Victoria, where most family Christmases have been held for the past 30 years. Except for a few spent on the beach with our youngest in Western Australia!

Happy Christmas, everyone!

We asked the Kamloops Early Stage Support Group...

### What would you like to tell your family and friends?



#### Slow down...

- Listen, you are talking too quickly.
- If you talk too fast, I miss the whole thing.
- You talk too fast for an older person.
- I need help to be included in the conversation. Slow the talking down. I get confused when you talk too fast.



#### Sometimes I get frustrated...

- Leave me alone, I'll get around to it in my own time.
- I need time to get the information I want.
- I'm still here. Please talk to me; not to my partner about me.
- Sometimes I can't take any more.
- I'm more comfortable in a small group. A big group is too much for me to be a part of.



#### Give me a chance to try for myself...

- I'll ask you to help me when it doesn't make sense to me. I want to try this myself.
- I'd like to try this myself. When I get stuck then I'll ask for help.



#### Being with family is important to me...

- I like being with the family and children. I enjoy watching my grandchildren even if I'm not talking with them.
- It makes me feel good knowing my grandchildren want to come and see me.



#### Try to understand...

- I don't mean to frustrate you. I know you get tired telling repeatedly. I appreciate you being patient.
- I need your friendship. Please don't forget me.

Here are some websites that may interest you:

[www.alzscot.org/pages/person\\_with\\_dementia.htm](http://www.alzscot.org/pages/person_with_dementia.htm)

**Alzheimer Scotland** - The Learning Network is a forum on the early stages of dementia.

<http://www.dasninternational.org/>

**DASN International** - A worldwide organization by and for those diagnosed with dementia, working together to improve our quality of life.

### **Tips for Coping with Dementia** from a Vancouver Early Stage Support Group

While each person has his or her own individual strategies for coping with the daily challenges posed by Alzheimer's disease or related dementias, the members of the Early Stage Support Group in Vancouver (we meet the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month) discovered that we have much in common when it comes to making life easier and happier for ourselves.

We all agreed that it is very important to never blame yourself when you screw up, with one member noting that this is "the worst thing you can do." It is also difficult not to, since our families are changing just as we are, and there is a huge grey area of potential miscommunication between us as a result.

Another "rule" we live by is to never be ashamed to admit you forgot. This helps others understand us, and, really, it is up to us to help them to understand.

Repetition and routine are important. Things done frequently are not so easily forgotten, and there is comfort in daily routines and rituals, as well as in notebooks and Blackberries! One member plays Solitaire on the computer every night to ground herself. Another says his list of daily "must-dos" helps get him going each day. It also helps to have things you *want* to do each day, things that capture your interest, like hobbies or a good book.

While routine helps, everyone agreed that being flexible is important, too. We don't want to get so hung up on our schedule that we fall to pieces if changes are necessary.

Daily exercise is an integral part of each person's day. Helping others can make a huge difference in self-esteem and functioning, too. That's one of the reasons the support group itself is so important for those who attend. We learn from each other, and the humour in the group helps banish feelings of depression.

As dementia progresses there are so many things you *can't* do that it is easy to become over-sensitive when we feel others have let us down, even just a bit. Therefore, letting go of hurt is a big help, although it can be tough to do.

Dementia robs us of so much, but there is still so much we *can* do, if we keep a positive attitude and reach out to the world around us.



Make regular exercise a part of your daily routine



Write notes to help keep track of your appointments



Maintain a positive attitude

### A Groggy Morning

by June L. Scott  
Early Stage Support Group Member,  
Burnaby

Well; it's a lovely morning  
But, I feel kind of down  
I don't know why  
But, it's all around

I try to shake it off  
But, it doesn't work  
I sing and think with happy  
thoughts

But, my eyes are tired  
And, my head is dull  
There appears to be some kind of lull

I guess I'll shake it  
As the day passes by  
Although I feel like I want to cry  
I'm usually an up person  
So this is hard for me to take  
I'm sure I'll get rid of it  
With a real good shake

Exercise girl; move to and fro  
Head up and down  
And away we go;  
Oxygen is what I need  
There! my head is lighter; indeed

I need to push myself now and again  
To keep in good spirits  
From now until' then  
Writing a poem really helps  
It gets all my feelings out on the shelf



Why people with dementia have to adjust to the changes in their abilities:

“Let's look at it as if it was a machine — for many years, it gave you 100% output. But then some parts broke and there are no replacement parts made anywhere. Now it only gives you 60%. You can't make that machine work or force it to work at 100%. You have to accept the 60%.”

Al Coppin  
Early Stage Support Group Member, Burnaby

### Would you like to contribute to the newsletter?



We really want you to feel part of this newsletter. You can contribute in the following ways:

- Send us news from your support group, for example, what topics of interest or activities have you covered
- Submit articles on how to live a full and meaningful life after a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia
- Drop off photographs

Send your contributions (Attention: *Insight*) to the Alzheimer Society of BC.

e-mail: [info@alzheimerbc.org](mailto:info@alzheimerbc.org)

fax: (604) 669-6907

mail: Alzheimer Society of B.C.  
#300 - 828 West 8th Avenue  
Vancouver, BC V5Z 1E2



# Get Walking!

Sunday, January 25, 2009

[www.walkformemories.com](http://www.walkformemories.com) / 1.800.667.3742

One in three people know someone with Alzheimer's disease — who do you know? Show them your support on January 25, 2009.

Make a difference in the fight against Alzheimer's by walking in the 2009 *Investors Group Walk for Memories* in 17 communities across BC.

For more information, call Angie Kok at 1-800-667-3742. You can also register online at [www.walkformemories.com](http://www.walkformemories.com)

### Health Line Services BC

A 24-hour line that puts you in touch with a Registered Nurse who will answer your questions about symptoms, health concerns, when to see a health professional, etc. Call 1-888-215-4700 or in Vancouver (604) 215-4700. Deaf and hearing impaired toll free province-wide 1-866-TTY-4700.

### DEMENTIA HELPLINE



1-800-936-6033

(Lower Mainland 604-681-8651)

Helping people with dementia, their friends, and their family members to build the confidence to maintain quality of life when facing dementia.

University  
of Victoria



Centre  
on Aging

The Caregiver Appraisal Study, part of the Alzheimer Drug Therapy Initiative, is looking for caregivers and their family members from across B.C. to discuss their experiences with Alzheimer's medications: Aricept, Exelon, & Reminyl. All correspondence is confidential, and participation is voluntary. For more information, please call the University of Victoria's Centre on Aging toll-free at 1-866-511-2594.



### Our Vision

Our ultimate vision is to create a world without Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

### Our Mission

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. exists to alleviate the personal and social consequences of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, to promote public awareness and to search for the causes and the cure.

### Introducing the new Honorary Editor of *Insight*



Jim Mann is a busy person who has held various management positions in marketing, the tourism industry, and government relations. He is an active volunteer who now advocates on behalf of and for people with dementia.

Jim has helped facilitate the Alzheimer Society of B.C.'s Public Advocacy workshops; these workshops show people how they can make a difference for themselves and others impacted by Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. In September, Jim was elected to the Alzheimer Society of B.C. Board of Directors.

Diagnosed with Early Onset Dementia in February 2007 at the age of 58, Jim is determined to help make a difference in the

lives of people who are affected by the disease. His willingness to speak out has given courage to others to open up about their own experiences about living with the disease. They also seek out support when they otherwise would not.

Jim was recently asked to be the honorary editor of *Insight*. He wants you to know that people with the disease are welcomed and encouraged to contribute to *Insight*. "I would like you, the readers – wherever you are in the province – to feel connected and to feel that you can gain something from this newsletter," says Jim. "Most importantly, I would like you to feel that you are supported."

We welcome Jim and look forward to working with him on the upcoming issues of *Insight*.

The Alzheimer Society of BC gratefully acknowledges the support of the following sponsors:



RBC  
Foundation



#### About *Insight*

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. is committed to ensuring that 85% of the content of *Insight* is written by people with dementia for people with dementia.

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. is committed to protecting the privacy of people whose personal information is collected and held by the Society, and we adhere to all legislative requirements with respect to protecting privacy. If at any time you wish to have your name removed from this or another mailing, contact us by phone at 604-681-6530, toll-free at 1-800-667-3742, or via e-mail at [info@alzheimerbc.org](mailto:info@alzheimerbc.org) and we will gladly accommodate your request.

*Insight* is published by:

**Alzheimer Society**  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

#300 - 828 West 8th Avenue

Vancouver, BC V5Z 1E2

Tel: 604-681-6530

Toll-Free: 1-800-667-3742

Fax: 604-669-6907

Email: [info@alzheimerbc.org](mailto:info@alzheimerbc.org)

Website: [www.alzheimerbc.org](http://www.alzheimerbc.org)