

AUTHORED NEWS ARTICLE

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Honoring Dad on Father's Day

By Bobbie Holob

Victoria, B.C - My Dad, Nes Holob, has now been gone for five Father's Days. It's healthy to remember Dad since he has passed; honestly though there are a few of his memories I would rather push away.

I try to erase: the day Dad came out of the washroom with his trousers on completely inside out.....when he lost the ability to write his nameto brush his own teeth..... to speak in a complete sentence and then barely at all.

Is it any wonder why one might be in denial when the two words Alzheimer's disease are spoken? A relative of mine was just a little too quick to blurt out "that is the worst" when I told him Dad's diagnosis. At that time I had absolutely no idea the unpredictable, painful and often cruel path we were going to walk; Dad and I. I don't honestly think anyone that has not walked alongside the disease can completely understand it's devastation. I certainly had no clue and was not prepared. My relative was candid at the time, but sadly, ever so accurate.

Looking back, I now understand more than ever. On a slightly lighter note, I can finally share some of the better (versus bitter), memories. Time has made the ache a little less.

What I loved about my Dad: you always knew where you stood; he did not mince words; always called a spade a spade. He had a quirky (sometimes inappropriate and annoying) sense of humour. Maybe, just maybe, it was under appreciated? Even I can relate to that!

However he was intelligent, capable and honest. At the time, it did not register but I was really proud of my Dad's lifetime career. He successfully spent 35 years as an educator, most of those years as principal of schools in Burnaby, B.C. He garnered so much respect. The story goes "if there was a problem school it could be handed to my Dad and he would get it sorted out". Very 'no-nonsense' but managed to gain respect of both students and colleagues. I fondly remember the annual Christmas parties in our basement where Dad's staff would gather and dance the night away!

I was blessed with a secure and stable childhood. I was not spoiled but I had everything I needed. I was so very very lucky. All of my childhood memories are 'feel-good'; they finally give comfort.

The years passed and Mom and Dad retired to Osoyoos, B.C. Our relationship was always rock-solid. Predictable you could say. Their lifestyle shifted as did mine. We visited back and forth however it was a case of me not 'needing' as much from them anymore. I became more independent and remained living on the Lower Mainland. They enjoyed their retirement in bliss. I do mean that because they both were healthy into their early 80's and managed to have many years of good health and adventurous times together. Travel was a large part of their retirement and Alzheimer's disease did not affect Dad until much later in life, shortly after my Mom passed away from a stroke.

We relocated Dad to Victoria from the Okanagan with a previous 6 short months in assisted living in Abbotsford. He could not cope there; they could not cope with him. Things were escalating and his needs were far greater. It was shocking for me to watch things unravel so fast. This confident strong man was losing himself and it was sadly out of anyone's control.

My 'wake up call' (that Dad is not Dad) came on the day I made him cry. Not something I was proud of. This is not a man to shed tears; let alone show emotion and vulnerability. I could no longer hide in denial. He most definitely was not the man I knew to be my Dad and I had to change my attitude about everything; I mean absolutely everything. Role reversal is somewhat of an understatement; the beginning of a whole new relationship between father and daughter.

I 'walked with Dad' down many paths during his time in Victoria. What motivated me all that time to be at his side? He was at my side (almost) since birth (I was adopted at 3 months). We lived our distances apart but I always knew he was just one phone call away. Not a day went by that I did not worry about him. He never let me down; why would I let him down. Dad was in care in Victoria for two years before he passed away.

What am I left with now that Dad is gone? A slightly warped sense of humour for sure! Also, a perspective on a disease I have greater knowledge of and am always gaining more. This experience and knowledge has equipped me with an empathy and compassion for anyone that is walking down this painful, challenging path. I feel I have something to offer in my role as a support group facilitator with the Alzheimer Society of B.C. I understand and I feel deeply for what they are going through. It's such an unfamiliar terrain. They deserve medals for their strength and bravery.

Lastly I am secure in the knowledge that I made a difference in my Dad's life. Would I have done anything different? No. I am at peace knowing I did my absolute best during a time when he was anything but.

"Happy Father's Day Dad with my love."

The Alzheimer Society of B.C. is the only province-wide organization providing support, education, and information about Alzheimer's disease and related dementia through support groups, telephone workshops, education programs, library resources, and the Dementia Helpline (In the lower mainland: 604-682-8651 or Toll-free: 1-800-936-6033). The Society serves Victoria residents at our Greater Victoria Resource Centre at 202-306 Burnside Road West in Victoria and can be reached at 250-382-2052. The resource centre has support groups for both family caregivers and people with early stage dementia. Learn more about the Alzheimer Society of B.C., at www.alzheimerbc.org.

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