



STORY SUGGESTION

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Using a personal journey to help others

Dorothy Leclair, Burnaby

Dorothy Leclair is a prime example of a loving caretaker who has come full circle in the fight against dementia. The Alzheimer Society of B.C. regional support and education coordinator can still remember the fondest memories spent with her wonderful mother even though her mother can no longer do the same. In 2000, Dorothy's life was altered forever when she discovered that her mom had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Acting as the primary caregiver, Dorothy's experiences throughout each stage varied but new challenges would always arise. Those experiences translate to her role at the Society where she works to bring awareness to the wide range of ways this disease can affect a family.

Dorothy decided her mother could no longer live alone when she realized she was no longer safe there. Her mother lived in an area where she was quite geographically isolated from a close neighbor or nearby facilities and should she find herself in a situation where she needed assistance, she wouldn't be able to receive it in a timely fashion. The decision was also based on the fact that her dementia had "robbed her of her skills and good judgment," such as the daily financial decision-making of paying her bills.

Once her mother came to live with her, Dorothy witnessed how the mental abilities of her mother were slowly eroding. "It wasn't uncommon for her to repeat questions multiple times or to put salt on food again and again," she says. Dorothy found herself frequently modifying dinner preparation routines to involve her mother, but recognizing the growing limitations her mother was facing.

Dorothy realized she needed to learn as much as possible about the disease and connected with the Alzheimer Society of B.C. Through calling the Dementia Helpline she was able to begin attending a support group, which provided her with information about the *Family Caregiver Series™*. "The resources and information from the Society were essential in caring for her," Dorothy says. It was with the help of the Society that she learned to care for her mother in such a way that would reduce her levels of stress and expand her skills to cope with changes in communication as well as behavior. In the

support group she learned these changes could cause either tears or laughter and laughter feels much better as a medicine.

When Dorothy learned of an employment opportunity with the Society, it seemed like a great match. "I had had such a positive experience as a recipient of the Society's programmes and information. I knew the Society as a respected source of support and information as well as having caring and compassionate staff and volunteers. When I became aware that the Society was in a position to hire new staff I felt it was a perfect fit for my advocacy and people skills as well as my knowledge of the disease and the impact that it has on families. I had derived a great deal of personal satisfaction acting as a volunteer facilitator at the Burnaby Resource Centre that I believed it would be a good fit for both myself and the Society," she explains.

She now helps remind those in similar caregiver roles to be kind to themselves as well as their partners as dementia only changes the present time we're living in. "There is only one thing I wish for my mom and that's for her to be comfortable and pain free."

Since being hired by the Alzheimer Society of B.C. for the Fraser Valley Resource Centre in 2010, Dorothy has been an advocate for quality of life and care for those living with dementia in long term care facilities. Upon going through the stages of caring for her mother from the early stages, being there for her on a daily basis, attending workshops at the Society and presently using her wealth of experience and knowledge to help others on their journey, Dorothy has come full circle as a caregiver and an advocate for Alzheimer's disease. Dorothy finds her own stories of being on the dementia journey are something people can quickly and easily relate to.

Dorothy's mother is currently living in a care facility in Delta.

The Society provides free education and training for its volunteer facilitators of its support groups, an integral part of the service it delivers to families in communities across British Columbia.

"We know that effective support group facilitators are the key to making any support group experience positive and productive," explains Jean Blake, CEO, Alzheimer Society of B.C. "Providing useful and meaningful education and training for our facilitators is a benefit to the families we serve, as well as, an opportunity for our volunteers, many who have a direct family connection to dementia, to access accurate and timely information."

Available for interviews:

- Dorothy LeClair, support and education coordinator, Alzheimer Society of B.C. - North Fraser Resource Centre (located in Burnaby)
- Jean Blake, CEO, Alzheimer Society of B.C.

Media Contact:

Ruby Ng, Director, Marketing & Communications
Alzheimer Society of B.C.

Phone: 604-742-4919

Cell: 604-828-9516

E-mail: rng@alzheimerbc.org

Web: www.alzheimerbc.org



ALZHEIMER SOCIETY OF B.C.
300 – 828 West 8th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5Z 1E2
PHONE: 604-681-6530 FAX: 604-669-6907 TOLL FREE: 1-800-667-3742
WEBSITE: www.alzheimerbc.org E-MAIL: info@alzheimerbc.org
CHARITABLE REGISTRATION BN #11878 4891 RR0001