

# Neighbours

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John Shyluk spends time with wife Evelyn, a former teacher and artist, who has late stage dementia. January is Alzheimer Awareness Month, aimed at raising the profile of the disease and related dementia.

Gavin Young/  
For Neighbours

## Taking care

Alzheimer campaign helps sufferers in battle with degenerative disease

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## Monty Python fans, eat your hearts out!

Tony Award-winning musical Spamalot comes to Calgary

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## COVER STORY

# Alzheimer's campaign reaches out to families

Alex Frazer-Harrison  
For Neighbours

At first, they thought it was job stress. After all, being a teacher of special-needs kids is hard work.

But taking time off and being prescribed medication for depression didn't help.

At age 55, Evelyn Shyluk learned she had dementia.

"It was a total shock to us," says her husband, John. "We were hoping for something curable."

"The first reaction was anger. Why is this happening? We had all these travel plans."

An estimated 11,000 people have Alzheimer's disease or related dementias in the Calgary area. John compares learning to care for a loved one with dementia to learning a new job skill.

"You need training, and the Alzheimer Society (of Calgary) offered me training to be a caregiver," he says. "They are my lifeline."

Today, Evelyn is 70, lives in long-term care and is in the late stages of dementia.

"She's in a wheelchair. she's silent and can't verbalize, but she still looks good, physically," says John, who visits his wife regularly.

"She still has her hearing and some long-term memory, so it's important to keep talking. And it's amazing to see how she responds to voices."

There are many faces of Alzheimer's disease and dementia. To mark Alzheimer Awareness Month, the Alzheimer Society of Calgary has created a mural that will be on display at City Hall from Jan. 21 to



John Shyluk visits his wife, Evelyn, who has late-stage Alzheimer's and lives at the Harvest Hills Bethany Care Centre in Calgary. It's one of two facilities in the city designed to care for those with dementia.

Gavin Young/Calgary Herald

25. Unforgettable commemorates those who have fought the degenerative disease, including former premier Ralph Klein and Anne Itterman, whose granddaughter is Olympic women's bobsled gold medallist Kaillie Humphries.

"Each of us had to deal with it in our own way," says Cheryl Simundson, Humphries' mom and Anne's daughter, adding having a large family to share the burden was both a help and a challenge after Anne was diagnosed at age 60 with Pick's disease, a form of dementia. "It be-

came harder for (her grandchildren) because she didn't know them."

Anne died in 2006, but she left an impression on Humphries as the bobsledder scored gold in Vancouver while sporting a tattoo commemorating Anne and other loved ones who had recently died.

The mural illustrates how behind every diagnosis is a name, a face and a story, says Alzheimer Society executive director Barb Ferguson.

"There's no real clear path on how (dementia) progresses from individual to individual," she says.

"Where we can help is in terms of education and training, informing people about the signs of when those transitions are taking place."

The society is hosting a community information forum Jan. 26 where experts will give advice and information about the disease and how to cope, as well as discuss topics such as guardianship and housing.

"It's important for us to get information out and encouraging people to know the warning signs," says Ferguson.

## Warning Signs

The Alzheimer Society of Calgary offers this list of warning signs that may be indicators of dementia. The society says these may also be indicators of depression or infection, so it's important to check with your doctor:

- Memory loss that affects day-to-day function
- Difficulty performing familiar tasks
- Problems with language
- Disorientation of time, place
- Poor or decreased judgment
- Problems with abstract thinking
- Misplacing things
- Changes in mood and behaviour
- Changes in personality
- Loss of initiative

Source: [alzheimercalgary.com](http://alzheimercalgary.com)

Adds John: "What I've learned is not to be afraid of it, and how to cope. I would strongly recommend people get in touch with the Alzheimer Society. Take advantage of the adult day programs and support groups for caregivers."

And Simundson says never be afraid to ask questions: "There are no such things as stupid questions."

The community information forum on Jan. 26 runs from 9:30 a.m. to noon at Delta Calgary South, 135 Southland Dr. S.E. Admission is free. To register call 403-290-0110 or e-mail [info@alzheimercalgary.com](mailto:info@alzheimercalgary.com).

For information on support services, and information about dementia and its 10 warning signs, visit [alzheimercalgary.com](http://alzheimercalgary.com).

Jamie Gregg  
Canadian Sprint Star

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