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## “I’m Still Me”

...that is the message Muriel Munson wants to share with others about living with dementia. Muriel does not see herself differently and states, “Other people say, why me? I say, why not? I think that if you are going through something yourself, you are able to help others going through the same thing.” Muriel learned from her mother that you must help people; giving to others is what is most important.

Muriel Munson is an artist who learns from nature and started painting as a child. Her mother recognized her talents very young and encouraged Muriel to explore them. Art has always been a part of her life. Muriel lived in Mexico for some time and earned a living painting there. She also helped others while she was in Mexico and it was there where she learned that friendship is the backbone of her life. Muriel believes that we should enjoy our lives and enjoy each stage of our lives...“we are always getting ready for the next.”



When Muriel was given a diagnosis of dementia, she felt relieved. She had known for a few years that something was wrong. She was unable to follow a recipe, had difficulty reading a library book and has not painted in five years. Since her diagnosis, Muriel has had to give up driving. Sometimes she feels as though people look at her differently.

In order to adjust to these changes in her life, Muriel now plans ahead. Every night before she goes to bed, Muriel picks out what she is going to wear for the next day. She and her partner, Bill, decide on the dinner menu together in the morning. Muriel writes down instructions and then, when she begins to prepare the meal, she has a card to help her remember what time to put the chicken or the roast in the oven and when to take it out. These notes really help her and it was someone from the group who gave her that idea.

The group Muriel refers to is the Beyond Words Support Group (for persons in the early stage of dementia). Muriel also participates in the Best Friends Coffee Club and the R.E.B.E.L. group. Muriel says the groups are upbeat; they are about friendship and bonding and give you a lifesaving feeling. They give you the strength to carry on.

Muriel claims that the Alzheimer Society of Niagara Region is her number one support because just being able to talk to others who understand is wonderful. When asked if she would encourage others with early stage dementia to participate in programs at the Alzheimer Society, Muriel responded, “Absolutely, yes!!”

# Dr. Phill

Well-known in the Niagara Region, Dr. Phillip O'Reilly currently sits on the board of the Alzheimer Society of Niagara Region. He is also offering his medical expertise to answer any questions you may have about Alzheimer's Disease and related dementias. If you have a question for our very own Dr. Phill, please see the last page for how you can contact us.



Dear Doctor Phil,  
Recently I was diagnosed with dementia and my family thinks that I should give up driving. I think that I am still able to drive but I was wondering what the risks are, and if I should in fact give up driving all together?

Thank you for asking this question as it is one that is important to consider once a diagnosis of dementia has been made. Driving is a highly regarded source of independence - one that we all dread the thought of losing. The diagnosis of dementia does not mean that you must stop driving immediately. That will be a decision you will make with the guidance of your doctor, who has an obligation to ensure that you are safe to continue driving – for both your wellbeing and that of others. It does mean, however, that you will have to take seriously the fact that driving will inevitably become a problem for you.

Any disorder that affects your brain, such as strokes, seizures, brain injury, tumours and dementia, can have an impact on your ability to react quickly. More importantly, these disorders may also affect your judgement, reasoning and visuo-spatial skills which can dramatically increase your risk of an accident. For these reasons it is important that you are aware of any changes you may have in those abilities. The difficulty is that you may not notice that these changes are occurring. You will need to ask your family members and friends to monitor your driving and tell you if they see any changes that may be of concern.

You can also attend a program that will assess your driving skills as this would provide you with needed information about your current abilities.

Remember, also, that if and when your doctor says, after assessing you, that you should not be driving, he/she will be obliged to report that decision to the Ministry of Transportation. Be aware that as soon the report is made, you will no longer be covered by your car insurance if an accident occurs - even if your insurance has already been paid. So, do not continue to drive once your doctor has indicated that it is no longer safe to do so.

## Tips & Strategies for Daily Living

Here are some great exercises to get your brain moving! Feel free to come up with some ideas of your own. Pick the things you like to do and devote an hour every day, three to five times a week. You'll notice the difference!

- Word and number games- crosswords, word searches , word jumbles and sudoku puzzles are all wonderful and fun ways to improve memory. You can modify these games to suit your needs by seeing how many words you can get in 20 mins, rather than focusing too long on completing the puzzles.
- Solitaire- There are many kinds of solitaire games, use a deck of cards or play on the computer
- Jigsaws- look for puzzles with fewer, larger pieces to start and as you improve increase the difficulty level. Buy them at garage sales or thrift stores.
- Video and computer games- any video game that requires concentration, memory and problem solving especially classics such as "Tetris"- help to work your brain
- Musical instruments – According to research, this is one of the most beneficial activities. Pick up a musical instrument and play, whether it's a flute, keyboard or a guitar. Even if you are a one fingered wonder, it will still get you thinking.
- Darts and billiards- both are great ways to improve memory and problem solving. They are also a lot of fun!

Source: Train Your Brain, from the "memory work out, A "By Us For Us Guide"

## Alzheimer Society of Niagara Region's news & events

For more information please call (905) 687-3914

- Best Friends Coffee Club  
On the second and fourth Thursday of each month we invite you to join us for the Best Friends Coffee Club
- A Changing Melody is a conference for persons with early stage dementia and the care partners. For the first time, A Changing Melody will be coming to Niagara in the Spring of 2010. The conference will be taking place on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010 and registration will be available in the New Year. If you would like more information about the A Changing Melody Conference, please contact Gina Bendo at (905) 687-3914
- The Manulife Walk for Memories in support of the Alzheimer Society of Niagara Region is taking place on Sunday January 31, 2010 at the Pen Centre. For information about this event call (905) 687-3914

## From the editor...

Welcome to our second issue of Connections, our newsletter for you - persons with early-stage dementia.

I know you will enjoy our feature interview with Muriel Munson. She is an inspiring and interesting woman living with early-stage dementia. She tackles life's challenges with a very positive attitude.

If you are interested in being interviewed for a feature article in one of our future issues, please contact me at (905) 687-3914.

We continue to welcome your ideas and thoughts about the newsletter and encourage you to participate in the production of this newsletter. If you would like to help, we would love to hear from you. Call (905) 687-3914

Thank you,  
Gina Bendo, RegN

### Current Research

Aricept is one of a group of medications called "cholinesterase inhibitors." These medications prevent the breakdown of acetylcholine, a chemical important for both learning and memory.

Aricept may show some improvement or no decline in cognition, including memory, orientation and language and the performance of daily activities such as bathing, dressing and eating. Response to this medication will vary from person to person.

Information sheets are available from the Alzheimer Society of Niagara Region at your request.

**Please note:** Treatment does not cure the disease, it may act to slow the progression. Please check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns.

Source: [www.alzheimer.ca](http://www.alzheimer.ca)

### Contact & Feedback

What I liked: \_\_\_\_\_

What I didn't like: \_\_\_\_\_

Things I would like to see in the next issue: \_\_\_\_\_

How I would like to contribute: \_\_\_\_\_

My question for Dr. Phil: \_\_\_\_\_

Other comments: \_\_\_\_\_

#### How to reach us

##### By mail:

403 Ontario St., Unit #1  
St. Catharines, ON L2N  
1L5

##### By phone:

905-687-3914 extension  
543 (Gina)

##### By email:

[gbendo@alzheimerniagara.ca](mailto:gbendo@alzheimerniagara.ca)

# Remember when...

*In 1940 The Wizard of Oz won two Oscars and a special award for Judy Garland.*

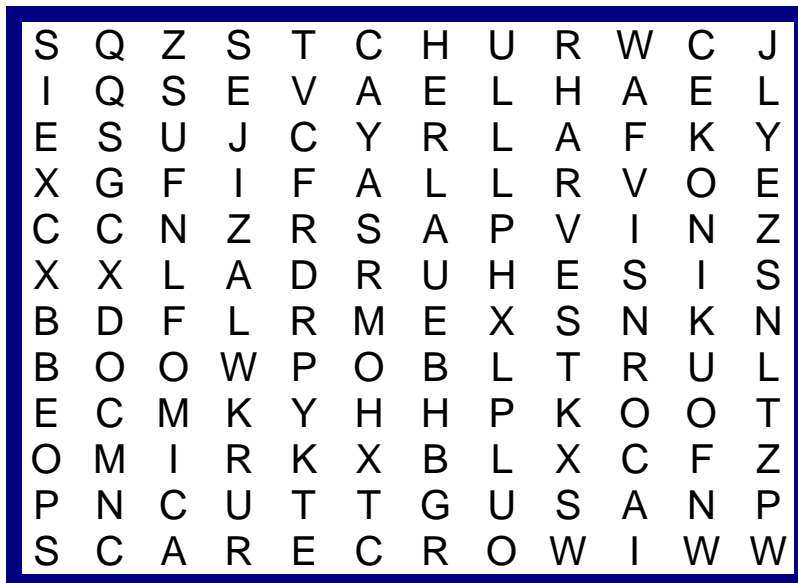
M-G-M's The Wizard of Oz was a milestone motion picture in 1939. Breaking theatre attendance records across North America and winning unanimous critical acclaim. Since then, it has endured changing taste in music, entertainers and entertainment to become a cornerstone of North American popular folklore.

Source: <http://thewizardofoz.warnerbros.com/>



## !Surprise!

Take a break from reading and challenge your brain in a fun way! Activities like word searches, crosswords, puzzles and Sudoku are great ways to exercise your brain.



### Words to find

ACORN	RAKE
COLD	SCARECROW
FALL	SQUIRREL
HARVEST	ORANGE
LEAVES	PUMPKIN

## **Tips and Strategies for the Holiday Season**

**For many people the holidays present an opportunity to spend time with your family, celebrate and take part in special activities. Here are a few of the best ideas we found to help make the holidays a little less stressful.**

- Prior to the commencement of the holiday season think about what activities you would like to take part in and which traditions are the most important to you. Share your thoughts with your family and friends so they know what your hopes and expectations are
- Give yourself permission to do only what you can manage. There are certain activities that may be overwhelming for you and it is okay to choose not to take part or only take part in portions of certain activities.
- If you are feeling tired or overwhelmed during your holiday celebrations find some quiet space to take a little time for yourself. Communicate with your family that you may need to take some time away during parties or other gatherings.
- Try to maintain as much of your normal routine as possible. When your schedule permits take part in your regular routine weather it includes exercise, napping, reading or attending community programs.
- Take this opportunity to share your most valued traditions with the younger generations in your family. This is a great way to reminisce and plan which traditions you would like to follow this year. Remember, it is okay to adapt your traditions to fit your lifestyle today or create new traditions that you can use every year.
- Use lists for tracking your shopping and spending, holiday gatherings and events and other things you would like to do this season.
- Work with a partner to do familiar and fun holiday activities such as making, signing or mailing cards wrapping presents or decorating cookies. This can be a meaningful way to share time with your loved ones.

Sources: Alzheimer Association website, [www.alzheimertoronto.org](http://www.alzheimertoronto.org), November 2001  
Research Update: Tips for an enjoyable holiday season prepared by the ASO Education Dept.