



MEDIA RELEASE – for immediate distribution

THE FACES OF ALS - Zita Van Buskirk

What do you do when a disease you can't pronounce takes away from you the things you loved?

What do you do when you live each day knowing there is no cure and that the disease will, too soon, take your life?

Zita Van Buskirk faces those questions each day that she lives with ALS. Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (also known as Lou Gehrig's disease) is a fatal neuromuscular disease. Nerve cells degenerate, voluntary muscles weaken and become immobile. The senses are impaired while the intellect remains unaffected. Death typically occurs from respiratory failure within two to five years of diagnosis.

Zita's symptoms started like many do. She didn't 'feel' sick. She didn't 'feel' bad. Her symptoms started with a feeling of having "marbles" in her mouth when she was speaking and having a small amount of slurred speech. She found herself tripping more often while walking her dog.

The day she received her diagnosis is one her and her family will never forget. "The diagnosis was devastating," says her daughter Michele, "Especially given how active and outgoing Mom had always been."

Michele describes her mother as a tireless worker, who went out of her way to help others through her volunteering at Moncton Headstart and at other organizations. In her spare time, Zita loved to crochet, and through her volunteer work with a church group, made crocheted bears that were sent to children in Haiti.

When you live with a disease like ALS, your life seems divided in two.

Before and *after*.

Before ALS, Zita spent countless hours in her garden. Before ALS Zita loved travelling and visiting with her children and grandchildren, sharing stories with them. Before ALS she loved talking and spending time with friends. Before ALS she loved walking her beloved Cairn terrier and treated Bonica like a canine queen.

Michele sees every day what life is like for her Mom *after* ALS. She no longer has the dexterity or strength to crochet. She can no longer share her stories, because she cannot speak. She cannot walk her dog. Even travelling to visit family and friends is no longer possible.

What do you do when a disease takes away from you the things you loved? Zita and her family face the answer to that question every day, and it's a different answer every day as the disease takes away one thing and then another. But Zita is a fighter.

Even in the face of all this, she continues to stay positive. To fight this disease and to hang on to each day that she has. And she continues to tell her story *in her own way*, raising awareness for a disease that too few have heard of.

Michele speaks for her family and those who know Zita when she says proudly, "She is an inspiration to all of us."

Zita was diagnosed with ALS in 2007.

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Please note that Zita and Michele are available for interviews.