

## Up the Down Staircase

by Brian LeBlanc, International Dementia Advocate

As a child in the 60s and 70s, I couldn't wait to get to adulthood and do all the things an older person gets to do. The one thing I never counted on was watching my maternal grandfather, my father, and my mother mentally decline with Dementia-Related Illnesses.

What I REALLY didn't count on was being diagnosed in 2014 at the age of 54 with Alzheimers Disease.

Devastating? **YES!** Life Altering? **YES!**

Stopped Living a Full Life? **NOT A CHANCE!**

The day you receive your diagnosis is not the day you start forgetting things. It's not when you start misplacing things or start getting lost. If you're like me, you've probably been doing those things for years. It just means what you're experiencing now has a name.

On my normal days, which are more frequent than my so-called "abnormal days", I'm fine. I can do almost all the things I used to do with no difficulty and/or confusion. On my abnormal days is when I embrace my Sapphire moments.

I utilize my phone for a lot of things. It reminds me of meetings, when to take my medications, when to eat, and when to take a bath. Yes, I need a reminder to bathe. I don't mind the reminder because I would rather smell good than not.

I usually wake up in the morning with brain fog. At times I can't speak, I can't rationalize, I can't do much of anything. So, instead of fighting it, I drink my coffee, eat a good breakfast, and just sit to wait for the fog to lift.

I also lose my balance quite frequently. I used to get alarmed but it's now part of my daily routine. Sometimes I fall and Dallas, my little 6 pound "Chorkie" (Chihuahua/Yorkie) comes by and starts licking me in the face. It's a great moment and a reminder that life, even with its ups and downs, has some nice moments.

There are also my Diamond moments which, if I'm not careful, can be sharp and hurtful. Even before my Alzheimers Diagnosis, I had a bit of an edge. Now I believe my Alzheimers exacerbates the situations.

When things are not going my way, usually I am trying to learn something new, or I can't figure something out, I will throw things, usually whatever is in my hands (*As a side note, I have never thrown anything at anyone*). At other times I will yell some *not-so-nice* words. I will also combine the two when really frustrated. It alarms people and even scares them sometimes. Although I don't mean for that to happen ... it just does.

I wish I could say I have learned how to control it. So far, I have not been successful in doing so, BUT, I'm still trying.

Living with Alzheimers is challenging, but doable. Just remember, pity parties only have one invitee. No one else wants to come to your party. Embracing your challenges cultivates strength and courage and is more attractive than anger and pity. I choose the latter.

*Brian LeBlanc is an International Dementia Advocate, Keynote Speaker for the Early-Stage Advisory Group, Alzheimers Advocate – National Alzheimers Association Advisory Council, National Dementia Advocate – Dementia Action Alliance, and an International Dementia Advocate – Dementia Alliance International.*

*He says, "I've been 'living with' a Diagnosis of Alzheimers Disease since 2014. I spend my time speaking both nationally and internationally (Care Partner Groups, Individuals Living with Dementia Groups, Zoom, Skype, Webinar, Conferences) regarding my Alzheimers life. **I have Alzheimers BUT, it DOESN'T have me, for I don't allow it to define who I am!**"*