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Challenges no match for love

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When Peter Wylie retired, he moved with his wife Sylvia to Rocky Mountain House.

"The first time I ever thought of leaving my husband was in Rocky," said Mrs. Wylie.

One day, Mr. Wylie's wallet had gone missing and his temper flared, accusing his wife of stealing it.

"He took after me with a chair, but I escaped," remembered Ms. Wylie, recounting the event sitting at her kitchen table in Glenbow.

Sylvia drove to the RCMP station to report her husband.

"I said, 'he is very, very sick. He's not a criminal. He's not a violent person. He's sick,'" said Mrs. Wylie, explaining the RCMP processed her complaint on compassionate grounds.

When the RCMP went back to the home to take Mr. Wylie to the hospital, where he stayed for a week, they found him trying to fix the door he had kicked in chasing after his wife, oblivious to what had taken place.

The Wylie's story is not about domestic violence,

but rather a progressive, degenerative illness that causes thinking and memory loss.

Mr. Wylie is among approximately 500,000 Canadians living with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia. Of the 500,000 people affected, more than 71,000 of them are under the age of 65, according to the Alzheimer Society of Canada.

Mr. Wylie was 64 years old when he hid his wallet in his top dresser drawer, forgetting where it was.

Fifteen years later, he is now 78 years old and has just celebrated his eighth year living at Bethany Cochrane on Jan. 11.

He lives in the 800 Wing, reserved for 26 residents with dementia.

Not long after Mrs. Wylie made the RCMP report, she realized she couldn't care for her husband so far away from family and Calgary's medical facilities, so they moved back to Cochrane where they had lived previous moving to Rocky Mountain House.

The day after the move Mr. Wylie attempted suicide by drinking a bottle of vodka and immersing himself in a tub of ice-cold water.

Mrs. Wylie found him early in the morning and immediately pulled the tub plug and called 9-1-1.

He didn't wake up for 48 hours.

He stayed at the Rocky View psychiatric ward for the next month. Before he left, he was officially diagnosed with Alzheimer's Jan. 4, 2001, and the hospital advised Mrs. Wylie that she would be unable to provide the necessary care for her husband if he remained at home.

She started looking into



Peter Wylie has struggled with Alzheimer's for the past 15 years. While the disease has created challenges, Sylvia and Peter share the same love they started nearly 60 years ago.

CTimes photo by Sara Loftson

nursing homes and days later a spot became open at Bethany Cochrane.

Today there is a waiting list to get in to Wing 800. Bethany Cochrane is the only facility in town that offers care for people with dementia and as the population continues to age chances are the waiting list will grow. The Alzheimer Society of Canada reports within 25 years, the number of people living with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia could reach between 1 million and 1.3 million.

Beside long-term care,

Bethany Cochrane also offers an adult day support program for people living with dementia at home Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and Fridays from 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. As well a family support group lead by a social worker meets monthly every third Wednesday at 2 p.m.

"We try not to get hung up on routines. This isn't a hospital, this is a home," said Doreen Wilson, administrator for Bethany Cochrane.

But Mrs. Wylie said for her husband creating a sense of home at Bethany

Cochrane has not been easy.

"No matter what state of mind their mind is, they know it's not home. They want to go home," she said.

In conversation with Mrs. Wylie, she is able to spout off dates almost like the events happened yesterday — an impossible feat for her husband.

Sixty years ago the couple met in Kamsack, Saskatchewan and were married there on June 21, 1951.

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Peter and Sylvia Wylie were married 58 years ago, on June 21, 1951.

CTimes photo submitted

Life continues on

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They moved to Calgary in 1956 where Peter found and kept a job with Beatrice Dairies for 20 years, after which he tried his hand in the insurance business and real estate. Mrs. Wylie stayed at home and raised their four boys and three girls — together they have 11 grandchildren.

The disease has stolen away the delight many couples take in watching their children grow up as they grow old together.

"He knows the kids to see them, but he doesn't know their names," said Mrs. Wylie.

"I threaten him — you forget who I am and I'll stop visiting you. He says 'I'll never forget you,' she laughs. "It helps to have a sense of humour."

Mrs. Wylie lives alone and religiously visits her husband at Bethany Cochrane two or three times a week.

She would have never guessed this would have happened to her husband because he had no family history of Alzheimer's.

"His dad died at 92, sharp as a tack. His mom died at 58 from Multiple Sclerosis. That's the problem, nobody knows what causes it — they've been through the coffee thing, the aluminum thing," said Mrs. Wylie.

Researchers are studying heredity, environmental and physiological causes, but the disease remains an incurable mystery.

Mr. Wylie experienced warning signs well before the wallet incident, such as memory loss, disorientation of time and place, misplacing things, changes in personality and loss of initiative.

Mr. Wylie has never been a vio-

lent man, said Mrs. Wylie, but the disease brought out his temper.

While Mr. Wylie never fully explained why he wanted to leave Cochrane and move to Rocky Mountain House, Mrs. Wylie thinks he knew he was getting sick and wanted to escape the scrutiny of friends and family.

"He was completely in denial through the whole process," said Mrs. Wylie.

The first doctor's appointment, losing his driver's license, turning their joint finances over to Mrs. Wylie — each milestone signaled a loss of independence.

Before Mr. Wylie was officially diagnosed with Alzheimer's, the doctor asked Mrs. Wylie to first see a lawyer and get power of attorney.

"That's the best advice he could have given me. Anything under joint names you can't touch until he's gone. I would recommend that to anybody.

That was difficult for him, he knew what was happening," said Mrs. Wylie, who was OK with the transition since she had always handled their finances.

Today, despite very limited speech, Mr. Wylie is still physically in good health and there are a few other things that he has retained.

Mr. Wylie whistles often and smiles more.

"He loves singing and we danced half our lives away. He can still waltz, polka," said Mrs. Wylie, explaining her husband takes advantage of the weekly singing

and dancing clubs at Bethany Cochrane.

As for Mrs. Wylie, she says, "life goes on and you make adjustments."

She has become a globetrotter going to Hawaii, Disneyland and Europe and this April she is going with a tour group to celebrate Easter at the Vatican in Rome.

"You have to move on otherwise you just end up being an angry old woman. I find joy in my family. I find joy in my friends.

I depend a lot on the grace of God for my strength and I'm committed — I love my husband very much."



Peter and Sylvia Wylie have both struggled with Peter's Alzheimer's for the past 15 years. *CTimes photo by Sara Loftson*

Calgary Catholic School District

Register Now For September 2009



All CCSD schools offer a well-rounded, faith-based education in a supportive, inclusive and nurturing community to meet each child's unique needs from Kindergarten to Grade 12. Registration is ongoing throughout the school year.

To Register

Holy Spirit (Kindergarten–Grade 6) at 403-932-2433
St. Timothy (Grade 7–12) at 403-932-7235

Special Needs

Children with special education needs should register at their local school.

District Program Fair

CCSD offers a wide variety of programs of choice from elementary to high school to meet the individual learning goals of all students. Parents and students are invited to explore the optional programs offered by attending the **District Program Fair on February 19, 2009 from 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. at Bishop Carroll High School (4324 Richard Rd. SW)**

Kindergarten / Grade 1 at Holy Spirit School

Holy Spirit School offers a choice of morning or afternoon classes on a first come, first served basis. To register, children must be five years old on or before March 1, 2010. Your child's birth certificate should be presented at the time of registration.

To register in Grade 1, children must be six years old on or before March 1, 2010. The child's birth certificate and one parent's Catholic baptismal certificate should be presented at the time of registration. Children who are already attending Kindergarten do not need to re-register for Grade 1.

St. Timothy School

Registration is ongoing at St. Timothy for junior and senior high students interested in enrolling for the upcoming school year. St. Timothy offers courses in Career and Technology Studies, Spanish and French as a Second Language, as well as a Hockey Canada Skills Academy program open to boys and girls. St. Timothy features fine arts options and comprehensive athletics program.



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