

Hello to you all. My name is Cynthia Bromley, I am a member of the Positive Dementia Group and I would like to talk to you today about my own experiences of living actively with dementia.

I have always been a very active person, since leaving college and qualifying as a PE teacher, to running three marathons and raising three children. I was a member of various sports and social groups, my favourite of which was the Deeside music society where I played leading roles in various shows.

In fact, it was at the music society that I began to notice things weren't quite right. It started with silly things like forgetting the odd line, or getting confused about dance routines, but it got worse until I couldn't remember any lines or routines and had to leave.

Other areas in my life were following a similar path. I was unable to hold down my job, I lost touch with friends and people started to comment on my unusual behaviour. I knew something was wrong but had no idea what, or how to deal with it. I felt extremely frightened and very alone.

Strangely enough it was receiving a diagnosis of dementia that changed all that.

After months of tests and uncertainty I was told that I had early onset Alzheimer's. It was a shock to hear this diagnosis but at the

same time I felt a certain amount of relief that I wasn't going completely mad. I finally knew what was wrong with me.

This all happened about 2 years ago and since then my life has completely changed. With help from Alzheimer Scotland and my family I have found that active person I used to be and my diary is as busy as ever.

One of my favourite activities is walking and I have joined a walking group, which meets once a month to venture in to the Scottish countryside. It started off as a relatively small group, but over the months it has grown and is now a great social event as well as a good way of getting physical exercise.

A few months ago I took part in a walk leader's course, which taught me the skills to take other walkers out and share the positive effects that being outdoors has on your physical and mental health. It was a very busy day, but one that I really enjoyed and I am very much looking forward to putting my skills into practise this summer.

As well as physical exercise I enjoy maintaining my social life and meeting new people. Since my diagnosis I have met so many fantastic people and dread to think where I would have been now without their friendship and support.

I have a fantastic network of carers who take me out to clubs and enable me to pursue my own interests. One of these is returning

to singing. I have joined a singing group that meets once a week to sing songs from well-known musicals. Whilst it isn't the challenge of playing the lead roles, it is certainly a great opportunity for me to do something that makes me happy.

Although life has improved I have to be honest and say it's not perfect. I get frustrated that I don't have the level of independence I used to and feel I have lost a lot of people in my life because of the illness. However, I have also accepted that this is my new life now, and one thing I promised myself was to make the best job of it that I can.

One way I have been doing this is by giving talks to people to raise awareness of Alzheimer's and what it is like to live with the illness. Talking about my own experiences gives me huge a sense of achievement as I can do something I enjoy whilst showing people that a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease is not the end of your life.

This leads me on to a little story about one talk I gave to the Banchory Rotary Club. After the talk a gentleman came up to me to thank me for speaking and then asked me if I remembered who he was. I apologised and said that I didn't, to which he replied, 'you used to play squash with me and beat me every time!'

Needless to say I am no longer running around the squash courts, but in my head I am playing my own game against a new opponent

called Alzheimer's and I am determined to beat it for as long as I can.