

Family Member Profile – Judy Daschuk

Sept., 2007



As I was planning our romantic trip to London and Paris for our 10th wedding anniversary, I jokingly said to my husband Terry, “wouldn’t it be funny if I got pregnant and we had to cancel our trip”. That would never happen to us or so we thought. Well, as the old saying goes...never say never!

Imagine our shock when my doctor confirmed that I was indeed pregnant. What I had thought was just another symptom of Lupus, the chronic disease that I had been suffering from for the past 6 years, turned out to be morning sickness. I was warned that I could easily miscarry but things went well during my closely monitored pregnancy. Nine months later I gave birth to our son, Nicholas, but our joy was short lived as I had been sick with a high fever during the delivery and he was born with a

severe staph infection on his skin. I only held him long enough to take a picture and then he was whisked off to the NICU for 5 days. Surely our troubles were over, but this was not meant to be so.

From the start, Nicholas cried a lot and never slept. As he got older he stopped talking and he made little eye contact. He would go out of control with temper tantrums. Imagine our sadness when he was diagnosed with Autism at the age of three.

The next few years were a nightmare as we muddled through the governments long waiting lists for services and we found there was a huge lack of resources in the schools. As the BC government does not recognize Autism as medical disease, but sees it as a behavioral problem, it means many of the treatments are not covered. We’ve seen other families with autistic children who have gone into debt and sadly marriages have fallen apart because of the strain.

When Nicholas started school I was amazed to see that there were at least ten other special needs children attending the local school. Another mother and I organized a support group to meet once a month for coffee and to discuss how we could get the most out of the school, to exchange knowledge and resources. In the second year I arranged to have speakers come in and we added community partners to the group. After several years of meeting together we all went our separate ways because as our children grew older and attended middle school many mothers went back to work part-time or on to other things. One mother became a school trustee to ensure that the voice of special needs families would be heard at the school board level; another mother became part of the group that spearheaded the movement to take government to court which resulted in the funding that all autistic children across the province receive. Without realizing it, this group actually connected me to Partners Care when one of the community partners received a posting for a job at BC Children’s called the PiC Family Liaison. She recommended one of the groups speakers, Susan Greig, for the position; and as you all know Susan did get the job and the rest is history. Along with those important relationships that I established through the group I learned that networking with other families is important & that you cannot do it alone.

Today Nicholas is 13 years old and attends middle school. Along with Autism he now suffers from severe Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), being afraid of germs. Our hearts ache for him as he lives in a world that he is afraid of and does not understand.

When I was approached about joining Partners in Care, I felt that I was inadequately qualified to join; after all, Nicholas only periodically uses BC Children’s services. Upon attending a few PIC meetings however, I was struck by all of the members deep commitment to family centred care and I realized that regardless of what our child’s medical issues are, we are all parents who care and want to make a difference. Imagine what we can do.....

PS. As for that 10th Anniversary to Europe, we still did go...but with a baby in tow and minus the romance.