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Take time for our elders

By Sarah Sobanski

If you've been reading *This Week* with any regularity this past month, you may have guessed that January is Alzheimer's awareness month.

We've had weekly submissions preparing for the Alzheimer Society of Hastings-Prince Edward's annual walk Jan. 28 at NHHS. Each time it's a different story, each time an entire family impacted.

According to a press release by the society, every year 25,000 Canadians hear the words, ?you have dementia.? It states it's one of the fastest-growing diseases of our time, but still has no cure or effective treatments. Every three seconds, someone in the world develops dementia. In Canada alone it's estimated there are 564,000 living with it. In 15 years, that number will almost double.

I'll come right out and say it ? we aren't very good to our elders.

Every week I hear about someone who can't afford their bills because their pension is too little, if they have one at all. In a February 2016 article by Richard Shillington ? who authored *An Analysis of the Economic Circumstances of Canadian Seniors ?* in *iPolitics* it was reported that almost half of Canadian families aged 55 to 64 have no accrued employer pension benefits in Canada. It stated the poverty rate has more than tripled between 1995 and 2013 ? around a quarter of single seniors living in poverty.

This past summer local members of the Ontario Health Coalition brought a giant rocking chair to Bancroft to raise awareness of failing care levels in long-term care homes. It stated there have been approximately 20,000 people on wait lists for long term care homes spaces for over a decade. In speaking with members at the display, I was told that waiting lists varied for different communities ? that it could be hard to get a bed in your own community. Since 2001, more than 24 long-term care residents in Ontario have died as a result of violence from other residents and thousands have been attacked by other residents. Almost two-thirds of long-term care residents have dementia and half have aggressive behaviours.

That's the tip of the iceberg. More could be said to society's implications that senior citizens are less productive, less important. How could things take precedent over taking care of your aging mother or father? There's work, the kids' sports, this event, that event ? we think they're the past, ahead is our future.

Perhaps we have trouble coming to terms with the fact that our parents need to be taken care of when they've always been the ones to take care of us. That passing of the torch is scary but like anything new, holding it up only requires patience, practice and, most importantly, time.

My opa was a tough-love sort of man. He took care of a house of six on a single income. He made his four daughters go to church twice on Sunday. He took my mother into the city on his motorcycle.

In retirement, he travelled with my oma. He had a boat and a captain's attitude when it came time to sit at the dinner table. He rubbed his hands together when he said the before meal prayer. After dinner he made the grandchildren line up for enveloped gifts, oldest to youngest ? then one Christmas he couldn't remember our names as each of us took our turn to hug and thank him.

Alzheimer's is a frustrating, heartbreaking disease. It's hard to visit. It's hard to watch. It's hard to understand. There is nothing quite like it.

We owe it to our elders to help fight it. It's one thing in a long list of things that can and need to change. Our elders deserve their identities.

One day we're all wise and old.