

It's Going to be OK – Our Family's Journey with Alzheimer's

"Everyone hits bumps in life. That is a part of life. Wellness is tied in with being able to manage the bumps. That is how we build resilience." says school counsellor Marie Kennedy.

The Kennedy family of Lochaber, Nova Scotia hit a bump in early 2000 when their beloved mom/grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. Alzheimer's disease is a progressive neurologic disorder that causes the brain to shrink (atrophy) and brain cells to die. Alzheimer's disease is the most common cause of dementia — a continuous decline in thinking, behavioral and social skills that affects a person's ability to function independently.

On a drive home from a visit to Nanny Mac in the long-term care facility, Marie Kennedy and her sons Ben and Alex decided to draft a book for kids and families about their experience. Later that year, Marie's mom and the boy's grandmother died, and the draft was put away for 10 years. Occasionally they took the book out and worked on it but life continued for them all.

Marie and her son Ben attended a *Pitch the Publisher* event in Halifax in 2018 where they received a lot of encouragement from the publishers, but no publisher was willing to take the book on. The family decided to move ahead, and self publish the book. Meaghan Smith—a singer and songwriter from Halifax—agreed to do the illustrations and brought the words to life. She embedded forget-me-nots on every page in the book which is a symbol for the Alzheimer's society.

In early August, a book launch was held in the community of Country Harbour where the family has deep roots. Since then the book has reached all parts of Canada and the U.S. with many families sharing their stories.

"In many ways, the book fills a gap for kids and families who are struggling to understand the illness and explain it to their children," says Kennedy. "Many children

ask the same question: "Why did my nanny's brain have to get sick?" The book helps to explain the illness in a child-friendly way that is developmentally appropriate for children of all ages.

The family also wanted to include a page at the back of the book which includes strategies their family used to cope with the illness of a loved one. They felt some of these strategies might be beneficial for other families. Some of the strategies include: listening to the loved one without correcting; finding the humour; and understanding that the loved one's brain is sick.

"We know many of our students have grandparents who are living with this illness," continues Kennedy. "We also know that many teachers are also dealing with this illness with loved ones. It is our hope that this book will help. It is about grief—but really about hope and knowing that things will be ok."

For more information on how to purchase the book: <https://www.itsgoingtobeokbook.com/>

The Kennedy family is offering free shipping for NSTU members in Nova Scotia.

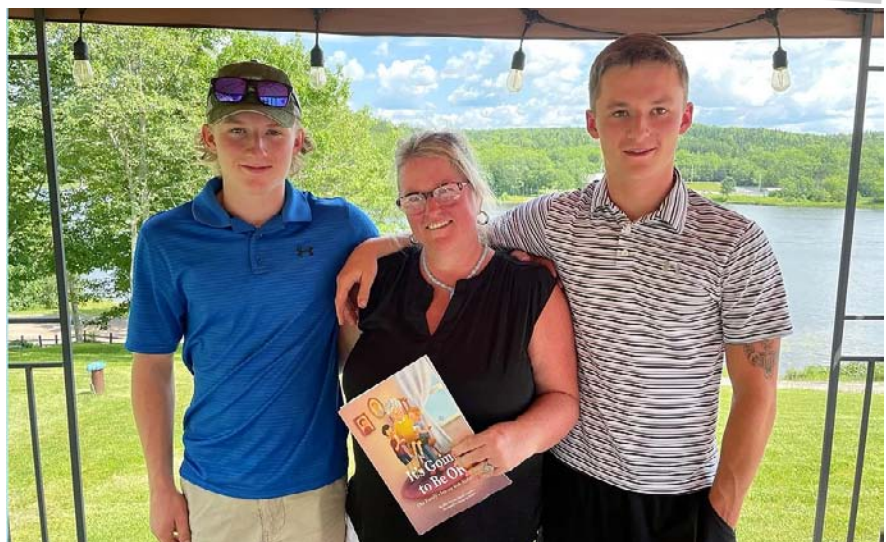
Marie Kennedy, a member of the Antigonish Local, has been an educator for 25 years. She started as a high school English teacher and then completed a M.Ed in counselling and has been a school counsellor for past 10 years. She has taught with Strait Regional Centre for Education her entire teaching career and is currently a school counsellor at St. Andrew Junior School in Antigonish.

For more information:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/it-going-to-be-ok-1.6127051>

The Kennedy family has donated a book for *The Teacher* has a book for giveaway.

Email your name, home address, and the name of your school with Well Teacher Giveaway in the subject line to theteacher@nstu.ca by October 11, 2021 to be eligible for the draw.



Marie Kennedy is shown with her sons Ben and Alex.