



## ALSNWWI Support Group

A Gathering of Individuals Touched by ALS  
Share Joy, Sorrow, Laughter, Tears, and Hope.

The ALS support group provides a safe place where patients, families, & friends Gather to share information, support, and resources with others who understand.

**Our Next Meeting will be THURSDAY, 01/14/2016.**

(Second Thursday of each month, 1:00pm – 3:00pm at Chippewa Valley Bible Church,  
531 E. South Ave. Chippewa Falls, WI 54729)

*~ Nov-Dec 2015 ~*

*This past year, we were so fortunate to have a variety of wonderful speakers present at many of our support group meetings: Ms. Amundson & Mr. Scheider, Aging & Disability Resource Center of Chippewa Falls; Shelley-Rai Pehler, UWEC, department of nursing; Amy & Jane, from the Healing Place; Gina Severson, Health Care Services Coordinator Muscular Dystrophy Association/ALS; Diane Fergot, CSW, Care Services Coordinator for the Wisconsin Chapter. We THANK YOU for sharing your time and talents with our group!*

*Our last two meetings of 2015, we took some quiet time for group members to reconnect. It was a time for old and new friends to gather sharing personal stories and experiences about*

*ALS of course but more about sharing in each other's good company. We talked books, movies, vacations, and family traditions. We shared good memories and a few challenging ones too! It's been a privilege to be a part of your lives. THANK YOU for sharing your precious time with others!*

*This month we would like to share a special feature.*

***Michele Briggs** is well known in our ALS Community as the main caregiver for her husband, Bill Briggs. Bill was diagnosed with ALS many years ago and is one of few who continue to live with a very slow progression of ALS. Michele has been by his side throughout; however, earlier this year Michele had been diagnosed with cancer and finds herself battling for her own life while allowing others to care for her. Here's her story...*



**'What a bad dream!' By Todd Beckmann Sentinel**

TRADE LAKE—January 5, 2015 is a day Michele Briggs will never forget — it was the day her doctor told her that she had Stage 4 cancer —incurable but treatable. “My doctor said, “The cancer has metastasized — it is not just in your breast, it's in your spine, your pelvis, there are a couple of spots on your lungs and a couple spots on your liver,”” Briggs explained She was in the doctor's office to hear the results of a bone scan. “The doctor told me she thought she grabbed the wrong chart — she looked at the results and thought no way did those results match up with this

patient,” Briggs continued. She was incredulous. “How can this be?” she remembered wondering. “I have no pain.” She was adamant in her denial. “I’ve had clear mammograms for eight years and now I’m looking at Stage 4 cancer — it scared the daylight out of me,” Briggs said. No doubt it was a turning point in her life. “I call that day my day from hell — we were at the clinic for more than 12 hours,” she stated. A CT scan ruled out that the cancer had spread to her lungs and her brain. “What a bad dream,” she said to herself when she woke up the next morning. But it wasn’t a dream — it was her new “normal.” “I call that day a curse as well as a blessing — if she hadn’t done the blood work which led to the bone scan, who knows what would have happened,” Briggs reasoned. An oncologist put her at ease. “Yes, it’s cancer but it’s treatable,” Briggs said the doctor told her. Fortunately for Briggs, the Food and Drug Administration had just approved a new medication for her type of cancer a month before she was diagnosed. She takes the med every day for three weeks and then takes a week off the drug — and so far, it seems to be working. “The latest scan showed the spots on my liver had healed a lot, the mass in my breast shrunk quite a bit and the lesions on my spine and pelvis had healed over,” Briggs noted. “The goal is to get as much mileage out of a treatment as possible and when the cancer becomes resistant to that treatment, they have to tweak it somehow.” Her next scan is in November. Blood clots in the lungs, pulmonary embolisms in the legs, neuropathy and a lowered white blood cell count (compromises the immune system) are a few of the side effects of the drug. “I’ve had a little neuropathy (tingling in the fingers) and my white blood cell count has dropped a little but I’m still on the highest dose,” Briggs explained. “But I have my blood work done every month and the doctors keep a pretty close eye on it and would change my dose were my numbers to plummet.” Her cancer, a slow-growing cancer, is called metastatic, so she is deemed a lifer. “Through treatment, we ‘lifers’ are maintaining and trying to stay one step ahead of the beast,” Briggs pointed out. It was a routine doctor appointment last December which started the whole ball rolling. “During a routine exam, my doctor found a mass,” Briggs recalled. To say she was stunned would be an understatement. “I had been having yearly mammograms since I was 40 and it never showed up,” she added. “All the tests had been clear.” So an ultrasound and a mammogram were scheduled to determine what the mass was. In the meantime, the Briggs family tried to celebrate the holiday season. “It was a good distraction for me but I was so nervous and scared I couldn’t really enjoy it,” Briggs remarked. “The ultrasound ruled out the possibility of it being a cyst, so they scheduled a needle biopsy to identify what it was — and that appointment was right after New Years.” But the wait was killing her. “I wouldn’t wish the wait on my worst

enemy,” she pointed out. But as it turns out, the wait was better than the answer Briggs got. “My doctor told me it was cancer — once you hear that word, everything else just kind of goes blank,” she said. After sharing the news with family members and shedding more than a few tears, it was on to battling the cancer. “I met with the breast surgeon and originally we were looking at a lumpectomy with six weeks of radiation,” Briggs reported. “I said ‘Okay, I can handle this.’” They did some routine blood work that same day in preparation of the surgery and when she got home, the hospital had called. “Something was up with my blood work — one of my protein levels was off,” she described. “This protein is produced in the liver and in the bones so if something isn’t right, this level would be elevated.” That led to the bone scan which ended up determining the extent of her cancer. Her advice to other women is pretty common sense. “Get in there and have your mammograms,” Briggs said. “Don’t take anything for granted.” She admits family has been integral in Briggs’ battle. “We just had an influx of family that weekend I was diagnosed,” she recalled. “People brought food, gave support — I got a prayer necklace and every time I turned around I was on a new prayer chain.” She looks back on the past 11 months of her life from a new perspective. “It’s been a very humbling experience,” Briggs pointed out. “I’ve had so much love and support from people, it’s been amazing — some people never get to know how much they’re loved.” It has taught her to reassess how to look at life. “Not that I ever took a lot for granted — this experience has just taught me to be thankful for every day,” she concluded.

[http://www.presspubs.com/burnett/news/article\\_01235fb8-6de7-11e5-bdf4-eb69c62cf44e.html](http://www.presspubs.com/burnett/news/article_01235fb8-6de7-11e5-bdf4-eb69c62cf44e.html)

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*Peace, Love, and Joy to each of you!*

*Merry Christmas!*

*Deb Erickson, LPN*

*ALS Outreach Assistant*

[www.alsnwwi.org](http://www.alsnwwi.org)

**ALSNWWI Support Group** is a non-profit organization that has been operating in the Chippewa Valley since 1992, serving over 9 counties. Services include: Monthly support group meetings; Outreach support service for home visits; Local resources & referrals, Educational materials; Financial assistance for items not covered under Medicare or private insurance; Community advocacy. **Annual Walk & Wheel-A-**

Thon is held the second Sunday in June at the Northern Wisconsin State  
Fairgrounds in Chippewa Falls - Save the Date, June 12, 2016!

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*Questions, concerns, or input please contact:*

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