



Alicia Horne


For Alicia and her husband Bill, dairy farming is more than a shared passion, it's in their genes, with both coming from multi-generational farm families. However, in September 2024, that legacy would be challenged when - just two years shy of their wedding and four years into realizing their dream of running their own dairy farm – their life suddenly changed.

While Bill was going through the morning's chores, he suffered what they would soon confirm was a stroke. It was Alicia's quick thinking and action that may very well have saved Bill's life. Although he wasn't showing the common signs and symptoms typically associated with a stroke, Alicia recognized the subtle changes in Bill that prompted them to rush to the hospital. This would be a pivotal moment for Alicia and something that would drive her desire to share her experience in the hope of educating others on stroke awareness.

As the initial shock wore off and they began to confront the uncertainty of Bill's road to recovery, Alicia stepped into action. The work ethic and drive she learned growing up empowered her to care for Bill, manage the dairy farm and feed crops and continue her career. This was their dream and she knew she could do it. One of their first goals was to get Bill to his son's wedding, which was to take place shortly after his stroke. Two and a half weeks into his recovery, they turned this into a reality. Working together with the therapy team, they ensured both Bill and Alicia were comfortable in doing what they needed to do to attend.

Alicia attended as many physical therapy sessions as she could to learn the different exercises and how best to adapt for Bill's need. This is where Alicia's "out of the box" creativity and drive really shone through. She knew Bill was motivated to get back to the farm, and to get there, it was important that their care team understood this goal and the skills and activities required to successfully run the farm.

And so, Alicia created the "Dairy Man's Therapy Kit". She brought in show-and-tell items like parts of the milking equipment and tools so that the staff could feel the weight and understand the dexterity required to operate them. She also created videos by filming friends performing the various tasks so that staff could see the repetitive nature and what is required to tend the farm and milk a cow like the squatting, bending, lifting and reaching needed to move and use the equipment. Together with Bill's care team, they balanced these "farm tasks" with traditional exercises, even putting tape on the floor of Bill's room to mimic the gutters and other obstacles he would



typically encounter on the farm so he could practice stepping over them and making sure that his balance was strong.

In and out of the hospital, Alicia got creative – she became an expert thrifter, scouring local second-hand shops to find similar exercise equipment the staff was using so Bill could transition home and do his exercises. She was always thinking about the big picture – knowing where she and Bill wanted to be and figuring out the little steps that they needed to do to get there.

Naturally open and honest, Alicia found that sharing their journey helped her navigate her new world while also educating others. She used social media to document their journey to bring awareness to post-stroke recovery as well as caregiving. Alicia's posts were vulnerable. She never shied away from discussing the good days and bad, including the impacts on her mental health.

When stroke awareness month approached, she felt compelled to share their experience to help others recognize, spot and understand the symptoms – or lack of and the importance of taking quick action.

Together, Bill and Alicia have also advocated for several patient experience improvements, from presenting to their local hospital's Board of Directors, to advocating for updates to the guidelines for reinstating a driver's license after a medical event.

Bill's 50 days in hospital concluded with a "milking race", where the staff's new-found farm knowledge was put to the test and where Bill could show off his reclaimed skills. While everyone agrees Bill was the true champion that day, Bill and Alicia continue to celebrate the "wins" with each milestone achieved, like cutting the first steak, climbing the farm equipment again and even driving.

Meeting Alicia you can see she is a force and she's not done yet!

Alicia credits her family and broader farming community who came together and provided unwavering support for her, Bill and their farm.

Looking back on her approach to caregiving, Alicia shared that it was her father's role modeling, following her mother's illness that inspired her, telling us, "There were moments I felt overwhelmed, but I would come back to my dad's words: *I made a vow*. That grounded me. It reminded me why I was doing all of this. So, I would wipe my tears, tie my hair back, and keep going. At the end of the day, I am simply grateful that Bill is still here. I made a vow to stand by him, to support him and to walk this journey with him—and that is exactly what I will continue to do."

Today, Bill has made incredible progress, though he still lives with some lasting effects from his stroke. Alicia continues to work while managing the farm and supporting Bill's ongoing rehabilitation. She says, "though our lifestyle has changed and our routines may have shifted, our priorities have become clearer. We learned to share more, appreciate more and focus on what truly matters."