

by Ginny Gillen,
Executive Director

Unbelievably this February marked my 10th anniversary with NABIS. I cannot believe that 10 years have gone by! Over the years when people would ask me about my work as an Executive Director at NABIS, I have always used the analogy of a roller coaster ride. Some days would bring such joy and reward and then, as if to keep the universe in balance, there would be days when the obstacles seemed overwhelming. But roller coaster rides are thrilling and I can truly say that this is how I felt about my work.

On February 18th, 1998 I started working at NABIS as a Support Worker. It did not take me long to realize that first and foremost I would become an advocate in my role. There seemed to be very little understanding of what brain injury was and what kinds of support were necessary. I also discovered that NABIS and organizations like ours in the rest of the province were the primary support for people with brain injury and at that time there were only 5 of us! Obviously things needed to change.

In July of 2000 I became the Executive Director of NABIS and again I found my role to be primarily one of advocate. This time however, it was at a level where I was working with people who could make decisions (and fund them), that would increase the support available to our community. Following on the hard work of previous Executive Directors and Board members as well as committed professionals from the community, I was fortunate to be in this position at a time when government funding through the Alberta Brain Injury Initiative, was made available. The gifted and supportive staff at NABIS worked with me to make sure that NABIS received a government contract and positioned itself to expand our much needed services. Sometimes it has been a bal-



Ginny at the 2003 AGM, NABIS' 20th Anniversary.

ancing act to remain true to our role as advocates while at the same time being primarily funded by government. But my opinion is that NABIS is here to serve both the brain injury community and government in that we need to be the conduit of information about the needs and issues facing individuals and families affected by brain injury, to our politicians. If they don't hear from us, how can they support us!

The Alberta Brain Injury Initiative has definitely made a difference – Service Coordination, Supports for Community Living, Provincial Conferences, the Networks Activity Centre, to name a few. However the work is by no means finished and this means that NABIS as an advocacy society must work hard to see that programs and services for individuals and families affected by brain injury, continue to evolve. It is absolutely essential that we have your voice. Join NABIS as a member for a start and champion the organization to your MLA. These actions on your part will be very effective!

This year, my tenth with NABIS, I have decided to get off this roller coaster and take up another ride. I have resigned my position to take up new challenges. One cannot work somewhere without taking some level of ownership for that organization and I must admit to having done so with NABIS. It is so difficult then to be saying goodbye to individuals and families affected by brain injury, my fellow colleagues, community partners and the many funders I have interacted with over the years. I have had the privilege of doing meaningful work and enjoyed it so much. My thanks to all of you and I hope our paths will cross in the future. **Take good care of NABIS!**



Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin, Keynote Speaker and Ginny Gillen at the NABIS Breakfast 2004

Ginny Gillen