

“Don’t let this THIEF called Alzheimer’s rob any more families of their loved ones.”

Carrie Zelazoski, Antigo, WI

Alzheimer’s disease has had a widespread impact on Carrie Zelazoski’s family. On her father’s side, her father, aunts, uncles, grandfather, a nephew and a cousin battled Alzheimer’s disease. “My family has been hit hard by this terrible THIEF named Alzheimer’s,” said Carrie. She has become active in the Alzheimer’s Association Wisconsin Chapter over the years, participating in Advocacy initiatives to raise awareness for research and the Walk to End Alzheimer’s in Antigo.

Watching a Father’s Decline

Carrie’s father, Ben, was an active farmer in Northern Wisconsin. One of the tragedies of Alzheimer’s is that his body did not fail him, his mind did. He was strong, friendly and handy at fixing things. He was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s at age 77 and fought for over a decade before losing his battle in 2011. “Alzheimer’s stole all of his joy,” Carrie shared. “It stole my children’s ability to know their grandfather.”

He was very active and wandering was a concern, so he was moved to a care facility. “Dad was very strong and loved to keep “farming” at his care facility,” said Carrie. “He would stack furniture, similar to his days of stacking hay bales; he was under his bed to fix his combine; he dismantled a toilet with no tools.” It was a challenge for the staff, and his family had to switch him to multiple facilities over the years. “Finding a new facility was not always an easy task,” Carrie shared. “My sisters and I wanted to have him somewhere where one of us could visit him daily.”

Carrie and her sisters were dedicated to their father. “You would have moments of recognition – he would look right at you and for a fraction of a moment, you knew he knew you, and you were important,” shared Carrie. “You have to live for that moment. You live for your parent, not a victim of a disease.”

Participation in Research

“When we found out about a family history research initiative for families impacted by Alzheimer’s, we were all eager to participate,” said Carrie. “We are trying to help our children.” Her family has been engaged in the Wisconsin Registry for Alzheimer’s Prevention (WRAP) study for over a decade. WRAP, coordinated by The Wisconsin Alzheimer’s Institute (WAI) is the largest family history study of Alzheimer’s disease in the world. Participants visit every two years to answer questions about lifestyle factors such as diet, fitness and stress; have vital signs measured and participate in cognitive testing. The Alzheimer’s Association Wisconsin Chapter is a community partner to the WAI and proudly supports this critical research initiative.

Carrie and her 2 sisters participate, along with two spouses and several other family members. “We want to make a difference for ourselves, our children and their children,” Carrie shared. “Research is the only way we will find answers to put this THIEF in jail. It steals from our time with each other, memories and family history.”

Recognizing Service

Carrie is the recipient of the Alzheimer’s Association Special Service Award given to her at the Wisconsin State Conference. She led a quilt fundraising project involving the Antigo community. They created quilts that would be given to individuals with dementia in memory care facilities in the community.

