

Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month

A SALUTE TO A MILWAUKEE CAREGIVER

Your Life Changes

During Alzheimer's and Brain Awareness Month, we salute the more than 191,000 caregivers taking care of a loved one with dementia. Johnna McGee, Milwaukee, is a caregiver for two special people on this difficult journey. Her 95-year old mother and nearly 40-year old daughter are living with dementia. "When their lives began to change, my life began to change," Johnna said.

Her daughter, Rhonda, has Down Syndrome, but previously was able to live alone and had a job. But when her daughter started hearing voices, she moved back in with Johnna for support. Individuals affected by Down Syndrome have a greatly increased risk of developing a type of dementia and after meeting with a doctor, they believe the voices are an early sign of dementia for Rhonda.

Johnna's mother has lived with her for over 20 years, but was diagnosed with dementia in recent years. "My mom's mind is sharp, but she forgets we have conversations and to take her medications." Johnna said. "My life is surrounded by them now. I want to make sure they are taken care of, so my time is their time at this point in our lives."

Johnna is still working, but plans to retire early to focus on her family. She is able to work from home three weeks out of the month and her family helps when she works off-site.

Joy of Caregiving

"Taking care of them is a joy for me," Johnna said. "It's a journey and every day is different. But I'm lucky to have a 95-year-old mother and a daughter with Down Syndrome who will soon be 40. At this point they have more needs than I do and I'm happy to take care of them."

"I would encourage other caregivers to take time for themselves," Johnna said. "It's hard to do, but you shouldn't feel guilty that you aren't doing enough. Have a little confidence in yourself and know that you're doing all you can."



Vera Roeana and Johnna McGee



Vera Roeana McGee surrounded by her grandchildren, including Rhonda (center with blue sweater).

Johnna attended the Alzheimer's Association Caregiver Event in 2022 that was focused on self-care strategies and available resources for families.

The Alzheimer's Association Wisconsin Chapter provides free education programs and support groups, and connects families to resources in their local community. They also offer a 24/7 Helpline at 800.272.3900 and online information at www.alz.org to support caregivers' day or night.