

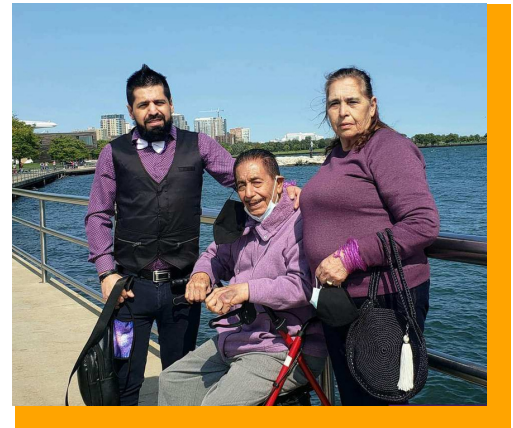
National Family Caregiver M O N T H

**Honoring
Luis Gonzalez
Caregiver, Milwaukee**

The challenges of being a caregiver are great for thousands of families across Wisconsin. We salute caregivers like Luis Gonzalez, Milwaukee, who is caring for his father who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's three years ago.

Recognizing the Signs

Luis' parents lived in Mexico and when they visited Luis, he noticed several signs that were very unlike his father, including losing time. His father, Eduardo, had suffered a stroke eight years earlier and had to relearn many things, so the family attributed changing behaviors to his stroke. Luis encouraged his dad to visit a doctor and he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's.



Luis is single, so his parents moved to Milwaukee so he could help with their care. After his diagnosis, his father continued to decline – losing speech, hallucinating, wandering and sleeplessness. Luis quickly took over caregiving duties including taking his father to all doctor's appointments and managing his medications.

Educating the Family

Initially, the family was in denial and didn't want to accept Eduardo's diagnosis. Luis wanted to learn more about dementia, in order to be a better caregiver. "I joined a workshop offered by the Alzheimer's Association so I could help my family understand the disease," Luis said. "I learned about symptoms and how to care for someone with dementia. I also met Virginia Zerpa, Community Outreach Coordinator for the Hispanic Community at the Alzheimer's Association and she shared many resources with me and conducted a Care Consultation with us."

Luis encouraged his whole family to get involved and he brought his two brothers, mom and sister-in-law to the Cuidando con Respeto class offered by the Alzheimer's Association at the United Community Center. "I wanted everyone to understand the disease," Luis said.

"My dad's behavior is what my family struggled with the most," Luis said. "I tried to reinforce that we shouldn't correct him or argue with him, but we just had to go with it. So, if he asks where his sister is, who has passed away, don't correct him, but just ask him where she normally goes during the week. Reasoning doesn't matter anymore and you have to see everything with love and compassion. If you argue with him, he'll feel bad and like no one is on his side. One analogy I use to explain how my dad feels is to imagine that you're at a party and you don't know anyone. You would probably want to leave. This is how dad feels every day."

"I love taking care of my dad," Luis said. "I want him to feel good about himself and even little things like complimenting his shirt or saying his cologne smells good, brings a smile to his face." Thank you Luis for all the things you do as a caregiver today and every day.



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