

Saluting the Caregiver's Journey

A SPECIAL BLACK HISTORY MONTH TRIBUTE

During Black History Month the Alzheimer's Association would like to celebrate those in the African American community who have traveled the long journey brought on by Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. You are all heroes. Dementia is a very real issue in our community. As the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Director at the Alzheimer's Association's Wisconsin Chapter, my job is to spread the word about all the free care and support services that are available. I've met so many folks who are caring for their loved one with dementia. I wanted to share the story of someone I connected with a few months ago. Her name is Tracey McNeely and she is caring for her mother, Ruth, who is 103 years old. Ruth was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2021 and Tracey is now her 24/7 caregiver. Here is Tracey's story in her own words.

"How did I know something was wrong? Mom started asking me how's Clinton or how's Thomas. She had eleven siblings, eight are gone. It took me by surprise because they've passed. I talked to our doctor at one of the visits and a test was recommended. The test revealed she had Alzheimer's.

Mom remembers her childhood, the years before she got into the 100's, and activities she loved in the past. Last week, she asked about her bowling ball. She was an avid bowler, bowling all over the country and Canada.

She was also an expert cook. She had a cake and a pie business, catered for weddings, and has her own cookbook - Ruth's E-Z Cooking, An Autobiographical Cookbook, Recipes from the Heart - Food for the Soul - that sold in the US and Europe. She is famous for her homemade rolls, and one of her great nieces called, and asked about the recipe, and she remembered it! She doesn't remember recent things.



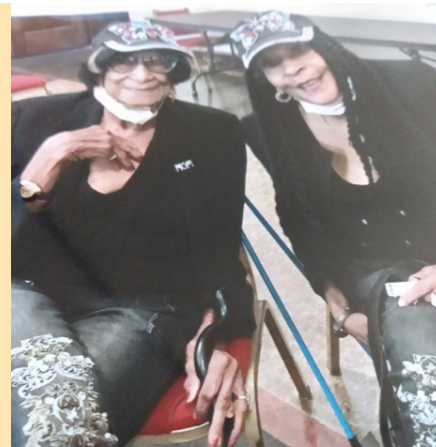
I'm very lucky. Mom is very easy to care for and says thank you for everything you do for her. My mom and I attend St. Matthew CME Church, Milwaukee, WI where I am a missionary, Rev. Dr. R.D. Shaw, Pastor. In the beginning I was often impatient, because I didn't know what was going on. I learned that you have to be patient and you have to be kind.

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My life is my mother. Sometimes I'm so tired I can't see straight. I do it all. If you're like me and do everything, you have to take breaks. Meals on Wheels helps, because I can do housework and not have to worry about preparing a midday meal.

It is a privilege to care for her, because no matter what the circumstances were, she always supported me. That's God's purpose for me."



The Alzheimer's Association salutes Tracey McNeely, as a caregiver and an accomplished black woman. This educator taught at Riverside Univ. H.S. in Milwaukee from 1984-1991, was elected co-chair of the English department, and served as yearbook advisor and cheerleading coach. In 1991, she moved to Flint Michigan where she took a job with the Detroit Public Schools. She retired from Detroit Public Schools in 2008, where she also served as alternate rep, Detroit Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, DSA H.S.



About the Author: Diane Milner is the Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the Alzheimer's Association Wisconsin Chapter.