

National Family Caregiver Month

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Jim Adams, Community Educator, Support Group Co-Facilitator, Chetek, WI

Importance of Family Caregiver Month

For National Family Caregiver Month, we celebrate the role of caregivers in Wisconsin. Jim is very familiar with the importance of a caregiver. He was the primary caregiver for his wife Diane, before she lost her battle with Lewy Body Dementia in 2014.

"This month is so important so you know that you're not alone," said Jim. "There are so many people out there dealing with similar types of caregiving. It's such an important role and it's important to take care of yourself, so you can be a *better* caregiver."

A Caregiving Book is Born

Jim is the author of the book, *Other Me's*, which is a personal account of how his family dealt with the effects of Lewy Body Dementia with Parkinson's Disease during the last two years of his wife Diane's life. The book uses reflective daily journals and memory care facility notes to chronicle the progression of Diane's physical and mental symptoms. "I needed to turn something bad into something good," says Jim. "I was a high school teacher for 24 years and I knew, that from my experience, other people could learn. I took a horrible thing and made something good come out of it. Life does go on and you can do some good things after the illnesses. All the trials can be turned into something to help others."



Giving Back

Jim has been volunteering as a Community Educator and Support Group Co-Facilitator for several years for the Alzheimer's Association. He is also actively involved volunteering with the Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC).

As a Community Educator, Jim teaches classes on key topics including: 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer's and Effective Communication Strategies. "When you go to talk to people about dementia, and they know that you've been through it, it's reassuring to them," said Jim. "I can answer a lot of their questions and I know that I'm helping someone."

Caregiving During COVID-19

As a Support Group Co-Facilitator, Jim shared how COVID-19 has been devastating for many families. “For a caregiver, not being able to see a loved one in a facility has been tough,” Jim shares. “Also, for those caregivers at home with a loved one, the social isolation is difficult. In the past, you’d be able to go out and meet with neighbors or go to a restaurant and see people, and now that’s gone.”

“The transition to virtual delivery of education programs has been a challenge, as some caregivers struggle with technology,” Jim shared. “But even if I have a few on the phone and a few on Zoom, the sharing that goes on is still the same. The ability for people who are on the same journey to share ideas with each other is invaluable.”