

National Family Caregiver M O N T H

**Honoring
Jane Enkers
Caregiver, Wausau**

During National Family Caregiver Month, we salute caregivers, like Jane. Jane and her family have been caring for her father, Joseph, since he was diagnosed with dementia three years ago. Joseph is a veteran, having served in Okinawa, Japan for two years. "In the early stages we noticed dad's memory slipping," Jane said. "He has declined significantly since his diagnosis and it has been a difficult journey for the whole family, as we rally to meet his caregiving needs. All of our lives changed with dad's diagnosis, and it's important for caregivers to mentally prepare for this. There is a shift families have to make to put your loved one's priorities first and I was fortunate to have a good family network to make this happen."

The Family Meeting

Jane was fortunate that her sibling and her father's girlfriend were all committed to keeping him at home as long as they could. In order to make that successful, the family relied heavily on regular family meetings and open communication. "Initially, we set up an a.m. and p.m. schedule," Jane shared. "It was difficult, but we managed for a few years, having regular family meetings to regroup. It was imperative that we were all on the same page with any changes." The COVID pandemic and balancing work schedules were the biggest challenges for the family. A successful strategy the family used was identifying a different sibling to be the point person for key areas, including: health/medicine, finances and house maintenance.

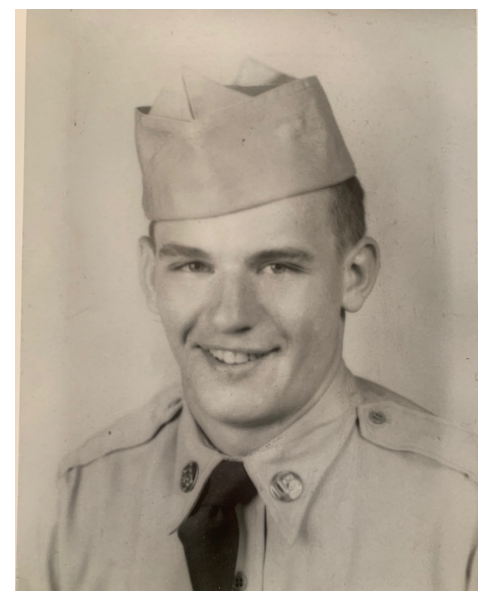
Recognizing Evolving Needs

"While we managed for several years at home, we reached a point where we were unable to care for dad ourselves," Jane said. "Ultimately, hygiene and safety were the primary drivers for us to look for outside resources. While we explored many in-home options, ultimately it was in dad's best interest to transition to a facility in Stevens Point."

"Once we decided we needed to move dad somewhere, we shifted into research mode," Jane said. "There are many types of facilities, and we wanted to do our homework so we could ask educated questions. We visited seven to eight locations before we made our decision."

"Even now that dad is in a facility, someone from the family is there almost daily," Jane said. "The staff do a good job, but we are still active caregivers and want to be involved. My advice to those with a loved one in a facility is that you have to be patient with the transition. It was a shock for all of us to adapt to a new environment."

Jane is an advocate of creating awareness of resources to support families on this journey. She represented the Yellow Flower, for caregivers, at the 2021 Walk to End Alzheimer's Stevens Point.



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