

National Family Caregiver Month *“Try your best to be present and not perfect.”*

Kristin Schmitt, Franklin, WI

For National Family Caregiver Month, we salute caregivers like Kristin, who help support a loved one on a journey with Alzheimer's. Kristin helps support her grandmother, Donna, since she was diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's in 2019. Kristin and her husband also have a 3 and 4-year old son, so she is considered a “sandwich generation” caregiver. Over 25% of all caregiver's fall in this category, meaning they care for an older adult and children under the age of 18.

Two Peas in a Pod

“My grandma and I have always been like two peas in a pod,” Kristin shared. “She taught me so much and helped raise me. She is amazing at crafts (formerly selling items at craft shows), gardening, baking – you name it. We are extremely close.”

The family realized something was going on long before Donna's diagnosis. They knew something was different, but it took some coaxing to get her to go in for the physical evaluation where she was officially diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

Taking a Different Path

Kristin has a Master's Degree in Social Work and was working as a social worker, as her young family was planning for their future. Kristin had planned to pursue medical school and had completed core courses and the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) in preparation for applying out-of-state.

Then her family received the news of her grandmother's diagnosis and everything changed. “It was the hard decision, but an easy one,” said Kristin. “I'm honored to be able to make the decision and be here with her.”

Since her grandmother's diagnosis, Kristin and her husband have helped her grandparents move from their home to a condo. She also helps with appointments and meal preparation for her grandparents.

A Business Is Born

“I knew I needed to financially contribute to my family and also have flexibility to help my grandma,” said Kristin. “But I also wanted to do something with purpose.”

That's when INIK was born and Kristin decided to start her own business. INIK (meaning "unique" in Haitian Creole) is a hand-made soap and bath items store. “I feel like the influence of my grandma took hold,” said Kristin. “My business is intertwined with my grandma and a portion of every sale is donated to the Alzheimer's Association.” Her grandmother even assists on a few items like curling ribbons and stickers for items.



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“Long-term, my goal is to have a retail space and have a classroom area where those living with dementia and their caregivers can come and make things,” shared Kristin.

Advice to Caregivers

As we honor National Family Caregiver Month, Kristin shared advice with other families on a similar journey. “Try your best to be present and not perfect,” Kristin said. “As a caregiver, there are so many emotions – fear, pain, anger – and sometimes you can lose patience. I know when my patience is tested, that I’m trying to be perfect, but really just my presence makes the biggest difference.”

