

A Salute to Caregivers

Pearl Cannon, Caregiver and Volunteer, Milwaukee

Full-Mission Volunteer

Pearl has been involved with the Alzheimer's Association for nearly two decades. She first became connected when her mother, whom she was a caregiver for, lost her battle with Alzheimer's disease. She began volunteering and over the years served as a Support Group Leader, helped with education and workshops, led a Walk to End Alzheimer's® team and served two terms on the Board of Directors.

"After I started volunteering, I was encouraged to start a support group," Pearl shared. "I thought to myself, that maybe I can do this. I learned so much about the needs of caregivers and how to approach people. Being a caregiver myself, it was easy for me to talk with people because I was on the same avenue as they were." The Support Group was held at her place of worship, Brentwood Church.



Meet them "Where They Are"

Pearl's husband Charles was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2008. She was his primary caregiver until he lost his battle in 2020 at the age of 89. "I tried to meet Charles where he was," Pearl shared. "While many things, like giving up driving, were difficult for him, I told him not to look at it like giving up, but being safe. It's very challenging, but you have to understand that they're still a person inside. I didn't want him to feel like he was a burden in any way."

Pearl described trying to go where Charles was in his mind and not question it. They found joy in the simple things. They would go to the McDonalds drive through and sit under a tree and share a meal together.



They also got great joy from their involvement in the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute's Amazing Grace Chorus (www.wai.wisc.edu/chorus). "The Choir was an amazing gift for us," Pearl shared. "Programs like this help with quality of life." The Choir is composed of those living with dementia and their caregiver.

The couple also loved to travel and participated in "Celebrated Seniors," which was a program at Brentwood Church. They would take road trips to other states and meet other seniors.

Breaking Down Stigmas

“A big piece of advice I have is to get comfortable talking about dementia,” Pearl said. “You can help your loved one better if you are open to talking about it. There is some awareness in the Black community, but a lot of apprehension. Families may still say their loved one just can’t remember or are a little crazy. But understanding more about dementia will help on the journey.” African Americans are twice as likely as Whites to develop Alzheimer’s disease.

Seek Out Resources to Navigate the Journey

“As soon as you’re diagnosed, contact the Alzheimer’s Association,” Pearl suggested. “Many people are very overwhelmed by dementia and don’t have a lot of tolerance. It was helpful to me to find out everything I could, so I knew what to expect. There are many services, resources and support out there, if you take advantage of them. Knowing my options gave me a plan, so that I could make our home workable for Charles to stay with me.”

“My faith keeps me strong,” Pearl said. We salute Pearl and her dedication to increasing awareness for Alzheimer’s and dementia in her community.

