

## April 2023 Care giver of the month: Jennifer Weaver

Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services



A fit and athletic man, Johnny Weaver was diagnosed 6 years ago with Early Onset Alzheimer's Disease. His wife Jennifer is his primary caregiver, making herself available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to dress, toilet, shower and feed him. While he can still walk, he is much slower and "stiffer".

Together they still celebrate holidays, birthdays, and other events although Jennifer is not sure Johnny understands much of what is being celebrated. He gets ice cream each time which has always been his way of celebrating...even prior to the disease.

Born and raised at Lake of the Ozarks, Jennifer is a registered nurse who worked in labor and delivery for 30 years. Once Johnny was diagnosed, she made the decision to leave nursing so she could care for him rather than placing him in a care facility.

Her favorite memories are those times Johnny coached their 3 sons in every sport they played. When the boys were in school and played on the school teams, they were at every game. As proud parents, they never missed a musical performance, piano competition or theater performance that their youngest son participated in. How Johnny loved his boys!

Two afternoons per week Jennifer leaves Johnny in the care of a secondary caregiver so she can do the shopping and attend to her own doctor visits, hair appointments, etc. She is grateful for the additional help and cherishes those two days!

While Jennifer doesn't have much free time, she enjoys photography. "I do love photography and working on my old photos." she says. She is also working to rid her home of the 'treasures' she has collected through the years. Jennifer says, "I am in the process of "decluttering" our home. I spent our entire life collecting things only to spend these last few years getting rid of them!"

When asked what advice she would give other caregivers, Jennifer said, "Keep your connections to the outside world. This is difficult to do. I have not done very well at this. Remember that you need help. I

tried to do this alone for four years and getting part time help saved my sanity. And, finally, remember that your loved one is still here. We don't know how much they understand but I don't want any regrets of him not knowing how much he is loved."

Through being a caregiver, Jennifer has learned patience, although it wanes at times, as well as more compassion. "I never had it because I never knew." says Jennifer. "I wish I could have prepared for the long haul. Pick your physician for the long haul! Pick a doctor that you can pick up the phone and speak to....you're going to need them."

Jennifer attends a support group for other caregivers where they share stories, cry together and give support that others cannot possibly understand. "I truly wish for a cure for this awful disease of Alzheimer's."