

Alzheimer's Association Listenline

Liz Hernandez - Transcript

Glynn Washington: Our guest on the Alzheimer's Association Listenline is Liz Hernandez, and Liz grew up not too far from LA in Riverside, California.

Liz Hernandez: I grew up in a very loving household where my parents in Spanish we would say "cariñosa", my mother was very "cariñosa", she was very loving, very caring with her words. She raised us to wear our emotions out in the open and my father was the same way. So, I was grateful because I grew up with parents who were very powerful with their words.

Glynn: So of course, Liz landed a gig in radio went on to MTV and in 2014 she joined access Hollywood. It was a proud moment for the family, but something felt off.

Liz: When I was hired at access Hollywood I was only there about a month when I found out my mom was diagnosed, and we were really blindsided because we had no education when it came to the warning signs of dementia or Alzheimer's. I look back and I just think oh my gosh I didn't think it happened to Latino families.

Glynn: Like a lot of people, Liz started seeing signs that something was different with her mom, but she didn't know exactly what was going on.

Liz: It started with phone calls from my father, my dad would call me and said there's something going on with your mom. He says she's losing her car keys every day. He'd find them in the refrigerator, or you know hidden in one of the pans and because you don't know the warning signs you just chalk it up to, I don't know maybe my mom's just being bizarre maybe she's stressed. You know you just rack your brain for everything except for the obvious if you knew the warning signs. And so one day she calls me, and she said to me "Elizabeth, do you know how I get to-" and my sister's Olivia "-how I get to Olivia's house?" And then that's when I knew I just my heart sunk and I called my sister right away and said we need to sit down, we need to have an intervention.

Glynn: The first time you have the conversation about Alzheimer's it can seem imposing. There are so many questions but it's also one of the most empowering things you can do.

Liz: So it was very much a relief for me to be able to sit down with me my sister and two of her sisters and of course my mom she was really great at being clever through it which really broke my heart because I wish she would have said hey this is what's going on with me I'm forgetting things but instead she said "I'm just stressed I need a vacation I think I just need to get away." And for a little while we kind of bought it because again we knew nothing, so uneducated about dementia and Alzheimer's, and so we let her go on a vacation and it just snowballed from there and that's really where it started, and we got her a proper diagnosis.

Glynn: And the earlier you get a diagnosis of Alzheimer's the better off it is. Because it's possible to make plans to discuss the future and to talk in an open way.

Liz: Being able to have a clear conversation where she's understanding what's happening and eliminating a lot of that fear and asking her what her wishes are, how would she like things to move forward.

Glynn: Liz knew that she had to make decisions on her mom's behalf, but she wanted to make sure that her mom's voice was heard.

Liz: I would always ask her, "mom do you know what's going on?". She would have these moments of clarity where I would have beautiful conversations with her about what she needed and what she wanted.

Glynn: And even though they were not able to talk as they used to, her mom still found a way to give in the last word.

Liz: You know one thing about my mom was she was very wise and very powerful with her words. And so she would leave love notes for me all around the house. She would put it on post-its, she would put it on moving boxes she would write me letters and that to me is obviously my treasure chest now. Like, I, it's going to make me so sensitive, but my mom probably has 5% of her language now and those words are all around my house in frames and it's so powerful to actually be able to look up and hear her voice or read her words. Because unfortunately with this disease that's what it takes from them is their voice. In those moments where I feel like she connects with me and she looks at me and says I love you, there's nothing more special.

Glynn: That's Liz Hernandez on the power of words and the importance of having a conversation in dealing with Alzheimer's. To hear more stories, we now return you to the Alzheimer's Association Listenline menu.