

Solving a Diagnostic Puzzle Improves Quality of Life

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Her eyes sparkle and she flashes a flirtatious smile as a volunteer guides her across the dance floor. Watching Adriana Trevino swing her hips to Mexican music at an adult day care program, it is hard to believe that a few months ago the petite 93-year-old in a spotted pink dress stared blankly at the world and dissolved into frequent, inexplicable bouts of tears. . . .

. . . Earlier this year, a neighbor introduced Trevino's family to the California Alzheimer's disease program [USC-Los Angeles CADC], which runs 10 centers throughout the state offering treatment, support, research and education services to patients and their caregivers. Trevino's son, Jesse, says the specialists he met there gave him back his mother. "Now she is the life of the party," said Jesse Trevino, who at 56 has become his mother's primary caregiver and manages her Boyle Heights boardinghouse. "Put on some mariachi music, and she will kick it."

. . . For Adriana Trevino, the first signs were small memory lapses, nothing alarming for a woman then in her 80s. She would finish eating and announce it was time for lunch. Once she forgot she had already taken her pills and swallowed another handful.

Then the symptoms got worse. The woman who had kept friends in stitches with her sly asides was always in tears. She forgot how to wash and dress herself, became incontinent and lost her balance. The family doctor said she suffered from dementia and suggested a nursing home. But her son and daughter wouldn't hear of it. They tried medication. By January, their mother seemed like a zombie. She could no longer walk and was barely responsive.

In desperation, Jesse Trevino approached the Alzheimer's Disease Research and Clinical Center at USC [USC-Los Angeles CADC]. Dr. Lon Schneider, who heads the center, said general practitioners rarely have the time or expertise to do a thorough diagnosis. The center's specialists concluded that Adriana Trevino had been overmedicated with tranquilizers and recommended the Boyle Heights adult day care program to keep her active and stimulated. They also got her on a trial for a promising new Alzheimer's drug. Four months later, she is back on her feet, using a walker she refers to with a wry smile as her "Cadillac." She readies herself for day care at the International Institute of Los Angeles, where a guitar player strums in a sun-splashed courtyard and she can play her favorite game: picture bingo. She often refers to Monterrey, Mexico, where she grew up. Money was scarce, but her trim figure and sunny personality won her a job modeling clothes in store windows. The day she was married, she drove off with her husband to begin a new life in Los Angeles. He found work cleaning movie theaters and saved enough money to buy a rambling old house fronting Hollenbeck Park. . . .

- excerpts from an article published in the *Los Angeles Times* on June 5, 2009 written by Alexandra Zavis. The complete article can be read [here](#) [1].

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