

Preparing for an Intergenerational Celebration

by Olivia I. Nolan, Future PAC something, and her
mother Beth A. D. Nolan, Ph.D., PAC Research,
Grants, and Policy Lead, Mentor, and Speaker

Holidays are a favorite for many families, and ours is no different. My mom says that without time, planning, and lots of patience, they can also be stressful. So, when we planned Thanksgiving with grandpa, we decided that planning was our best weapon against stress and the best way to make a memory. Using Teepa's plan for making visits positive, we laid out our Thanksgiving dinner. The plan pretty much breaks down like this: pre-visit planning, then what to expect and try to do during the visit.

Pre-Visit Planning:

My mom, dad, and I started this three-days before Thanksgiving. We knew we wanted to plan for each thing: 1) the music to set the mood, 2) the food and smells, 3) where we wanted to have it, 4) and the activities!

Music - The first thing we did was set the mood. We used the free website Pandora.com to build a station and used his favorite group, The Kingston Trio, to build a playlist. Adding songs from Pat and Shirley Boone and Sam Cooke, we played this station during all our planning and cooking!

Food and Activities - My dad does the grocery shopping, but my mom is a list maker! We listed all the food that my grandpa and my dad had at their holidays and made sure we had the foods I liked, too. Every possible dish we could make two days before, we did! I learned that my grandpa did most of the grocery shopping and cooking when my dad was growing up. Knowing how he was chewing as an Amber GEMS® state, we used the Grind Dining™ method (grinddining.com) of preparing some of the food—just in case he wanted to pick up some of the food, rather than use a fork. We made tasty bites of mashed potatoes, stuffing, and turkey, even though he ended up enjoying the regular, cut up food.

Next, we found grandpa's old yearbooks and his yearbooks as a teacher. We marked all the pages with his picture. We did the same with a book of cars we found from the library and found all his old cars! I thought he'd find lots of words with all those pictures.

The Place - After all that cooking, music, and activity planning, we realized it was going to be a full day, and that was not even getting him back and forth from his place at the nursing home. My dad suggested that if we bring Thanksgiving to him, it might leave him with more energy to enjoy the day.

We thought we had it all together. For the pre-visit planning, Teepa suggests:

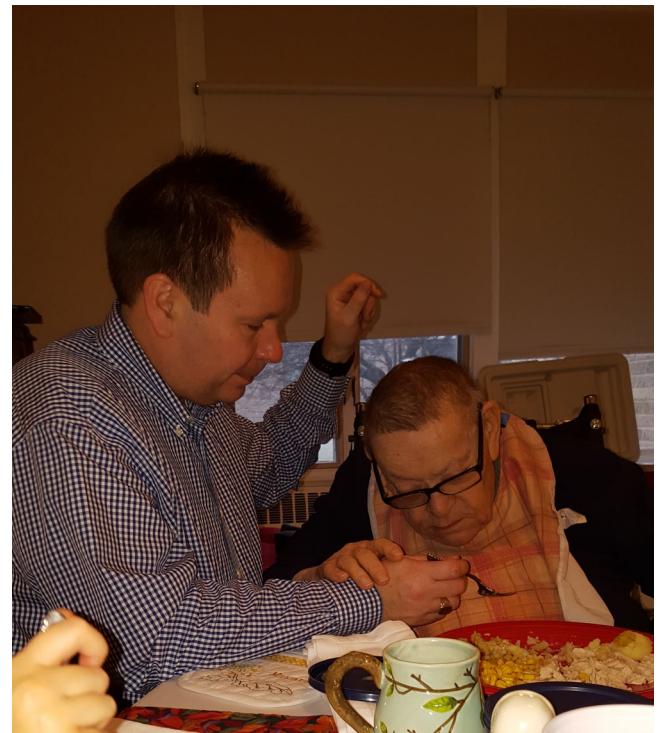
- Review possible music
- Gather the food, props, and history
- Think through activities
- Keep it simple!
- Breathe!!!

If we did have him come to our house, we would really want to be sure we tried to keep the extra noise down, have places for him to “get away” from all the activity, and make it possible for him to cook with us, like stirring the gravy!

During the Visit:

After we loaded up the meal, table decorations, books, and our small speaker, we all took a deep breath and got into our PAC-mode. For example, we talked about how we were going to approach using the Positive Physical Approach™. I knew that using our Positive Action Starters would be helpful, like breaking down tasks (“here’s your coffee, grandpa”), or giving him the choice (“Coffee or something else?”—even though I knew he’d pick coffee!), and even asking for his help (“Grandpa, could you help me turn the pages?”). It was all about taking a deep breath, letting the little stuff go (like when he ate the turkey with his fingers!), and just enjoying being together instead. He may have eaten the turkey differently, but he sure enjoyed every bite! And when he got to the pie, well, that was gone in a flash, even scraping the plate with his fork!

I hope everyone can let go of all the little stuff that might be said or things that surprise us. Instead, really look for everything we will actually want to remember many years from now. I think you can see for yourself if we enjoyed our day. Happy Thanksgiving and Happy Holidays.



*Olivia Nolan is 12 years old and is in seventh grade. For five years, she made moments great with her grandfather, who was living with dementia, and has watched just about every Teepa Snow video her mom plays! In addition to going with the flow for people living with dementia, she is also an expert on anything **Marvel Comics** and **Hamilton**, the musical.*