

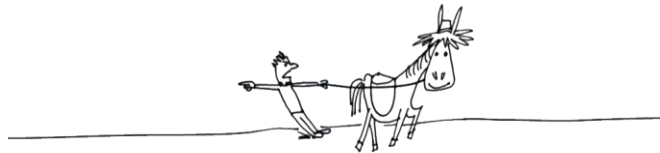
## Pause, Breathe, Smile

by Barbara Spahr, PAC Certified Independent Trainer

For 16 years, I was a care partner to my mother, through her protracted journey with frontotemporal lobe dementia, and I was downright dense. This was not apparent until after her death when I experienced the PAC Trainer program.

My mother was unhappy. Nine times I moved her from place to place trying to create an environment where she would be happy. From my home to a variety of independent and assisted living facilities, then a skilled nursing center, I then brought her home again for end of life care. I spent countless hours trying to entertain her and hoped against hope *she would “change” and be happy.* That sounds vague, and it felt vague, too.

I stubbornly dug in my heels and missed the part about not being able to alter the disease and its manifestations.



Here are my thoughts looking back. First, realize that you will be looking back on this one day.

Learn about dementia, the physiology of the brain changes, the progressive nature of the disease, and care-partnering techniques. Information will lead to awareness of the transitions to come.

Realize you need the critical skill of being able to pause, or time yourself out as Teepa teaches us, and breathe deeply. Really breathe. Practice regularly so that pausing and breathing become an automatic response to the many, inevitable challenging moments.

Be curious about what and why something is happening. Take a minute to think and listen to your own thoughts. Pause. Literally step back a bit and breathe. It lowers stress hormones and promotes a moment of silence which is invaluable when caring for a person living with dementia. Talking will probably not help and may make the situation worse. The simple act of staying connected in hand under hand, humming a favorite tune, and using a relaxed Positive Approach supportive stance diffuses tension.

Later, think about the situation, pause, and breathe while you are taking stock and practice a different approach. Smile. Feel the tension leave your face. Then let go of this episode! Let it go and let that be your mantra as you exhale long, slow breaths.

There are many transitions around, through, and around again during the journey of dementia. Consider them opportunities to practice and be transformed little by little.

It will allow you to think more clearly, not dwell on the past, put less pressure on yourself to achieve unrealistic results, and realize a measure of peace within the care partner role. For me, I have finally let go of regrets and carry a few lessons from my mom in my heart. She taught me to be quiet and pay attention to the sun and breeze on my skin and the bird song because, late in her journey, it was the only thing she noticed about being outside.