

How Tender Loving Care Can Impact Dementia

by Rosanne Burke, PAC Certified Independent Trainer

Last May, Karuna did something that many caregivers never do. She asked for help.

In a message to the teepasnow.com website, Karuna explained that her mother, Isabelle, had fallen eight times in the past six days and was admitted to the hospital. She went on to say that her mother has advanced vascular dementia. Fortunately, she was medically stable and would be returning to the private retirement facility where she had been living for the past year. Karuna and her family decided that the philosophy of care going forward would be to provide simple quality of life experiences, staying close, and doing very little. She asked, “Is there anything else you can suggest to me as a devoted and loving daughter?”

Karuna also sent along [this video](#) which is a precious moment of her and her mom singing a song that they always sing. When asked about the video and what she was feeling at the time, she said “It was just mom and I sharing a very special moment of love.”

Deb LeBlanc, a PAC trainer and consultant, phoned Karuna back immediately. During their first conversation, Deb learned about Isabelle’s Tenderness Team. When in the hospital, the geriatric doctor asked Karuna about the care plan for Isabelle’s discharge. Karuna said it was a no-brainer. She would arrange for someone to be with her mom 24 hours a day. About a year prior, Karuna had put out a call for help to family and friends to spend time with her mother. From there, the Tenderness Team was born and it would now be expanded. The primary criteria for being on the Tenderness Team was a willingness to provide Isabelle with loving kindness. Karuna explained that the team also grew out of a need to help care for herself. She knew she couldn’t stay present and have the stamina to be in this intimate dance of life and death without an extensive team.

Karuna’s focus for the past three months has been to put her other responsibilities aside so could spend all her time and focus energy on being with Isabelle. As a devoted, conscious daughter, she believes the experience of caring for her mom and her willingness to simply be present and to sit quietly with her, is profoundly healing. She said that the “experience I am having is a one-time deal and I only get one shot at this. These are moments to be savored.” As she goes through this experience, Karuna said she is reconciling the accumulating ambiguous loss by witnessing who she is as an individual beyond being her mother’s daughter. In many ways, she said she feels liberated from the mother-daughter relationship. She has a great yearning to tease out the tenderness in loneliness, and expand love as she abides alongside dementia. Karuna is learning how to move beyond the suffering and find peace in solitude.

When asked to describe Isabelle, Karuna described her as woman who gave of herself every day and gave to anyone in need. She tended to everyone, most of all her beloved husband Harold, whom she met in a retail glass shop in St. John’s, Newfoundland, and

her darlings (daughters and granddaughters). They moved to Sarnia where they made a life together until Harold passed away in 2009. Karuna said that Isabelle has a very playful spirit and has always been a kidder. Her smile “lights up my heart and all who see it!” For many years, she was an avid lawn bowler, and won many awards provincially and nationally.

Today, Isabelle is 86 years old and when asked how she is, Karuna replied that she is physically tired and weak. Some days, she sees glimpses of her mom when she opens her eyes and smiles. She is bright and ready to be social. Karuna said she sees a beautiful light in her mom that makes it easy to abide with her.

It was Karuna’s wish that the Tenderness Team receive the gift of Teepa’s training and techniques. On August 17th, her wish came true. Deb trained 12 members of the Tenderness Team with Isabelle also in attendance. Together, they learned and practiced PAC techniques, and how best to assist Isabelle. Deb said, “It was an honour to be able to be a small part of this mighty team who has come up with a unique way of supplementing the care provided for Isabelle.”

Teepa and the PAC team would like to thank Karuna for reaching out for help, and for being part of the shift in dementia care that needs to take place. If you are struggling, there are people who can help. Positive Approach to Care provides thirty minutes of free consultation and an online support series for you. Call (877) 877-1671 or [email](#).