

Moments On the Fly

by Greg Phelps, PAC Certified Independent Trainer
and Engagement Leader

Leisure, Productive, Self-care and Wellness – Restorative. What the heck is all this? My eyes grew a little wider. Introvert, extrovert - watchers, doers, talkers. What the heck have I gotten myself into? I thought all I had to do was gather guys up and head to the cafeteria for a piece of pie. And make mine lemon meringue. Yet here I was, signed up for my Engagement Leader Certification.

Welcome to Greg's world. My mother in law is a person living with dementia in a nearby facility. Being *semi*-retired, I was able to visit almost daily. It started innocently enough: helping serve the snacks and coffee, then engaging and spending time with other residents; all this while my wife was traveling the countryside with some "teapot" or something like that. Then the big ask: "How would you like to do a *men's group* on the Transitional Care Unit"? Pie and coffee! Sweet! I'm in!

Somewhere along the line I figured out it wasn't a teapot – but rather Teepa Snow and Positive Approach to Care. And a bit further along, I took my Trainer's Certification. Now I had just enough knowledge to realize that the pie I was eating was actually *humble pie*! I needed even more skills so I could make this work, not just for me, but for the men's group as well. So, certification number two followed.

My men's group will forever be a work in progress. I seldom have the same guys for more than a week or two as TCU is sort of a *staging* area where patients await residential placing. Each week, I go in the day before and find out how many people I will have the next day and try and learn a bit about each one. Resources are scarce, staff is busy – and often the residents are placed elsewhere before I show up the next day.

While some may find this volunteer opportunity frustrating, I love it – and I love my guys. Each week is an opportunity for a new connection. The guys are sometimes mad as hell and don't want to be there. Other times they are confused and I may be a brother or a long lost friend. But the skills I am constantly acquiring through PAC have given me a key to a world I didn't even know existed. Coffee time is coffee time; guys still like talking to guys. We can BS each other and be ourselves without the women folk hanging around. It is cars, dogs, tractors, jobs, kids – hopes, frustrations, and more. I encourage each of the guys to share whatever it is they want to talk about. In those moments it all comes together as I see the introverts and the extroverts. I see the watchers, the doers, and the talkers. I also get to practice my GEMS® and the practical knowledge they provide. It all starts with a *Positive Approach* and making a connection. We can then engage in meaningful activities which have a positive effect on a person living with dementia – if only for a moment.