

Barbara suspected something was askew with her husband Bob for about a year before was diagnosed with frontal lobe dementia in 2008. They had recently retired along the Front Range of Colorado and, as all young retirees from high tech jobs, planned on a rich retirement of travel and adventure. In his career as the vice-president of sales and marketing, Bob had travelled extensively around the world and had plans to revisit some of those places with his wife in the coming years.

Those plans were squashed with Bob's diagnosis. The disease progressed quickly and it was impossible for Barbara to care for her husband at home any longer. He was an avid hiker and would wander out of the house for his daily walks only to become confused and lost. Barbara spent several stressful afternoons searching the neighborhoods for Bob. The last time he wandered out of doors, he was eventually located at a busy intersection about 5 miles from their home. Barbara decided then that it would be best for Bob if he lived in an environment where his safety would be better preserved.

Barbara began searching for an appropriate living arrangement for Bob but the options were very limited. She eventually decided to move him to a dementia-specific assisted living home in Texas near her son.

The assisted living home was a good solution. Bob lived near family and the home was secure (meaning that Bob couldn't just wander out of doors without someone accompanying him). During the year that Bob lived in the Houston area, his disease continued to progress and his care needs became more intense. Bob's symptoms of his disease were classic: his actions were increasingly inappropriate, he lost his interpersonal skills (which had always been an attribute in his job), he showed a marked decline in his personal hygiene, seemed to lack awareness of thinking and had behavioral changes, and had lost his ability to communicate verbally.

He was not aware of his surroundings and his pacing/walking became more pronounced. He was constantly headed toward the door, which became a stressful experience for the staff at the assisted living home. His current living arrangement needed to change.

Barbara was fully aware of Bob's disease progression and was experiencing some anxiety of her own with respect to Bob and the kind of care he was now requiring.

Barbara had heard of Aspen House, a dementia-specific assisted living home in a town close to her home in Colorado. She made an initial inquiry and toured the community. She was certain that the staff at Aspen House would be able to meet Bob's needs but at the time, there was a wait list for an opening. Barbara continued to investigate other options for Bob's care and on the 10th day of her searching, at noon on Friday, December 28th, just 4 days before New Year's Day, she got the call that Aspen House had an opening. She immediately decided to take action to move Bob to Aspen House in Colorado.

Moving into a secure assisted living home in Colorado takes some effort. In most cases, the "move-in" process takes 2-3 days to conduct an assessment, get proper documentation from the family and to secure signed doctor's orders.

Aspen House had not yet been open for 3 years, but had developed a skilled, team-oriented group of employees who did what they did to make things happen in order to provide the absolute best care for residents and for families. The small office staff of the Director, Assistant Director and the Registered Nurse rallied at 1:00 PM on that Friday to move heaven and earth! Carmy, the assistant

It was 2:00 PM in Texas on the Friday before a long holiday weekend so that meant the window of opportunity was limited to just a couple of hours. Since the normal move-in process usually took 10 times longer, the three-person team met for a few minutes and developed a plan and assigned specific tasks to each team member.

The specific plan to move Bob to Colorado was simple:

- The Director would work with Barbara to secure the necessary family documentation and to sign all the paperwork
- The Assistant Director, Carmy would contact the Assisted Living home in Texas to get records of medications and physician contact information and then would get the physician signature on all necessary documents
- The Registered Nurse, Wendy would make phone calls to the Texas assisted living home to get details about Bob's care needs, specific information about Bob's personality, and develop a care plan for the Aspen House staff
- Barbara would be working simultaneously with Carmy and the airlines to procure tickets for air travel
- Carmy and Wendy were to fly to Texas on Sunday, December 30th to pick up Bob and accompany him back to Aspen House in Colorado!

Although Carmy and Wendy had not met Bob in person, their experience and training in dementia care gave them the skills and abilities to know what questions to ask and to plan a successful, safe trip with Bob.

Carmy has worked with folks who are diagnosed with cognitive impairments (Alzheimer's disease, Frontal Lobe dementia, etc) for 3 years and is certified by the Alzheimer's Association of Colorado in Dementia Care. Specific training for dementia care is rather limited, but Carmy has taken over 60 hours of classroom training and has read scores of books and articles about dementia care, but perhaps more importantly, she has the unique ability to turn theory into practice. She fully understands and appreciates the value of "getting into someone else's reality" and is masterful at redirecting people and defusing potentially stressful situations. She knows how and when to use therapeutic touch and how to modulate and inflect her voice when she wants to encourage a person to do something they might otherwise be opposed to doing.

Carmy further recognizes how a person with dementia becomes easily over-stimulated in a busy environment such as an airport or airplane.

Carmy spoke with Bob's wife to learn some history about Bob and to figure out his likes and dislikes so she could make the trip as easy as possible.

First thing she did was to have the doctor sign a letter to attest to Bob's cognitive impairment—she was correct in assuming such a document would be helpful. Then she contacted the TSA to let them know she would be travelling with a man who may not understand and follow their instructions. Again, this was foresight that proved to be wise.

Carmy then contacted the son in Texas to develop a plan. She advised Bob's son to pick up Bob at his current home, get him some food for the car ride to the airport (as a distraction to the car travel) and to meet her at a specific location in the Dallas airport.

Carmy's plan was for her and Wendy to arrive in Houston 4 hours before the return flight to Denver was scheduled to take off. She allowed for plenty of time to account for any unforeseen events.

Their flight arrived on time; Carmy identified the departure gate for their return flight to Denver, filled her carry-on bag with vending machine snacks and sought out a waiting place for Bob, Wendy and herself. She and Wendy then proceeded to the TSA office to advise them of her unique situation. About an hour after their arrival in Houston, they made it to the pre-arranged meeting place and saw Bob and his son. So far so good.

The plan was unfolding as Carmy had anticipated. However, knowing what she knew about cognitively impaired persons, events rarely go as planned. Carmy had several contingency ideas in mind for when the plan steered off course!

Even though Carmy had learned about Bob and his condition by speaking to his wife, son, current caregivers and physician, she hadn't met him yet and wasn't 100% sure what to expect.

Carmy knew that Bob didn't speak and his facial expression was static so when she first met him she had to quickly figure out the best way to communicate with him.

Carmy is friendly and outgoing. It was a breeze for her to introduce herself to Bob and to immediately establish a relationship of trust with him. She greeted him by taking his hand and left Wendy to take care of any business with the son.

Carmy also knew that Bob liked to walk; however, she wasn't quite prepared for the pace at which he walked! He moved at lightning speed and walked about three times faster than most. When he left his son's side, he immediately started his "airport sprint". Throughout his career, Bob had logged over 2 million travel miles and was quite comfortable in an airport environment—it was obvious that in his mind airports equated to fast walking!

The son completed the ticketing and luggage check-in process and at Carmy's suggestion, advised the check-in person that Bob was cognitively impaired and may need some special consideration for his travel. The check-in person immediately arranged for Bob to move to the front of the security check in line.

Carmy alternated holding hands and looping her arm with his as they dashed off to the security screening area. This part of the trip was one where there could have been potential issues. Because of her pre-planning, the screening went smoothly. The TSA supervisor and staff had been notified in advance and were awaiting Bob's arrival. Again, Bob moved quickly so Carmy was hustled through the x-ray machine so she could be at Bob's side.

Once they were through the security screening area, they had 90 minutes to wait for the return to Denver airplane boarding. Carmy had fully anticipated that the over-stimulating airport environment would be one that would lead to high anxiety for Bob, but because she had planned so well, this turned out to be a stress free hour and a half. Carmy steered Bob to the waiting area she had identified when she first landed in Houston. It was the chapel—a quiet, non-stimulating area where she knew he could relax for a while! She took Bob in and they sat for a few minutes while he ate snacks. After about 10 minutes, Bob was ready to go.

Carmy and Bob left the chapel and walked (sprinted) around the terminal for about 30 minutes before he finally agreed to sit and wait for the boarding call. They sat (ate more snacks) for another 30 minutes and then were called to board the plane. Because of her situation, they were invited to board early, which proved to be the best.

Bob was very comfortable on the plane. He had so many airplane trips that he immediately recognized what was expected of him. He sat down, assisted in buckling his seat belt and waited for take-off. The entire flight lasted only 90 minutes, during which time Bob was contented and relaxed as he ate even more snacks! As the plane began its descent into the Rocky Mountain airport in Denver, Bob apparently recognized the "feel" of the end of the plane ride. He unbuckled his seat belt and was preparing to stand to depart the plane—about 15,000 feet in the air!

Carmy placed her hand on his hand and told him they weren't quite ready to get up just yet and asked him to assist her in re-buckling his seat belt. He complied.

When the plane landed, they got off and proceeded to the nearest family bathroom where Carmy and Wendy assisted Bob. Wendy went off to collect Bob's checked-in luggage and the car while Carmy and Bob walked around the airport. During this walk/wait time was when the most eventful, unplanned thing occurred.

As they were walking (sprinting) past an open eating area, Bob quickly reached down and grabbed a beverage container off a table from a restaurant guest. Carmy quickly made an apology to the now drink-less patron and continued on.

The hour long car ride from the Denver airport to Loveland was another potential stressful event. The plan went off without a hitch: Carmy drove while Wendy and Bob sat together in the back seat. Carmy was once again prepared with snacks and beverages and kept Bob occupied with her endless chatter while Bob sat quietly and secured in his seat belt. Because he had enjoyed a full day of snacks, Carmy knew he would need something more substantial if he were to enjoy a decent night's sleep in his new home. Barbara, Bob's wife, had previously mentioned a particular fast-food favorite of Bob's so the

travelling trio utilized the drive-through feature at the restaurant and continued on their way to Loveland.

Bob was completely content on the ride and once at Aspen House, settled in immediately to his new home.

Because of the training and experience that Carmy has had with respect to dementia, she knew full well what to expect and had a well-thought out plan and pocket full of contingencies (and snacks) to minimize Bob's stress and anxiety as well as the stress and anxiety of his family and the people whom they encountered on their adventure.