I stood by the entrance door waiting for the receptionist to push the release button, allowing me to enter into my grandmother’s memory care community. I frequented this door as often as I could. Each time I stood at this nondescript door with its white keypad I contemplated, for a moment, what GEIMS state my grandmother would be in once I stepped over that threshold.

I had recently become a member of the Positive Approach® to Care (PAC) community, obtaining my first certification as a Certified Independent Trainer. Although I worked with people living with dementia on a day-to-day basis for my career, standing at that threshold always gave me pause. At this threshold I had to rearrange my hats to: granddaughter, PAC member, Director of Memory Care. My goal was to use my skills from the latter two roles, to make me the most supportive and present granddaughter I could be.

On this occasion I found my grandmother walking the long hallways, as I often did. I used Positive Physical Approach, a PAC technique to promote positive interactions, to interact with my grandmother. Henceforth, I paused at the edge of her public space, placed my hand by my face, and smiled before moving forward. It was then that I realized my grandmother was not wearing her hearing aids. I promptly inquired about their whereabouts and was told by a care partner that she had refused them that morning. The staff on multiple occasions had reported to me that she would refuse care. My recent PAC Trainer Certification had taught me the importance of using visual cues with people living with dementia, which was especially important with my grandmother who was hard of hearing. I asked the care partner if I could try to assist her.

Hearing aids in hand, I approached my grandmother and stood in supportive stance, a PAC method of providing support on one’s dominant side. I showed her the hearing aid, pointed to my ear, and then pointed to her ear. My grandmother smiled and then we proceeded to inserting her hearing aids with no fuss. The original care partner and I both exchanged a look with an aha gleaming in our eyes.

People living with dementia have the choice to not participate in care, but often they make that choice because our approach does not provide them with the supportive cues they need. However, like my grandmother, with the right care and setting, they often choose to engage and shine. Whether you work in the field or are caring for a loved one living with dementia, PAC’s certifications can provide you with the skills to help find moments of joy, like the one above. Click here to learn more about PAC Certifications.

Allison Groves started her journey in senior living by volunteering with hospice during her first year in college. She quickly ascertained that she wanted to dedicate her life to working with older adults. She changed her major to Human Development and graduated from Cornell University in 2011. Allison currently works as the Director of Clinical
Operations for Carlton Senior Living, where she assists with clinical risk management for their eleven Assisted Living and Memory Care communities. In 2019, Allison became a Gerontologist, graduating from the University of Southern California. She joined the Positive Approach® to Care team as a Mentor. Allison lives in northern California, with her husband and 7-month old son, where she enjoys backpacking and traveling.