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Inside Alzheimer's: How to Hear and Honor Connections with a Person who has Dementia

Nancy Pearce
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This was how one adult woman responded to Nancy Pearce's advice on how to connect with her mother who has Alzheimer's disease. "But I do not want to connect with this mother…I want my mother back!"

Nancy Pearce has a Master of Science in Education and is a licensed social worker with more than twenty years of experience working with patients with dementia and Alzheimer's in long-term care and hospice facilities. She also helps patients' families cope with and understand a diagnosis of the disease.

Inside Alzheimer's is a practical, conversational guide for those new to the disease, as well as advice and techniques for seasoned professionals. In the book, Pearce outlines her method for connecting with individuals, many who relive traumatic experiences. One case is Deborah, whose younger brother drowned while in her care. She named her son after her brother. She had a difficult relationship with her son and was emotionally distant while raising him.

At the care facility she had a doll she kept in her closet. Although she was afraid of the doll, she wouldn't let anyone get rid of it. One day Pearce visited her, and found Deborah hitting herself and repeating, "bad mommy." Pearce asked her, "Who?" and she said, "ME!"

Pearce acknowledged that being a mommy is a hard job and offered to give Deborah mommy classes. After a few visits Deborah was able to wash her baby doll with a sponge and feed it. Once she was comfortable with her doll she was much calmer throughout the day. Pearce enabled Deborah to overcome her anxiety by being open to communication and not judging Deborah for her past.

Another common problem is individuals who resent being in a facility. Gary had this issue after his son interned him for his own safety. Gary referred to his son as the "enemy" and the "Gestapo." When Pearce offered to look into his options for living more independently, Gary became upset and yelled, "They're going to tell you I'm CRAZY!" But because Pearce had built some trust and rapport, she was able to calm him. She also helped him move into a less restrictive environment by working with his doctors and his son.

Inside Alzheimer's helps families and caregivers better understand individuals with Alzheimer's through love, acceptance, and communication.

LAURA MUNION (August 8, 2007)

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