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*"We will walk
this caregiving road
together."*

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Letting Go
Starting with a Clean Slate

The start of a New Year gives us a once-in-a-twelve-month opportunity to let go of what we need to in the past and to begin anew with a clean slate.

What does this mean for you, the caregiver?

It depends on which phase of caregiving you're in—just starting, continuing, or former.

1. A New Caregiver What a life-changing journey you have embarked upon! Caregiving, especially for one with dementia of the Alzheimer's type, is one of the most challenging yet rewarding responsibilities you will accept in your lifetime. If you do the following, you will find it a life-changing experience that you won't likely trade for anything else.

- Learn as much as you can about your loved one's disease or illness.
- Meet with others (support group, online) who are going through the same experience.

2. Continuing to provide care Take some time to reassess the scope of your responsibilities. Realize you can't do EVERYTHING alone. Caregivers before you have tried. Some have given their lives while others suffer greatly.

- Please be a smart caregiver and ask for help.
- Take advantage of respites—whether five minutes

or an extended weekend. You may not think you can, but a respite will invigorate you, give you hope, and strength. Even a five-minute respite can make all the difference!

3. Former caregiver During this time of year, it seems, many of our loved ones pass on. A painful void now sits in the middle of your previously intense days of providing 24-hours of care. Surprisingly, you find it difficult to complete the mounds of paperwork as you grieve your loss. You may suddenly get up to check on your loved one, only to realize s/he is no longer there. With tear-filled eyes you try to return to what you were doing. You must go on. The road is not easy, but you will survive, just as you did as a caregiver. Sharing your experience will be a tremendous help to those just starting out on the caregiving journey.

Whether you are a new, continuing, or former caregiver; use the month of January to start anew. Set reasonable goals. As you work toward achieving them, be open to modifying them. Sometimes, we get overly ambitious and unrealistic. Ask yourself: *Do my goals energize me to get up in the morning and move toward achieving them?*

3 Kinds of Caregivers

- 1. New** - you recently started caring for someone and you're not sure what to expect.
- 2. Continuing** - you have been providing care and plan to continue.
- 3. Former** - your loved one has recently passed on and you still have the paperwork and family issues to tend to.

For more information about the unique responsibilities of each phase of caregiving, read *"Where's my shoes?" My Father's Walk Through Alzheimer's*.

Brenda Avadian, MA, is a speaker and author of eight books, including the internationally read titles on caregiving such as "Where's my shoes?" My Father's Walk Through Alzheimer's and Finding the JOY in Alzheimer's. Contact her at BrendaAvadian@TheCaregiversVoice.com