

RISE TOGETHER

A QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER



WINTER 2025
VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4

Let Your Light Shine: Walking Into a New Year With Strength, Perspective, and Each Other

Winter has a way of slowing things down.

The days are shorter. Energy can feel more limited. Routines that once felt simple may require more intention.

For those living with neurocognitive change, and for the care partners walking beside them, winter can bring its own set of challenges. Fatigue may show up sooner. Transitions can take more time. The need for patience — with ourselves and with each other — may become more noticeable.

And yet, winter also reminds us of something important:
light still matters — even when it's subtle.
Sometimes, especially then.

As this year comes to a close and a new one begins, it feels like a good moment to pause — not to measure progress or dwell on what has changed, but to acknowledge what it takes to keep walking this journey together.

Two Perceptions, One Journey

One of the most important things to understand about dementia is this: **two people can be living the same experience and perceiving it very differently.**

For the person living with neurocognitive change, the world may feel harder to organize. Words may come more slowly. Sensory input — noise, movement, visual clutter — can feel overwhelming. Some days thinking feels clearer; other days it doesn't.

For the care partner, the experience often includes anticipating needs, holding plans together, and carrying concern about what comes next — all while trying to preserve normalcy and connection.



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Neither perspective is wrong.
They are simply different.

When we name this difference — without judgment — it often becomes easier to slow down, adjust expectations, and stay connected.

Adjusting Together

I recently spent time with a couple navigating early cognitive changes. They weren't looking for answers; they were trying to make sense of what felt different.

At one point, the wife paused and said,
"Some days I know exactly what I want to say. Other days it feels like it's right there, and I just can't get it out fast enough."

Her husband didn't rush to reassure her. After a moment, he said,
"I think I'm still learning when to step in — and when to just slow down and stay with you."

It wasn't dramatic. There were no tidy conclusions.
But it was honest.

Two people noticing the shift — and choosing to keep adjusting together.

That choice matters.

Shifting Patterns, Not Losing the Relationship

Dementia changes how things work — not the importance of the relationship itself.

I often think of this journey as a series of shifting patterns. What once fit easily may need to be rearranged. Familiar routines may need to be adapted. Expectations may need to soften.

While much can change, the relationship still holds meaning, even as it asks to be experienced differently.

When we stop trying to force old rhythms and instead look for what works now, we often find moments of steadiness again — not because things are the same, but because both people are responding to where they are today.

This is where connection lives.





Where Light Shows Up in Everyday Life

Light on this journey rarely looks like big breakthroughs. More often, it shows up in practical, hard-earned adjustments:

- A care partner realizing that late afternoons are harder — and choosing to have important conversations earlier in the day.
- A person living with dementia learning to say, “I need a minute,” instead of pushing through confusion.
- Finding a new way to do something familiar — walking a shorter route, using visual cues instead of verbal directions, or letting go of “doing it the right way” in favor of “doing it together.”

These moments may not look remarkable from the outside, but they build trust. And trust is one of the strongest sources of light on this journey.

Looking Ahead: Practical Ways to Support the New Year

The new year doesn’t need resolutions or pressure. What it benefits from most is *intention* — small, thoughtful practices that support both partners.

Here are tangible ways to begin.

1. Create One Daily Ritual You Protect

Not a schedule — a ritual.

It might be:

- The same morning routine
- A short walk
- Music you listen to together
- A quiet moment at the end of the day

Predictable rhythms help create safety and calm, especially when other things feel uncertain.





2. Make Your Environment a Little Easier

You don't need to change everything. Even small adjustments can help:

- Reduce visual clutter
- Improve lighting
- Add contrast where items blend together
- Minimize background noise during conversations
- Keep frequently used items visible and consistent

A supportive environment reduces stress for everyone.

3. Choose One Communication Shift

Just one:

- Slow your pace
- Use fewer words
- Offer choices instead of open-ended questions
- Validate feelings before correcting facts
- Use gestures or visual cues

Small changes in how we communicate often lead to meaningful changes in how a day feels.

4. Make Room for Being Human

Some days will go smoothly. Others won't.

Let this be the year you give yourselves permission to:

- Have hard moments
- Change plans
- Ask for help
- Let go of perfection

Both care partners and people living with dementia are doing the best they can with what the day brings.





5. Plan for Rest — Before It's Urgent

Care partners need rest, not as a reward, but as a necessity. This might mean:

- Scheduling regular breaks
- Accepting support you've declined in the past
- Building quiet time into the day
- Exploring respite or adult day programs

A supported care partner creates a calmer, steadier environment for everyone.

6. Notice — and Name — What Still Works

Once a week, take a moment to notice something meaningful:

- A shared laugh
- A calm moment
- A task completed together
- A gesture of care

Say it out loud. Write it down. Let it count.

These moments reinforce connection — and connection remains the foundation of well-being.

“TWO PEOPLE CAN WALK THE SAME JOURNEY, EXPERIENCE IT
DIFFERENTLY,
AND STILL REMAIN DEEPLY CONNECTED.”

— MAUREEN BRAEN



A NOTE FROM MAUREEN

Looking ahead to 2026, RISE Dementia Care will continue to offer opportunities for connection, learning, and support for those on the dementia journey. The Kaleidoscope includes a monthly speaker series along with a monthly gathering designed for both care partners and individuals living with dementia. Ongoing offerings also include a dementia support group at Cornerstone Church, open to anyone caring for someone living with dementia, and an educational and support group in partnership with Thrive at Montvale.

Additional details, dates, and times are available on the website's Events page.

WHAT'S NEW AT RISE DEMENTIA CARE

New on the Blog:

Looking for deeper reflection and fresh perspective?
Explore our newest blog posts:

👉 Supporting Connection as Abilities Change

This post offers heartfelt, practical strategies to nurture connection and communication as cognitive abilities evolve, helping both partners feel understood and valued.

🌟 The Heart of the Holidays: When Dementia Changes How Traditions Unfold

This article gently guides you through adjusting cherished holiday traditions in ways that honor meaning and reduce stress, creating moments of presence and connection for everyone involved.

Read more at: www.risedementiacare.com/blog

CONTACT INFO

MAUREEN@RISEDEMENTIACARE.COM

WWW.RISEDEMENTIACARE.COM

INSTAGRAM: @RISEDEMENTIACARE

LINKEDIN: MAUREEN BRAEN

A NEW YEAR'S WISH

As a new year begins, there is no expectation to start over or get it right. Dementia doesn't follow the calendar — and neither should your compassion for yourselves.

Instead, consider stepping into the year with *intention* rather than resolution:

- *Intention to notice what still works*
- *Intention to adjust without judgment*
- *Intention to protect the relationship*
- *Intention to let light in — however it shows up*

Whether you are living with neurocognitive change or walking beside someone who is, please know this:

**There is no right pace for this journey.
You are responding to what today asks of you — and that is enough.**

May the year ahead bring steadier footing, moments of clarity, and reminders that even in winter, light still finds its way through — often because two people choose to keep walking together.

Wishing you a New Year grounded in connection, patience, and just enough light to see the next step.

Disclaimer: This newsletter is for informational and educational purposes only. It is not intended as medical, legal, or financial advice. For individual guidance, please consult with qualified professionals.