

Carol Fuller

A KEY TO THE LOCK OF CARING

Well Christmas is just around the corner again and it just doesn't seem that long ago since we celebrated Christmas last year, the time is flying, and we seem to be propelling ourselves into the new millenium at 'full speed ahead'.

I know Christmas is coming, I am preparing myself psychologically for it, and I keep on promising myself on a yearly basis, that this year I will be prepared, have all my cleaning, shopping and menus worked out well before the day, but Christmas comes and goes and yes there are a lot of the things on my 'things to do list' that I didn't get to. I used to worry, and 'stress' a little over not achieving the goals I set myself, and yes I felt very disappointed with myself. But I must also be kind to myself and ask myself 'did I set my goals too high for a total 100% achievement?'

As the years progress I find that my focus is constantly changing and so are my priorities. I am a full time carer, and like most carers we concentrate full time on the caring role of others, and we the carers don't look at the caring role of ourselves. We are constantly walking on 'egg shells' when the times are tough or the family is in crises. The 'tip toeing' around to avoid 'rocking the boat' at these critical times does become rather wearing over a long period of time, and we the carer can become fragile like an egg shell, and yes fracture cracks can and do appear on our fragile soul.

Christmas is one of the most stressful times of the year, (so the experts say) if you let it be that is. This year I am focussing on my family. My daughter is flying from Hong Kong to spend Christmas with *her* family, so I will be lucky to have my family together in one place.

A Christmas gift in itself.

I will be focussing on the needs of my family for that particular time, living up to my own expectations instead of trying to compete with the 'others' who may be running around like chooks with their heads cut off, spending loads of money (some of whom can ill afford to do so), competing with some invisible peer group to get the best gagety thing or top designer label in clothing. I am going to sit back and enjoy what I have, a family who loves me and I them.

I will buy gifts, but they will be well-selected gifts, which I know my family would appreciate and treasure, and not put away in a cupboard because they may have two or three of the same thing. I will ask my family what they would like in the way of food, this way I know I will be shopping for just what we want and not buying extras that may go to waste. Let's face it money is hard to come by, therefore spend it wisely.

I will not be rushing around trying to see everyone. If I cannot pay a visit to someone before Christmas day without placing myself under 'stress', I am not going to let it worry me. I will make it some time whilst I am on my holiday break, and talking about holiday breaks, that is what it is a 'holiday break' and we the carers need to keep that in mind.

Holiday breaks for the carers is a time to recharge the batteries, a slowing down and perhaps taking that little extra time for self, focussing on our needs. Perhaps it would be a good thing to have a carer's need list for that time and place a tick by the items on the list for self, and hopefully by the time the holiday break is over, we the carer can at least see that we have spent some quality time on ourselves. We don't have to forget our role as carers, but it is a time when we can step back with a clear conscience and 'self indulge'.

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I know that sometimes during the year it is difficult for a carer to cope, especially if the carer works. The working carer is actually running two full time jobs. Cut off times are most essential. I can hear myself saying this, but my conscience is poking me in the ribs and asking me whether I practice what I preach. Quite frankly I have to say 'no', but I do try to **squeeze** quality time for myself and take me out to the gym, aerobics and tai chi. (I am trying to get some balance here, gym for the weight and fitness, aerobics for the rhythm and tai chi for the peace of body, mind and soul).

I know that when I arrive home from work I greet my husband enthusiastically, I am very pleased to be able to come home to him, but bearing in mind I am taking one hat off and donning another. To cut off from my previous job, I pour myself out a nice glass of wine, pour my husband a lemonade and we try to have a 'catch up' or a 'happy hour'. Not unlike the significance of a full stop in a sentence, the separation from one to another. I realise that this is not for everyone, but this is my 'soft fluffy' for myself at the end of a hard working day. Anyhow, it has been acknowledged by the medical profession that one or two wines per day is good for the health.

As I said I have now refocused. In past years I have always pushed myself to get all my household jobs done by the Sunday evening, this gives me a fresh start for the forthcoming working week. To achieve this sometimes I used to stretch myself like a rubber band and because of who I am and what I feel is my standard, I used to worry if I didn't achieve this. Now I don't worry if I do not achieve what I aim for. I know that the dusting will be there next week and the week after that, you may be lucky to have a nearby door open, a breeze rush through and blow some of that dust away! The ironing can and does grow like

Mt Everest, but you will get to it another time. Floors I do try to clean, we have polished floors and if I don't vacuum regularly the dust rolls around like little tumbleweeds.

PRIORITISE is the key to coping.

Everyone copes differently, my methods may not be for all, but they work for me.

To the carers for Christmas, please sit back and **enjoy** this Christmas.

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