



I would like to acknowledge the hard work of Preston Hapon, who has worked feverishly behind the scenes for many years. After attending only one meeting, he offered to help our group. Even after relocating to Chilliwack with a new bride, he continues doing the design and layout of everything SABF, including my articles. As my partner-in-crime, he instinctively knows whether he will get a virtual bouquet or a hasty message from 'yours truly' in ALL CAPS! Sometimes the font is changed, a comma skipped, or reams of print is missing just to see if I'll notice -- I always do. And he is predictably ready to respond with patience, humour and flexibility, putting aside his English teacher past and letting me get my own way. . . most of the time! I thank him for making these articles look good, and for his unwavering and passionate commitment to our group.

Connecting

PART 1 July, 2020

Why Does 'Feeling Good' Feel 'So Darn Bad'?

After the initial torrent of grief emotions and the mourning that follows a loss, one day, someday, you will burst into a spontaneous giggle, or worse, an unrelenting fit of laughter. This momentary lapse of "forgetting that you have lost a loved one" causes you to retreat in horror, shock and disappointment (in yourself) that you have betrayed the deceased in some way by poking a toe outside of the "bereavement box". You may have seen a comedian on tv, watched a silly U-tube video, or remembered a funny thing that happened many years ago. The reason for your glee is irrelevant. This is a hint from the Universe that your life goes on, even after the death of a significant person or furry friend in your life. Some folks come to us very new to the grief process—like a million exposed nerve endings. Others are seasoned grieverers who decided to seek out a group after struggling on their own for months or years. Some worry that they cannot move forward as quickly as they would like to.

Some arrive simply because they are "feeling bad about feeling good". Many are fearful; thinking they will feel like a turd in a punch-bowl, with all eyes fixated in their direction. Some are confused to see people milling around sharing some light-hearted chatter. They expected a quiet room, with people sobbing quietly in every chair. Later they may stun themselves, when they inadvertently laugh themselves, when I tell a self-deprecating story or little joke to end the meeting. Eyes turn downward and it is easy to see that they took a mental note of their own reaction and comfort level in that unexpected moment of levity. (Later they tell me, that was the "first time I have laughed in four months" and it felt good.) During grief, the initial weeks and months are life-altering...sleep patterns are disturbed, cognitive abilities are challenged-- often from lack of proper nutrition, insufficient hydration, lack of sleep or exercise, or no sense of purpose and normality in our lives. After many buckets of tears, playing sad songs over and over again, watching classic movies of love and loss, or reciting painful

memories of someone's last days in palliative care, , we find this mindset of "retell and repeat" (with sadness) becomes engrained in our psyche; and that is what we expect of ourselves each and every day.

We all want someone to blame when a loved one dies, and we all know that when we point a finger at someone else, there are three fingers pointing back at us, so by default, we put on the guilt galoshes and try to make our way through the muddy days of grief that lie ahead. We mistakenly feel this is how to honour one who has died. Smiling is shunned. Laughing is strictly forbidden. The word "enjoyment" and "fun" have been deleted from our vocabulary and those who encourage us to embrace those elusive concepts are quickly "defriended" from our Facebook page. You wonder how one can be grieving one moment and acting like life is a bowl of cherries the next—after losing the love of our lives.

Grieving is hard work; it is tiring and very stressful; and eventually one gets sick and tired of feeling sick and tired. Your doctor may suggest a grief support group to vent your feelings, share your burdens, and create new alliances that have experienced a similar loss, or are trained to understand and de-escalate your unrealistic expectations or "parameters of acceptable behavior" that you may have set for yourself; one of them being that you can not, should not, or will not ever be happy again....(or at least, anytime soon)



Every griever is soon introduced to that ugly "G" word very soon after a loss—it is not "Grief" as one might expect; it's GUILT, with a big, bold G.

We can "guilt ourselves" to distraction without much effort. "If I hadn't broken up with Billie, he might be alive today." "Why did I go shower when mom was so sick...I should have been there when she died." "We left the gate open by mistake and now Buddy is gone forever." "What kind of father is too distraught to do his daughter's eulogy? That was MY job." Everything that happens in life is not our fault. We are not all powerful; and cannot protect everyone, nor fix everything. What we did, or didn't do at the time was based on what we knew right then. We weighted our options, considered the benefits and risks, and came up with a judgment or decision. When we know better, we do better. Do not blame yourself for agreeing to an experimental drug for cancer that could have saved your son's life. Nobody knew that it could cause blood clots. Survivor's guilt often plagues its victims for many years. We can't know why some lives are extinguished in a

tornado's fury, while others are spared. Some questions may never be answered to our satisfaction as in cases of medical misdiagnoses or malpractice. We cannot assume the guilt of taking grandma to "the best surgeon" we knew...never dreaming the outcome would be tragic. We all do what we think is best; and that is what our loved ones would have expected us to do. As human beings we establish a set of morals, standards of acceptable behavior, and an internal thermometer that monitors our personal actions and registers those that might warrant some responsibility or accountability. Some people blame themselves for a lack of faith...feeling like they are now recipients of this intense sorrow for having denied the existence of a higher being or afterlife. In the show *Afterlife* (with Ricky Gervais), a man tries to articulate his feelings of loss while struggling with the uncertainty of a magical afterlife that he does not yet know and cannot understand. But I believe, we all, religious or not, can relate to this beautiful quote as we grieve and mourn our loved ones....

***"I would rather be
'nowhere' with her, than
to be 'somewhere'
without her."***

Guilt is the feeling or emotion that generally surfaces, often before we have had a chance to respond in kind with reasonable arguments as to why we chose to do, or not do something. We can recite a million things to feel "bad" about, but are often reluctant to allow ourselves the freedom to feel "good" about anything, especially after somebody we love has died. After all, we

are still here, and they are not. That is reason enough to feel guilty, isn't it? (In a word, NO!) Guilt might be the only way one can prove to



the world that you recognize the inequality and injustice of a certain situation, but that should not be your passport to staying sad and tear-filled forever. As long as you can express guilt about a loss, and claim it as your own, you feel entitled to grieving and mourning indefinitely. But, is subjecting yourself to a lifetime of victimization and sorrow a healthy response to loss?

We are human beings, who make mistakes sometimes, and who wish we had done things differently. Full stop. If you think you are always feeling unworthy of something, it is difficult to have self-esteem and a good sense of self. It is very hard to forgive others, and sometimes, even harder to

forgive ourselves. Some people become reclusive, isolate themselves from others, and are not able to share their lack of confidence, or fear of repeating the same mistakes again. Being unable to forgive yourself can make it a struggle to try new things, to move forward. To release ourselves of our guilt, we must also forgive ourselves, as we would a best friend who tried in vain to help us, but may have failed in some way. Take off the guilt glasses, throw them away, and order your new prescription, so that you might see more clearly going forward. Every day is a gift, something new to be unraveled and opened like a birthday present, to be viewed with awe, and wonderment, and gratitude, .but especially with joy! All of us can learn to grieve well, feel sad, miss our loved ones, but love them enough to live well for both of us while we still can.

Continued in
Part 2

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*I came alone;
I left connected.*
