



# Connecting

PART 2 July, 2020

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

Sometimes we misinterpret grief for guilt and vice versa. Grief is deep or violent sorrow, a keen regret, while guilt implies that one committed some specified or implied offence, some criminality, for what one must assume some culpability. These are two very different things. There is no need to suppress feelings of goodness, relief, wellbeing, happiness, peace or contentment, just because we are bereaved. There is never any harm in "feeling good", even if it is only for a split second. Those who enter new relationships often feel this internal tug of war with their own emotions. Finding a new love may make Harry feel like an evil person for his excitement, for introducing Jessica to his children too soon for their comfort and/or acceptance into the family. A new job, a new motorcycle, a new facelift, a new outlook on life.....death of a loved one might sway us into searching for a new makeover, a new path forward, only to find that we feel awful for looking so good, or for feeling better than we think we deserve. Chris Cuomo often repeats this line on CNN cable news after

recovery from Covid-19. When asked how he is doing, he says, "Better than I deserve". Being luckier than most and surviving some health catastrophe can cause folks great despair creating a deep attachment and connection with those who have died or lost loved ones from the same illness. If we could only replace our Guilt with a word like Gratitude.

Instead of feeling guilty about not letting your diabetic husband indulge in massive pastries, credit your vigilance with ensuring that Stanley was able to enjoy your 50th Anniversary and watch his grandson get married. If being retired means you can't flood your mom's grave with fresh flowers each week....opt for a handwritten letter expressing your love, that you take and read to her when you visit instead...a gift that IS within your budget. And "feel good" about what you are doing, not shaming yourself for what you cannot....

Reversing a sense of "disentitlement" is sometimes the hardest challenge for those going through the bereavement process. Spending a single cent of an inheritance or

insurance settlement, removing anything of the deceased's wardrobe, or anything short of creating a shrine for your loved one may keep you stuck, immobilized and trapped in a situation that was not meant to be a life sentence. Grief is a temporary response to a severe loss or traumatic event that shatters us to the core, and requires a review, a redo, and a renew of life as we knew it -- before we can adapt to life as it will be, from now on. We understand that folks will feel bad before they feel good; and nobody knows for sure just how long that will be.



If you need written permission to live, laugh, and love with enthusiasm, passion, and wholesome participation, consider it done. Grieving the death of a loved one is not a death sentence for yourself. Grief is a stubborn and persistent motivator, urging us to release our sadness, to acknowledge the passage of a relationship, to rise up and say to yourself, I have done all I can, all I knew how to do, and now it's my right and responsibility to

look after myself as gently and compassionately as I do for others I care about. I want to feel better; and I will do everything I can to get me there. Grief and guilt are not walking sticks that you must carry with you for the rest of your life as a reminder that without it, you will never walk unassisted. At some point, we will put the stick down, hold our heads up, stand tall, and know that, as human beings, we are worthy of, entitled to, and deserving of feeling joy and sharing it with others. It takes courage to decide to look for happy things in our lives; and even more courage to share those glad tidings with others at a time when we feel like we have little

left to offer. Human beings are innately programmed to want to feel good. That is why addictions are so prevalent. Nobody wants sadness, or strife, or uncertainty. We shelter our children from all that is sad or worrisome. A smiley icon is our "go to" BandAid when we need to send an instant "lift-your-spirits" message to a friend.

We all know when it is time to stop feeling guilty, to welcome grief bursts when they come, but to set boundaries for how long they will be allowed to visit. Do not allow Guilt to live in your head rent-free; for no other reason than to set up shop and torment you for days on end. Make a list of all the special things you were able to do for your loved one during their lifetime and celebrate those acts of goodness, recalling them over and over again. Set limits on what you will allow (and disallow) as you navigate your grief

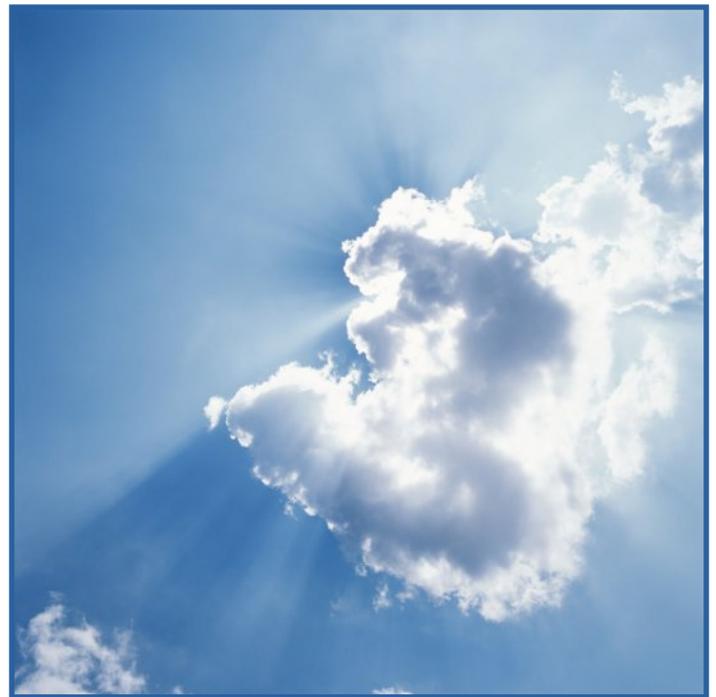
journey. Remember those that grieve intensely, loved intensely too. There is no cause for guilt, real or imagined, to consume your life any longer. We live, we learn, and we do better the next time we can make a difference.

*"The worst guilt is to accept an unearned guilt."*

*-- Ayn Rand*

To feel joy, without diffusing that joyous emotion with an equal dose of guilt is much of what the bereavement process is all about. We learn to be grateful, not guilted by a sudden burst of "happy". New relationships can bring that sparkle back into our lives, whether they be the little Yorkie who rescued you from sadness after your loss, the lady at church who brought you a casserole on Saturday, or the new buddy you met at the driving range that invited you to go golfing with him on Saturdays. Every smile that happens in our day is a gift from the heavens. Some of us believe our loved ones may have had a hand in those things that bring us warmth, energy, and hope in our darkest hours. They cannot be happy unless and until their faith shows them a sign that supports their beliefs in some way. Those who try to make sense of death when they believe life is finite and ends here on earth, after a death sometimes tend to allow joy to enter their lives quicker because they are not held back by the notion of having somebody still around "somewhere" that might be offended by their "sin or offense" of happiness.

When you begin to feel like life is worth living again, you are expressing a desire to move forward in a healthy, positive way. You are not copping out on your loved ones by trying to make the most of each day you are given. You are not supposed to feel guilty for not grieving every second of each day. Grief is fleeting for good reason...it comes and goes in waves, as you all know. The quiet lapses in between those giant surges is when your body tries desperately to recover its balance. Tears of sorrow are there to wash away our sadness. Tears of joy—to restore our equilibrium. If you find yourself singing along with Barney as you watch an old DVD with your grandson, or



accidentally yell out a cuss word when you stub your toe on the coffee table, laugh about it, cry about it if you must, but don't apologize for it! Your loved ones laughed when they could. Now it is your turn to carry forth their sense of playfulness and wit. You are honouring them by doing so.

We all behave differently after losing a loved one. Some react with sober rationality, others with unpredictability and overwhelming emotion. Sometimes our bereavement goes on far too long for most people's liking. Grief, coupled with guilt, anger, blame, resentment and any other complicating factors influences how we will react to a death, as well as how we adapt to our new lives after the loss. There is no "one size fits all" playbook for perfect grieving! Viktor E. Frankl, author of *Man's Search for Meaning* offered a simple, but soothing explanation for "out of character" responses .... "An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal grief."

**What if your guilt is complicating your grief journey; and there is ample reason for you to own it as you do??**

There are indeed instances of neglect, abuse, drunk driving, and such where fault has been determined. If that is your situation, do everything you can to get the appropriate mental health assistance you may need to be able to release your guilt in a confidential setting with a well-trained therapist who can help you. You can create a new path forward, redefining yourself as a person of value -- one who can work diligently to make your life one in which the good that you do far outweighs any personal failures that haunt you. Resolve to make amends in some way that you determine would benefit others since you cannot change the past, but you can teach others, and make positive changes going forward. Apologize by writing a letter to your loved one, asking for forgiveness for your actions or human frailties. Find a worthwhile cause, contribute your time, talents, or treasures and donate what you can in memory of your loved one...bringing peace to your heart. Healing yourself, with self-compassion, will help you to nurture

others who can learn from your experiences. David Burns, MD, is a professor of psychiatry at Stanford University Medical School and author of *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy*. You might find his book helpful.

We all know that grief can turn on our "tear taps" just by remembering and missing someone, but....

*"Tears are sometimes an inappropriate response to death. When a life has been lived completely honestly, completely successfully, or just completely, the correct response to death's perfect punctuation mark is a smile."*

*-- Julie Burchill*

A smile usually eases tension. It is welcomed and often returned by others. Smiles generate hope, acknowledge your presence, and offer a transfer of warm, healing energy from one human being to another.

Wishing you some warm, and peaceful summer nights, (with no mosquitoes) to sit quietly with your memories as you scan the heavens for your "north star" and guiding light!

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*I came alone;  
I left connected.*

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