

I'm Not Suffering
from INSANITY ...

I'm Enjoying Every Minute of It!

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Contents

Acknowledgments	9
Introduction	11
1. Make a Friend . . . Again	15
2. Practice Your Passions	25
3. Slay One Dragon	37
4. Move to a New State of Mind	49
5. Cinematherapy, Anyone?	59
6. Get a New Boditude	69
7. Embrace the Here and Now	79
8. Go Tubeless	89
9. Redecorate a Room for Less than a Hundred Bucks	103
10. Lose Your “Religion” .-. .	111
11. .-. . and Embrace a Relationship Instead	121
12. Take the Hundred-Smile Challenge	133
13. Break Out of Solitary Confinement	143
14. Forgive Yourself	159

Make a Friend ... Again

There's lots of stuff I *don't* miss in my life.

Remember eight tracks?

How about sticky lip gloss?

Here's a good one—what about those elastic belts that held our “feminine hygiene” products in place? Miss those? Neither do I.

Braces.

Rotary dial phones.

How 'bout eighties-style big hair?

I have a few regrets in life, but losing my lacquered big hair and blue eye shadow aren't among the bunch.

Some things you're just better off without.

Maybe it's the lateness of the hour (I'm writing at midnight, my kids asleep, dishwasher loaded, dog fed, lunches made). Or maybe the culprit is what happened last week when I went home for Christmas—I'll tell you about it in a few minutes. But whatever the reason, I'm sitting here thinking about things lost, some of which, like the “gems” in the list above, have left my life richer with their absence.

Other things may have left my life all right, but the word *richer* doesn't exactly apply. In fact, their absence leaves me downright sad.

Bladder control comes to mind. I happen to have a cold at the moment. It has settled in my chest, which means that every few minutes I erupt into energetic coughing. You might be wondering what this has to do with bladder control. Actually, you're only wondering if you happen to be in your teens or twenties. If you're a forty-something woman like me with a couple of childbirths under your belt, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

My eyebrows. That's another one. I miss my eyebrows. The older I get, the thinner they get. Except I did something recently that's actually helping me not miss my brows so much. I had permanent makeup applied to my brows. Tattooed, really. Kind of like penciling in the perfect brows, except it's forever. These babies will outlast a Maytag washer. You can dig me up after I'm gone and I'll look sort of like the stuff you see when you empty the bag on your vacuum, but you'll take one look at me and say, "Well, she *does* still have great brows."

What else do I miss? To be honest, there are a handful of friendships that have come and gone in my life and have left me sort of empty in their wake.

Have you ever had something like that happen in your life? You're super close to someone and you think you'll never know a day when you don't feel the same way, and then something happens and you bicker, or you drift, or someone moves, or something changes, and suddenly you've lost that connection and you think about it sometimes and regret the loss and wish you could get it back.

Earlier I referred to something that happened when I went home for Christmas, and it has to do with this very subject, with friendship lost. But before we get too sad, let me just say that sometimes you get a second chance. Sometimes it's possible to go back and pick up a thread that leads you to a

strand that can take you to a remnant of strings still tied to the heart of someone you lost.

I'll tell you all about it in a moment. But first I need to take a break. I need to get something from the cabinet above the bathroom sink. That's where I keep the cold medicine. I've got to take something for this cough. In fact, as long as I'm up I think I'll hunt around for anything else that might make me more comfortable until I get over this annoying, hacking cough.

Now where in the world did I put those elastic belts .-. .

Let Your Fingers Do the Walking

Okay, I'm back. Now, on to the story about what happened at Christmastime.

It all started when my sister Michelle blurted, "Let's call Brenda. Right now. Don't even think about it! Let's just do it."

We were in Michelle's home office. She was sitting by her computer. I was across the desk from her, painting my nails. I looked up. "Really? Now? After seven years?"

We had once been really close, the three of us. The silly nicknames and private jokes we shared could have filled volumes. We grew up together, really, and at one time the good memories had run as freely as milk and honey.

Then seven years ago something happened. Not a fight, really, just a concentrated time of stress and transition, and before we could smooth everything out, Brenda's divorce swept her down her own private path of emotional crisis, and my struggles with clinical depression swept me in an entirely different direction. As for Michelle, she had her hands full as she married, separated for a season, rebuilt a great marriage, and had a baby. As sisters, Michelle and I stayed close, of course, but we lost Brenda in the process. The threads of communication had snapped, and we had spun completely out of each other's orbits.

Michelle didn't blink an eye, "Yeah. Right now. After seven years. I'll dial."

I held the cordless extension gingerly with wet fingernails and watched Michelle dial the other phone.

Ring.

Ring.

Ring.

"Hello?"

Michelle said, "Hi, Brenda, this is a voice from your past."

Michelle said, "Hi, Brenda, this is a voice from your past."

I said, "Two voices."

Brenda said, "I have no idea who you are. Who is this?"

Michelle said, "You have to guess. We wanted to say hi. We miss you."

Brenda said, "You DO sound sorta familiar-.-.."

I said, "I see we're going to have to sing."

Michelle said, "Sing?"

I said, "Yes, sing. You know the song. Ready? One, two, three-.-.."

So we sang "Burn, Cookie, Burn." You can stop trying to recall the tune from some national countdown. The only time and place it has ever been performed is around midnight in the orange and gold kitchen in my parents' house on Farm Street back in the mid-'70s. You see, Brenda, Michelle, and I were baking cookies when we began pretending the cookies were talking to us from the oven and—

No. We weren't on drugs. We were teenagers and punchy with life and with the lateness of the hour, and it really did seem pretty hysterical at the time, and I'm not even going to TRY to explain it for one more second. You just have to believe me. It was funny at the time.

And somehow, it was funny again last week, when Brenda's voice suddenly broke into laughter and we heard her squeal, "You GUYS, what ARE you doing?" and the tentative tendrils

of reconnection touched and caught and held, and suddenly we were kids again and friends.

It was a very good moment.

And I have Michelle to thank for it.

It takes courage to reach out across a rift. Michelle was brave. And wise. More so than I. I just got to tag along and reap the benefits.

We met the next day for lunch. Brenda saw photos of Michelle's baby and met my five-year-old for the first time. Her son, Blake, had been six months old when I'd seen him last—now there are hockey trophies on his bedroom walls.

I think we'll hang on better this time. I also think we were lucky. I think second chances are too special to squander.

No Regrets

There's an old adage: "Fish and houseguests begin to stink after three days."

You know what else stinks the longer it hangs around?

Regret.

In fact, regret does more than stink. Regret can make you crazy.

Now, I'm not suggesting that you and I should live perfect lives. I'm not saying that we should be able to manage our days on earth so perfectly that we never do or say anything that we wish we could reverse.

The fact is, life is messy and chaotic and imperfect, and sometimes things happen that we'd give our eyeteeth to correct. Sometimes what we regret is something we said or did or didn't do. We'd give anything if we had seen the doctor sooner, finished our degree, said "no" to temptation or "I love you" when we had the chance, lightened up, straightened up, or buckled up, married a first love, or heeded a warning sign along the way.

Other times, what we regret is not anything we did but something someone else did to us. Either way, regrets are

unavoidable. If we have a pulse, you and I are going to have some regrets in life. And if we let those regrets eat us alive, we're going to need a straitjacket for sure.

Dealing with Unfortunate Good-Byes

We've all met women who can't seem to get past a regret in life. They're consumed by bitterness, defined by a past mistake. They've let regret drive them nuts, and they can't seem to forget and move on.

This chapter isn't about *every* category of regret in our lives (that would require a book, not a chapter!). But I figured I could talk about at least one kind of regret and offer some ideas on how to keep it from gnawing away at your innards for years.

I'm talking, of course, about the kind of regret that occurs when a good relationship goes awry.

For example, I lost Brenda when stress tested our relationship and (at least for me) personal struggles kept me too busy to reconnect.

I seem to have lost the Rottmeyers and the Spurlocks when these two families moved away last summer. Nancy and Larry headed to Indiana, and Cherie and her family moved to Colorado, and though I've missed them daily, I haven't exactly been burning up the phone lines keeping in touch. Yes, the distance is a factor. But I also think their leaving left a painful void in my life, and when I'm hurting I tend to withdraw and regroup and heal. Now, several months later, I'm feeling less vulnerable and more aware of my need to reach out again. Keeping in touch over the miles takes some effort, but I think I'm gearing up for the challenge.

I lost Chris, another friend, over some stupid stuff. I offended this friend last year, and things have never been the same. I called once and sent a couple e-mails containing apologies, but they have yet to be answered. It makes me sad. It's a loss I truly regret.

Some relationships end, and it's just as well. Perhaps there was something in the relationship that was unhealthy or toxic or wounding. Other relationships were good for years before something got twisted and they crashed and burned. I'm not suggesting that every ended relationship be renewed. But I guess I'm saying that—for the healthy ones—if time or events or conflict or distance have created a rift that you regret, what's wrong with going back and making amends, re-creating the connection, renewing a bond?

Here are some suggestions on how to do just that.

Let Your Fingers Do the Walking

Sometimes all it takes is a phone call. I know, for example, that despite the miles between us, Nancy and Cherie are a mere phone call away. I'll be the first to admit that when I've been remiss at keeping in touch, I'm tempted to put off the phone call, thinking, *But it's been months. Will they be upset with me? Will it be awkward? Will they ask why I've been silent for so long?* And yet, in my heart of hearts, I know the answer. These are rock-solid friendships. The connection we shared remains untarnished. So what if their leaving left me a little numb and I needed some time to heal? Great. Fine. Now it's time to get busy and reconnect and reinvest and reclaim. What about you? Do you have a good relationship you've let slide? Then pick up the phone. Today. And I promise I'm going to do the same. Because good friends are hard to come by and too priceless to be allowed to drift casually beyond our reach.

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Say You're Sorry

If you've made a mistake and hurt someone, ask for forgiveness. If you're not sure, say so by admitting something like, "If I offended you in some way, I'm really sorry. Tell me what I've done so we can talk about it, because your friendship has always been important to me and I'd hate to lose it now."

You'll feel better when you apologize, regardless of whether your apology jump-starts the friendship again or not. I wish that my apology had jump-started my friendship with Chris. So far, it hasn't. I'm still glad I apologized. It was something I needed to do, regardless of the outcome.

Sometimes what's standing between you and reclaiming a former good friend is the fact that, frankly, you're still ticked.

Kill a Grudge

Sometimes what's standing between you and reclaiming a former good friend is the fact that, frankly, you're still ticked. Was the offense done in malice? Was it part of an unhealthy pattern that characterized your relationship? Was it brutal enough to tarnish your feelings for your friend forever?

If not, I have three little words for you: "Get over it."

I explain this to my daughters all the time. I tell them that good girlfriends are hard to come by, and even the best relationships require a generous application of grace now and then.

Guard Your Expectations

When you attempt to rekindle a friendship, consider your mission accomplished if you get one good conversation out of it all. If you contact an old friend expecting that your relationship will immediately bloom into all that it was before

time/conflict/distance created a wedge between you, you may be disappointed. People change, circumstances change, schedules change. It's quite possible that your friendship, even if it gets renewed, will be different than it was before.

Maybe your friend has a husband now, or you have a new baby. Perhaps she lives twelve hundred miles away instead of right next door. It's possible that one of the two of you is busier than you were before and quality time will have to suffice when quality and quantity used to be the rule of thumb. Perhaps you'll become best friends again, or maybe you'll merely swap Christmas letters once a year. It's also possible that your conversation won't open the door for bosom-buddyhood but will bring about good stuff just the same, stuff like forgiveness, healing, resolution, or just even an hour's worth of warm fuzzies.

Friendship 911



Do you regret losing a once-healthy friendship to distance, time, or an unfortunate misunderstanding? Sometimes it's possible to go back and pick up a thread of a remnant of strings still tied to the heart of someone you lost. If you want to reclaim a former friendship, here are some suggestions:

- ☉ Evaluate whether the relationship was basically healthy. If it was dysfunctional or destructive in some way, think carefully—and perhaps even seek wise counsel—before trying to resurrect the connection.
- ☉ Be willing to apologize for anything you did that caused the friendship to falter.
- ☉ Be willing to forgive if you're the one nurturing the grudge.
- ☉ Guard your expectations. People and circumstances change. Don't expect your relationship to pick up exactly where you left it.
- ☉ Don't guard your affection. Be honest! If you've missed your friend .-. . if you regret the time spent apart .-. . if you'd give anything to share a box of chocolates and some girltalk like you used to .-. . say it!

Relationships evolve, and that's okay. The goal is not to relive the past but to write a new chapter in a relationship with someone who shares part of your history. Let that new chapter unfold as it may.

Don't Guard Your Affection

When you contact your old friend, it's okay to guard your expectations, but don't guard your affection in the process. Be honest. Talk freely. Nix the guessing games. Set the tone early by admitting, "I miss you!" Your transparency will go a long way toward rekindling the bond that once was strong.

There are lots of reasons to patch up, reclaim, or renew good relationships gone stale. For one thing, the older I get the more I recognize and appreciate past relationships that, at their very core, were solid and healthy. Sometimes reconnecting with this kind of friend or family member just feels right. Other times unfinished business calls our names.

Whatever the reason, sometimes rekindling a friendship is very good. Besides, after so much time apart, there's always lots of news to share, everything from the earth-shattering to the interesting to, well .-. the bizarre.

I can't wait to tell Brenda about my eyebrows.