

Name

**The Crazies**

***by Dick Gilbert***

It was a terribly hot Saturday when we gathered for our Houston conference. The hotel was “air-conditioned cold,” and whenever I went outside, the heat was so oppressive that my glasses fogged up.

I fogged up.

I needed a breather from listening, and decided to take a ride in the car. I set out looking for my 1989 Buick Seville. I knew I parked it right there, the front lot, under a shady tree. (I was wising up. This time I wanted to be able to touch the steering wheel when I got into the sun-baked car!) I found the tree. I found the space. No car.

“Okay, don’t panic,” I reassured myself. “There are other trees. There are other spaces.” More than 1,000 spaces, in fact, and I was about to visit every one of them. “Ignore the 98-degree heat and similar humidity. The car is air conditioned. You’ll get there. Over there.” No, that wasn’t it. “Now, let’s see. Maybe this time I really did come in that other entrance, over there.” Off I walked. And walked. And walked. So many cars. So many gray cars. So many Buicks. Not my car.

I circled the entire parking lot. By now the doorman was both puzzled and amused. I described the car. Off he went. Off I went. Crash! Bang! No, not an accident in the parking lot, but a collision in my mind. The lights went on, reality struck, and, 20 minutes into this horrible hunt, my “blindness” subsided. “You dummy!” I said to myself. “YOUR car is in Long Term Lot #F at O’Hare Airport in Chicago. This is Houston. It’s a rental car you want.”

The rental car was gray. It was a Buick, but a 1995, Forget where you parked your car? At least you remember you have one! not a 1989. Of course, now I am the fool. What on earth can I say to explain this to the doorman? “I am a bereaved parent.” Would he understand that explanation? “I am a professional, and I have all these talks on my mind, and I wasn’t paying attention.” Would that work? Does it really matter what he thinks anyway?

“Okay, Dick, now think.” I began to remember. Buick. Gray car. Dark gray, different from mine. Red interior. Says “Buick” on the rear bumper. There it is, in the front lot, right where I left it under the shade tree.

The doorman came over. I could have gotten away with it. After all, I did say I was looking for a gray Buick. Maybe he can’t tell it is a ’95 instead of an ’89. “I’m glad you found it. It can be hard in this big lot,” he said. Of course, I immediately felt the need to explain myself, and told about it being a rental car. He laughed. “Don’t worry sir. It happens a dozen times a day.”

Off I drove. For that moment I was relieved. The crazies had calmed down, the air conditioning was kicking in, and I could forget for a moment. When I returned from my drive the doorman greeted me pleasantly, and I went on to my next teaching assignment.

The crazies. To some they are an amusing interruption along the long journey of healing. To others they are terrifying.

To still others they are a total embarrassment rooted in personal of guilt and shame. For all of us, the crazies are at least a stop along the way of the grief journey. Nothing more, nothing less.

My wife Sharon and I went to see the movie Babe. It was adorable. It was fun. I cried through all of it. Why? It wasn’t the movie, it was me. It was what I needed to do. To others I may have appeared “crazy.” For me, it was a moment of healing.

Still, the crazies can leave us feeling disconnected and out of touch. And they get even more complicated when we worry about all those doormen in our lives. What will they think? Does it matter? Of course it can matter. We feel isolated enough already.

The crazies draw us apart all the more.

We can work through the crazies – just like we can work through all of our grieving – when we remember that loss leaves us feeling disconnected. We feel separated, cut off, and unable to connect to loved ones, to life’s meaning, to a surviving spouse or sibling, to all the things that are supposed to matter, and maybe even to God. That’s okay. Own the disconnection. Acknowledge how many times you have walked your own “parking lots” looking for a car that wasn’t there.

You will connect again. I connected when I began to remember not what wasn’t there, but what was: the color of the car, the lettering on the bumper, the red interior, the stick on the steering column where the gear shift should be so that every time I put the car in gear I sent the windshield wipers swishing. You will connect again as you remember not only what – or who – is no longer with you, but what or who is.

I was connecting again. I was back in touch again. I was claiming the symbols that always were there to connect me. And, I was allowing others, like the doorman, to step into my life. I was aware of my embarrassment with him, but also aware that I just didn’t have the energy to waste on what he really thought. He couldn’t possibly understand my feelings. No one can. No even another bereaved parent. But he did understand my predicament and stay with me in my searching.

The crazies. They can be confusing. Overwhelming. Embarrassing. They can be all of that, or some of that, depending on you. For all of us, though, they are just another step along the way of this wild ride we call grief … and a big step closer to healing.