

It Only Hurts When I Laugh

You know the kind of laughter that rolls out in sheets? Tears come; you feel it in your belly? You laugh till you think you're laughed out; then it comes again. Those around you can't help but laugh with you. It's infectious. Pretty soon, it's the laughter itself that causes more of the same.

That's the kind of laughter Jack was known and loved for. Wherever he was, people would do their best to make him laugh, because then everyone would crack up! He felt liked, accepted, and confident.

When Jack's marriage abruptly came to end, it hit him hard in what he calls, "a wake-up call with a sledge hammer to the side of the head." It sent him into what is known as a disorienting dilemma. His beliefs, values, even his identity were, "suspects, all lined up for questioning," as he put it.

I asked, "If you were to describe your feelings in a metaphor, what would that be like?"

"Emotional bleeding. Like feelings from the inside coming out. Depression. I used to see things as funny in my life. I couldn't do that anymore. I could hear jokes, but not laugh. Humor was gone. I couldn't keep rhythm. I couldn't clap or dance. Hobbies, interests, ambitions in life that I took pleasure in before didn't matter anymore."

Fortunately, Jack recognized his depression, and sought psychiatric help. He wanted to understand what happened in his life to cause him to be blind sided to someone else's needs and pain while he was riding high on life. That kind of examination is the perfect example of when therapy is the correct choice, over coaching.

I began coaching Jack after his soulful journey through grief. Jack told me he found himself immersed in a whole new world. He didn't have a lot of experience identifying and naming negative feelings; suddenly he had become an expert. At the same time, he was very interested in moving forward, stepping out of the bad, sad, feelings and finding purpose and joy once again.

I asked, "What stands out to you as most significant about your feelings of loss?"

"It was a turning point in my life. It went right to the core of my being. It changed beliefs and convictions in my head, things about marriage and what was important. There were daily revelations of myself. I wanted to be a better person. Now, I have the opportunity to reshape my life."

Jack described results of transformational learning, which occurs after a person chooses to look at a life change, and decides to make positive meaning out of it. The process is worth the outcome. For Jack, it was the motivation behind wanting to work with a coach, to reshape his life from a positive perspective of moving forward.

Over a period of sessions, Jack and I talked about what he needed to heal completely. He said that while he had grieved the loss, and had let go of the feeling of wanting to hang on in hope of reconciliation, healing had to be about forgiveness.

“Who needs forgiveness, Jack?”

“I feel like I want to be forgiven by my ex-wife. I know now that I wasn’t connected to her like she needed. I was too busy thinking about my own happiness to see that she had feelings I was totally blind to. I’m clear that she has moved on. So, I’m not hoping to get back together. I just want her to know I finally get my part in all of this.”

“It sounds like you are working on self-forgiveness too. What do you need to fully forgive yourself?”

That inquiry question led Jack to ponder where he was, and where he wanted to go next, in coaching. Before long, he was ready to set personal goals around his development of new beliefs, values, and of an identity he would be proud to live up to.

Upon completion of our sessions, he told me he felt that healing might be something that becomes a way of life. He said that he had learned with me that it is about choosing to be present to others and of being self-aware of feelings, needs and mistakes. So that laughter comes easy, in full rolling sheets that brings tears of joy and *connection* with love.