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So, The Thing Is... I'm Feeling A Little Guilty

By Barbara Cooper

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by: **Barbara Cooper**

So, the thing is... I am feeling a little guilty.

I know, I know, what's new? I'm like the travel agent for guilt trips. Right now I'm feeling a little guilty because I am so madly in love with my little Smiley Jane, who turns two-years-old today. I mean, REALLY crazy about her. I can't keep my hands off of her. Her smile just lights up my whole world and that laugh—gosh, if I could bottle that baby deep-belly laugh, I would be the richest woman in the world. It's hard to capture the essence of Jane's personality with words. I can't really describe that sense of perpetual motion, that blinding smile. It's like she is lit from within, and I think that light is joy and enthusiasm and awe for this world. She's so loving and so happy (even with that awesome temper) and then you add that baby skin and that wall-to-wall smile and the next thing you know, I am feeling guilty!

I can remember going through this phase with Ana (now four-and-a-half) too, although she was never quite so over-the-top at loving me back as Jane is. But there was no need to feel guilty because she was my first. I just totally indulged myself in a big crush on my girl. But with Jane, there's this vague sense that maybe I'm being somehow unfair. Like maybe my infatuation with her takes something away from Ana.

And it's true, you know. I am NOT madly infatuated with Ana at the moment. I LOVE her and I appreciate her and I marvel at her but it's also her job to push my buttons. She's good at it. The whining thing. The testing thing. The negotiating thing. The monitoring my speed limit when I drive thing. I can honestly (albeit ashamedly) say that when she goes to school, I am a little relieved. It's just hard with her right now. She's four going on about thirteen, and she ignores me half the time and is cheeky another fourth of the time and then she's so completely wonderful and loving and funny the other fourth that I feel MORE guilt.

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Oh, but that Hurricane Jane! I miss her if she's merely taking a long nap. Sometimes when I go in to check on her at night and I see her, asleep in her mermaid pajamas and her little rump up in the air, I have to stop myself from picking her up, just to feel her little baby self. She's so compact at this age. She hugs so well. I am getting some real one-on-one time with her now that Ana's in school in the mornings. And she's just CHARMING.

I took her to the playground the other day and she wanted me to swing on the big girl swing next to her. "That's GREAT swinging, Mama!" she said, encouragingly. (I love the way she always uses everyone's proper names when she is addressing them.) A little bit later, as we sat on the playscape and looked at the full moon still visible in the sky, she turned to me, blue eyes grave and awed. "Boo-ful. It's boo-ful, Mama." I gazed back at her, afraid my heart would burst. "Yes, Jane. It is. Beautiful."

I think part of appreciating Jane so much is that I know now how fleeting these days are. Every wonderful stage gives way to something else, and where once I cradled her and leaned over her as

she took her first steps, now I'm watching her run away from me into her own world. And after Ana, I knew this was coming, so all the times Jane runs into my arms become that much more precious. I give myself permission to enjoy the view of her little naked behind and the funny way she confuses her pronouns. ("Hold you? Hold you, Mama?") She's given to spontaneously saying, "I luff you, Mama." But I know. I know the day is coming when it will be gone, the last vestiges of her babyhood, almost without me even noticing.

Sometimes I watch Ana in this new role as my Independent Big Girl and I just want so much to reach out and pull her into my lap and hold her for a long while. I want to tell her I'm on her side. But I can't. She wouldn't stand for it (or believe me, for that matter.) The other night she came out of her room after bedtime on some pretext and when I tucked her back in, I kissed her.

She wiped my kiss off.

I guess this is a normal rite of passage, but must they all be such heartbreakers? I thought I was allotted a period of time when I got to be the hero --- what happened? This past summer, after I'd said "No" to her about something, she wanted to go to the grocery store and find a new family and go home with THEM. (I wish I could say I responded with sensitive probing about her feelings but instead I said, "Okay, as soon as you find a new family, I'll drive you right to their house.") The teenage years loom large.

So you can see why I prefer, ever so slightly, the uncomplicated relationship I share with the little Hurricane. She who still craves my presence and hugs me with abandon and misses me when I'm away. She who spontaneously started to YODEL in the grocery store a few months ago. (Seriously!) She, who is so responsive to my slightest touch. Who is silly just to make me laugh. Who likes to wear my shoes.

Maybe the first two years or so of a child's life are given to us as gifts -so we have a firm foundation of holding them closely that will withstand the next sixteen years of them distancing themselves from us.

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As Graham Green said, "There is always a moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in." I don't actually know that this is the start of the third year, but it would make sense.

I don't really want Jane to stay a baby -there are many other wonderful milestones along the way to adulthood. But I am enjoying every minute of it while I can (albeit with a small amount of guilt.)

Happy birthday, Smiley Jane. May you always have that sparkle in your eye and that yodel in your heart.

Babies are such a nice way to start people. ~Don Herrold

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Barb Cooper is the mother of Ana (4.5) and Jane (TWO) and this newsletter entitled "So, the thing is.... She lives in Austin, Texas.

Parents, Kids And Time Alone

By Margaret Paul, Ph.D.

"What are some of the ways in which you explain to kids that mom and dad need time alone, without feeling guilty about it?"

A journalist, writing an article on having time alone and couple time when you have kids, asked me this question.

Parents will feel guilty only when they believe that they are doing something wrong by spending time alone and couple time without their children.

This is a false belief.

The truth is that children grow up far healthier emotionally when their parents are happy and fulfilled, even if it means that their parents spend less time with them. When parents understand that they are being good parents by talking loving care of themselves and their relationship, their children will understand this.

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One way of helping children understand this is to introduce the concept of "time alone" very early in a child's life. By the time a child is three, he or she can easily understand the concept of time alone. If, each time you spend time alone with your child, you say, "This is our time alone," your child will begin to understand the concept. When you have time to yourself, you can say, "This is my time alone with myself." When you spend time with your partner, you can say, "This is Mom and Dad's time alone together." Parents can tell their children, as soon as they are capable of understanding the words, "We need time alone with you, with each other, and with ourselves. All of us need to respect this about each other."

Our three children fully understood the concept of "time alone" because we spent time alone with each them. They came to understand and respect at a very young age the need for time alone.

If you put yourself aside and don't spend time with yourself and with your partner, you are giving your children unhealthy role modeling. You are teaching them that others are always responsible for meeting their needs. You are teaching them to feel entitled to your time and attention rather than helping them learn to respect others' time. You are teaching them that it is okay to demand that others put themselves aside for them, which may create narcissistic behavior.

Healthy parenting means finding a balance between being with your children, being with your partner, and being with yourself. For your children to grow up taking responsibility for their own needs and feelings, they need to see you taking responsibility for your needs and feelings. Constantly sacrificing yourself for your children does not role model personal responsibility.

Children need to experience you and your spouse enjoying your time with each other, as well as with yourselves. They need to see you pursuing your work, hobbies, creativity and passions in order to understand that they also need to find their passions. If you are always there to meet your children's needs, how can they discover who they are and what brings them joy? Always being there to meet your children's needs for entertainment creates a dependency on others rather than finding these

resources within themselves.

Many people grow up not knowing how to be alone with themselves. Because they were either always in front of a TV or being entertained by their parents, they never discovered how to "play by themselves."

Of course it is very important to have enough time alone with your children. But it is equally important to have enough time alone with your spouse and with yourself. When you understand this, you will stop feeling guilty about taking your time alone. When you no longer feel guilty, your children will learn to stop guilt you and respect your needs.

Margaret Paul, Ph.D., best-selling author of eight books, including "Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By You" and co-creator of the powerful Inner Bonding healing process. Learn Inner Bonding now! Visit her web site for a FREE Inner Bonding course:

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