

**The Editor's Wild Hair:  
Following the Logic of "Feelings"  
By Joe Bustillos**

"Heart, why are you pounding like a hammer?  
Heart, why are you beating like a drum?  
Heart, why do you make such a commotion  
when I'm waiting for my baby to come?  
Oh heart, don't do it if it's not the real thing  
Heart, I get so easily deceived  
Heart, there is no other I can turn to  
if not you, heart, then who can I believe?"  
"Heart" by Nick Lowe

I vividly remember when it first happened. It was in the seventh grade when I walked up to Mary Hinck and said, "Hi," and she said rather unfeelingly, "Oh, it's you." It's like I didn't even really know that it was there until it came crashing to the ground in front of God and everyone. Jesus, I thought, if this is what love feels like, I don't want any part of it.

I didn't mean that, of course, and have spent the intervening 17 years demonstrating it to no one in particular. But something very definitely changed after that first brush with emotional death.

Back at home, though I never once for a moment doubted my parent's love for me or my siblings; emotions, especially anger, seemed to be Steven Spielbergian pyrotechnics. Like the

much-feared nuclear holocaust, there would be a blinding flash of emotional light: my father would explode over some such reality of living with five children. My mother would then deploy her tactical arsenal. Another flash, then children running in every direction, vainly hoping to avoid becoming part of the scorched landscape. Then just as quickly as it had begun, it would be over. Father would be about his business and mother would continue hers. It all seemed to my childish mind to be quite unnecessary.

So it only seems right that at one point in my life I hung around with a religious group that held to the philosophy that "feelings" could not be trusted. "Feelings, they come and go, but objective truth, now there's the ticket." Of course the objective truth that was being referred to here was

the bible, the Scoffield Reference Bible in the King James Version to be more specific. And Love, well that had something to do with some Greek word and God and Jesus dying and . . . (all of which of course made no sense whatsoever to my teenage mind, but who was I to scoff at the insights of my elders?).

I don't know why I always seem to use this column to take pot-shots at Evangelical Christianity (no doubt an unconscious attempt to pay them back for the emotional trauma and near fatal brain damage I experienced while getting my Bachelor of Arts degree in Biblical Studies). In fact, before this starts sounding too much like "Sex and the Single Brain Cell," I have to question the wisdom of attempting an article that would argue following the logic of emotions. I mean, either you understand it or you don't.

I guess it's just one of those things that pisses me off. While I was playing my little religious game, going to seminary and all, reading Kierkegaard's Either/Or, thinking about Pluralism and other "important issues," my own wife was suffering from emotional deprivation. Perhaps this isn't unusual for couples where one of the partners is working full-time while carrying 12 units of graduate school course work. It's

called, "I love you, but I don't have any time for you"---a rather mixed message.

Quite inevitably she announced to me one day at lunch, rather unceremoniously, "You know, if you were just my boyfriend or if we were just living together, I'd leave you." I wasn't sure I wanted to look up from the book that I was reading. I knew it wouldn't be a pretty picture. This was not at all what I was expecting.

So off to counseling we went. A well-meaning Christian friend told me about the horrendous percentage of couples who go to counseling and end up divorced. I think she was trying to caution me against the practice. Of course she failed to mention that no one goes to counseling because things are going great. Someone in the relationship has just about had it (a la, "if you were just my boyfriend . . .") and it's either this or the door. No doubt the percentage would be even greater had they not at least tried counseling. Still, it didn't sound very promising.

Once a week we'd arrive at the counselor's office. She'd outline the gripes of the week and I'd patiently listen, mentally preparing my counter-arguments. Then the counselor would turn to me and say,

"So Joe, how do you feel about what she has said?"

"Well . . . ." Feel? Did he say "feel"? Most of the time I'd say something about the supposed logic behind my actions and nothing about my feelings. This went on for months. Then one day it dawned on me. It happened while she was complaining about her needing to use the Nissan, which had an air-conditioner, 'cause she had to wear nice clothes to work while me and my Levi's could put up with the un-air-conditioned Toyota. When it came time for my little meaningless counter-argument I let it out. "You

know," I said rather matter of factly, "if she was convinced of my love for her or that she was number one in my life, than none of this other shit would even matter." Opps. Did I say that? They both stared at me like one does when a toddler unexpectedly makes an adult-like observation.

"So Joe, how do you feel about her then?" It took another five months before I could clearly say how I felt. In view of the fact that I write a column called "Sex and the Single Brain Cell," it should be obvious that we were to become another statistic.

"Oh heart, there must be no mistake  
Beware, special care, from the start  
Oh heart, though I'm glad for the first bit of love to have  
Be certain now, else you're gonna break  
Oh heart, motor of emotion you've never been like this before  
Heart, at first I thought you were joking,  
but I know deep down in you that you're sure."  
"Heart" by Nick Lowe

I realize that the above narrative is a rather odd way to set up an argument in favor of following the logic of feelings. Those that consider the concept to be little more than a dangerous dose of pop psychology will no doubt feel justified. But, like I wrote before, unless you understand the concept you'll have little appreciation for my argument (which is really no argument at all).

The reason for my sensitivity about this subject is no doubt the result of my own struggle with the concept of "feeling," starting with the amazingly disarming question: "what the fuck do I want out of life?" Laid out like a raw nerve, the question began to unravel the reasons why, two years ago, I would have recoiled at the idea of following feeling's leading.

Simply put, an anemic sense of self worth prevented me from thinking that I was an adequate judge for determining the meaning or direction of my own life. "What the fuck do I want out of life?" It's just a simple question. But there was a silent yet pervasive lack of self-trust, which perhaps extended personally and culturally to a time when authority figures were depended upon for making the decisions of life. And feelings were the luxuries of irresponsible youth and melancholic old age.

Just below the surface was an ancient belief that if I were left to my own devices, judging things on the basis of what I "want," I'd no doubt do

damage to myself and evil to my brothers and sisters. This was somewhat based on a twisted application of King David's repentant song and Solomon's words of advice: "But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me, mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads." (Psalm 22:6,7) "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will

make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5,6)

Not long after the news of my marital separation broke, my well-meaning father strongly suggested that if I turned this dilemma over to Jesus than all of the fuzziness would clear up and I'd make the right decision. Perhaps. But equally possible was the proposition that I got into this situation because over the course of the last 14 years I'd "turned over" such situations to the Lord, in my own feeble way, and failed to read the writing on my own heart. Ha. How

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was God going to talk to me anyway except through my own heart?

A child no doubt lacks the

common sense and self-discipline to negotiate the troubled waters of life without parental instruction and example but I have, for a long time, ceased being a child. And when I turned to the judgment bench of feelings I didn't find a power hungry madman bent on my own destruction or the lording over of the lives of my loved ones. Quite surprisingly I found a mirror image of myself, perhaps a little more insightful, perhaps a little more excitable, somewhat like a profile of ones self that until this

very moment one has failed to even notice.

I took feeling's leading and made some difficult decisions. Perhaps out an inability to read feeling's messages or like myself, out of a lack of trust, many fake their way from sun-up to the evening news thinking that this vague sense of dissatisfaction is all part of life. Life's a bitch and then you die. Right?

Someone once told me that there was more to it than that. Risking the possible dissolution of our marriage, she courageously challenged me to confess what I already knew about my feelings. Among other things, this difficult experience has shown me that feelings, whether acknowledged or ignored, have a way of making themselves known. **ADI**

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