



SO YOU THINK YOU'RE GOING CRAZY?

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I thought I heard the grass growing today. I mowed just last weekend and it shouldn't need cutting again . . . but I'm sure I heard it creeping up over the sidewalk this

afternoon.

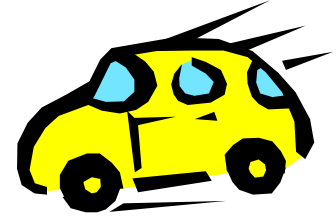
I know I heard the weeds in the garden chuckling at me as I sat on the deck this evening! Just as I sat down and began to let the tension of the day drain from my weary soul, **THEY** started snickering. It ruined the moment, and I finally went inside--away from the smart aleck weeds.

Then the dishes started in on me and I'll swear that the dust bunnies under the bed were hosting a class reunion! In fact, the entire house seemed to be chatting and laughing and enjoying the whole show. The television held nothing exciting and besides, it's hard to hear the actors when the smudges on the screen and the windows next to the set are screaming so loudly.

I finally gave up and went to bed. Bed has always seemed the safest place to be when the house and the yard (and the world) start in on me. I dragged my favorite "snuggly" out of the closet and covered myself with the sheet. At last . . . away from the conversations that seem to overrun my mind! But then, the mattress smiled . . . and I **HAD HAD IT!**

Isn't there anyplace where a person can go and not be disturbed by **LIVING THINGS?!** As I raced through the house, the sounds got louder and louder. The dryer reminded me that it needed emptying. The oven cried out to be cleaned (self-cleaning, my eye). The vacuum started gunning its engine, and even the clock kept ticking, ticking, ticking.

I left the house and hid in the car. What could possibly speak to me there? (Never, never, never ask that kind of question) When the voice from the glove compartment asked me to clean out the old gum wrappers and toss out the maps from 1956, I knew what my friends had been telling me for some time now was true. I AM going crazy and there is nothing I can do about it.



I first began to think about going crazy shortly after our son died. It seemed innocent enough in the beginning. Just an occasional sound that came from his bedroom or a whiff of his scent that would catch me by surprise. I didn't think much of it--in fact, I rather enjoyed those little reminders of him. But, after sharing my first encounter with him with a neighbor, I knew the rest of the world would think me daft. So I quit telling other people about my little conversations and my little encounters. I just kept them to myself.

They weren't that special (except to me), but I thought I saw him once on a playground about half a block away. By the time I reached the fence, however, he had become the little boy he really was and not my son. And once, in a store, I knew I heard him tell me to buy the Twinkies . . . I KNOW I HEARD THAT! So I did, and I enjoyed every one of them, too.

I found myself looking forward to these little encounters but never sharing them with anyone. And for quite some time, little reminders of our child flitted across my life . . . just often enough to keep me going. But then, after a number of months (or was it years?), the messages grew less and less noticeable. I think I was beginning to "get on with my life" (one of the all-time favorite expressions of those who "understand"), and I guess I didn't NEED to have the contacts.

I noticed that I still clung to little things, though. I kept his picture very close to me. We had moved several times by then, and we no longer had any of his room furnishings or very many physical reminders of his presence in our life. We didn't

refer to the extra bedroom as HIS and life had settled into its usual circus pace. But, I still kept his blanket. I had wrapped it in tissue and placed it carefully in the cedar chest to lie in state until his big sister would one day need it for her child. But, I kept getting it out and hugging it.

I never told anyone that. I was afraid to. But I thought I could smell him whenever I held that small piece of soft wool. I KNEW I could pretend for a little while. And I KNEW I was going crazy.

Everyone in our family managed to keep something secret for years after Big A died. His big sister kept his favorite stuffed bear VERY CLOSE to her pillow--but out of sight. I found it only after bringing the bulldozer in one afternoon in an attempt to locate the bed. Dad kept a small treasure tucked away in his drawer and carried it with him whenever he went off to play Army.



Once, we discovered we were all going crazy when we asked a neighbor to look after the house while we were going on a two-week vacation. We handed over the keys, a list of phone numbers in case of emergencies and the pictures of Big A. She looked at us with sympathy and caution. I remember telling her the house could burn down or the burglars could take everything--except those pictures. We finally put them in the safety deposit box. Everyone else in the world keeps important papers and jewels in their safes--we keep a few photographs, our only tangible link to what was.

We once discovered a widowed friend of ours often wore her late husband's bathrobe. (I sometimes wonder if my dad wears my mom's . . . but I don't dare ask.) Many of us sleep with an extra pillow to hug during the night. We sometimes set a place at the table "by accident" or keep the pipe filled and slippers in the closet. We are reluctant to rearrange THE ROOM or even to touch the things--and when we do manage to touch and clean and rearrange, we always keep something for ourselves.

It may not be much (to anyone else), but to us, that tiny secret something is the one link we have with the reality that someone we loved DID LIVE. Because, after awhile, we may begin to wonder if that life ever really did happen. We do seemingly strange things; little routines that we may not even realize are a part of our beings. We sit in the same place, regardless of how many are at the table. We keep a lookout "just in case" knowing "just in case" will never REALLY come.

We treasure the objects of our loved ones more now than when they were alive. It becomes difficult to throw away anything they touched.

However, as I discovered when the yard began to nag me, perhaps I really am crazy. Do I hear voices that aren't there? Doesn't everyone hear the driver-in-the-next-car's thoughts? Can't you hear the phone ABOUT to ring just as you get into the tub (or sit down on the potty)?

Has my hearing become more sensitive? Am I more in tune or out of tune with the rest of the world? Or am I going crazy? Does it matter to anyone else that I still have our son's holiday place mat? It's tucked way down below all the other tablecloths in the drawer. I can't--no I don't want to--toss it away. It's ours. It's our grief, our pain, our healing. And the rest of the world will just have to figure out how to live with our craziness or pretend to understand!



No one ever talks about these "unusual behaviors" or secrets. Few books tell us it's "normal" to hang on to tiny mementoes of the past. But no one thinks it weird to keep the old high-school yearbooks. No one thinks it's unusual to still have your wedding dress or a corsage or your first shoes (which may be bronzed and on top of the TV). No one thinks it's crazy to remember . . . so why do we, the grievers of the world, suffer under the burden of fearing for our sanity?

Because we think WE SHOULD BE OVER IT BY NOW. And we SHOULD HAVE control over these things. We should have the grass mowed and the weeds

pulled and the dust bunnies eliminated and the dryer emptied and the bills paid and



the house clean and the meals nutritious, colorful and full of fiber. We SHOULD ourselves into insanity!

And that's when the grass begins to make sense.

I figure as long as the conversations I hear in my head don't lead me to tall bridges, sharp objects or dangerous encounters, I'll be OK. If those things begin to happen, then I do need to talk with someone besides the microwave. But, for most of us . . . being crazy is simply a matter of being in touch with ALL of our self . . . the outer reality that everyone sees (and assumes represents the inner us). And being in tune with the interior parts, the secret self who may reside within, and not being afraid of who we are NOW.

The past is past, but only if we allow it to be. Sometimes, we need to carry it with us. Sometimes, we need to let it rest. Sometimes, we can't figure out quite what we need; and sometimes, we don't even know how to know what it is we do need! But, that seems to be the "normal" state of the human race.

It isn't enough to say it's OK to be crazy . . . maybe for you, it's not OK. But for me, being crazy is simply a state of mind, and I can change my mind anytime I want. I am a WOMAN! (Sorry, guys.) I don't think we're really crazy in the medical sense until we don't realize we are.

But most of you reading this just think you are the only one who has ever heard the frozen Oreos calling your name in the middle of the night. (I answer!) Or you are the ONLY ONE who still has "the bathrobe" or dreads trout season. (Christmas is no big deal if your loved one was a fisherman, but the sight of a casting rod or the smell of a bait shop . . .) We ALL have our little secrets--sometimes kept secret even from ourselves.

I quit thinking of them as signs of abnormal behavior long ago and I've been happier ever since! Now, when I hear his sigh or get a quick glimpse of his smile in the sun, I just say a silent, "Hi," and keep pushing the lawn mower.

Just remember, love doesn't stop talking to us just because we don't have to do its laundry anymore!

