

The Cure for



by Monika
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MFD

Both of my parents are involved in *Plain Truth* production, and will read this before it goes to print. They might expect me to say nice things about them. So, here goes: My parents are so great that they've been nothing but supportive as my husband and I took their youngest grandchild and moved 1,000 miles away without having actual jobs, using up all our savings and half our retirement fund in the process.

Rock on, Mom and Dad! You can definitely expect Mothers and Fathers Day cards this year. Most likely you won't get presents, though, because we live so far

away and shipping is expensive, and we're still getting on our feet after the move.

But this article isn't for people who have healthy relationships with their near-perfect parents, because I have it on good authority that there have only been two such relationships in recorded history, and neither of them is mine. This article is for the people who are secretly annoyed by Mothers and Fathers Day (*MFD*, for our purposes, if only because it sounds less like a holiday and more like a malady).

After all, it's not like God himself ordained *MFD*; it's simply a clever money-making scheme invented by the greeting card companies. On the other hand, so what? All holidays were invented by someone. Abraham Lincoln invented Thanksgiving, and some other illustrious founding father whose name I can't recall invented Independence Day. And that's fine, as far as that goes. Just because something is arbitrary doesn't make it meaningless.

If you have an especially troubled relationship with your mom or dad, you might sigh and stop reading right now. I don't blame you. Wounds inflicted by a parent

who is supposed to be your guardian and guide can take a lifetime to heal—and have a habit of leaving scars. But if your parents cause you an ordinary amount of exasperation, here's how to cope with *MFD*, as well as the other 363 days of the year.

Compassion is a useful starting point. They're not only your parents, they're also people who had

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complex lives before you were born, and who struggled with things, sometimes succeeded and sometimes failed. They made the choices that everyone makes—good and bad, well-intentioned and dreadfully misguided. Maybe your parents' way of relating to you has saddled you with multiple neuroses, or made it hard for you to find joy with your own spouse and children.

You're right. And you're not alone. Every single one of us is wading around in a steamy swamp of consequences—the consequences of other people's choices, stretching back to the dawn of humanity. When you picture yourself and your parents squishing through the

swamp together, it's easier to be “Zen” about your parents' effect on your life. (Can I say “Zen” in a Christian magazine?)

If compassion stumps you, try simple acknowledgement. After all, someone fed you when you were a kid. Someone lost sleep because of you. Someone wiped your poopy bottom. If you were extremely lucky, someone put cartoon-character bandages on your *boo-boos*. (If you were average lucky, you got skin-colored bandages, but they were nevertheless tenderly applied.)

This is no guilt trip. You don't need to feel guilty about your parents' sacrifices, because parents should make sacrifices, especially ones involving late nights and dirty diapers.

Acknowledge your parents' acts of love...even if they also made mistakes that have cost you countless hours and dollars in therapy. I'm not necessarily talking about forgiveness, but I am talking about a measure of clear-sighted grace. You don't have to pretend the bad stuff never happened in order to be grateful for the good stuff.

The bottom line is, the most profound way to honor your parents is to develop meaningful relationships with them. You can “reverse engineer” a friendship with your parents, working backwards from a point where you think you know everything about each other to realizing you don't really know all that much, and maybe you can discover some commonality of experience—or at least a shared taste for blue cheese.

It's not rocket science. It's much harder! How can you think of your mom and dad as people instead of just parents? How can you acknowledge their love without recalling the instances when they should have been more loving?

The funny thing is, the two



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things you want from your parents are the same two things they want from you—to be appreciated as an individual distinct from the parent-child relationship, and to be loved no matter what. □

Monika lives in Vancouver, Washington with her husband and their five-year-old daughter. She's currently at a local Hallmark store, searching for MFD cards.