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## **JOYFUL MUSINGS**

**By Joy Birnbach Dunstan, MA, LPC, MAC**

### **Bring Back That Lovin' Feeling**

There may be no better feeling in the world than being in love. New love is fueled by a chemical soup that makes the sun shine brighter, food taste better, and touch feel exhilarating. Unfortunately, those chemicals diminish after around eighteen months or so, and then it's up to us to keep a relationship vibrant and strong.

Don't let that old Righteous Brothers song become the theme in your house: *"You've lost that lovin' feeling, Now it's gone, gone, gone."*

Long-term relationships require maintenance to keep that lovin' feeling alive. After a decade or two, it's easy to take each other for granted. Those little things you once found endearing become irritating annoyances. Compliments and words of appreciation disappear as criticism and complaints take over. Conversation dwindles to mere exchanges of information about the chores for the day. Romance, and oftentimes your entire sexual relationship, becomes a thing of the past. *"Now there's no welcome look in your eyes when I reach for you. And now you're starting to criticize little things I do."* Closeness fades as each partner retreats into a protective cocoon of silence or verbal attacks.

To put the life back in your relationship, intimacy needs to be restored. Intimacy is a close, affectionate and loving personal relationship with another person, that sense of deep connection that comes from sharing ourselves with a trusted partner. Besides sharing ourself, it also requires accepting, listening, and embracing another as he or she opens and shares with you. Trust is key. Who wants to be vulnerable and open with someone who tells us how stupid or lazy or overweight we are?

Intimacy can be enhanced through lovemaking, but it is important to remember that sexual intimacy must *follow* emotional intimacy, especially for women. Foreplay is what happens in the 24 hours before you have sex.

Creating intimacy requires paying attention to your relationship by investing time and energy in it. It's great to have your own personal interests, but it's also important to have common activities, hobbies, and interests you can share with your partner.

Bring play and fun into your lives. Even everyday chores can be fun when done together with a lighthearted attitude. Laughter is essential, but don't forget there is a big difference between humor and sarcasm.

Share your thoughts and feelings openly and honestly with each other. This aspect of intimacy is clearly expressed by thinking of it as "into-me-

see." Notice, remember, and comment upon the great things about your beloved. One of the hallmarks of a good marriage is a ratio of a *minimum* of five positive comments to every one complaint.

Create a peaceful and relaxing home and environment, and a bedroom conducive to lovemaking. Bring romance back into your marriage. This can be as simple as a caring note left on the kitchen table or a surprise bouquet of flowers. Kiss. Kiss at least ten seconds every day. This may be one long kiss or ten short ones, but kiss.

Bring your best self to the relationship. Don't waste energy complaining about and trying to improve your partner. You're the only one you can change, so *be* the kind of partner you'd like to have instead of trying to change your partner. "*If you would only love me like you used to do. We had a love, a love you don't find everyday. Bring back that lovin' feeling. . .*"

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