

The Feelings Chart
By Darren Harrison

"Can you tell me what you're feeling right *now*?" The woman had nicely coiffed hair and long bangs that hung over the top of her spectacles. They couldn't be called glasses. They were too loud and silly looking, with bright purple rims and giant oval lenses. All her features were small and symmetrical, and the spectacles sat there heavy on the little bridge of her nose, looking cartoonishly out of place.

"Billy, can you point to the face on the chart that best shows what you are feeling, at this moment?"

Billy shifted on his chair. The small room the two of them occupied was carpeted and had a window with velvety looking curtains. Somebody had tried to decorate the room in such a way that imbued comfort but the hard chair and the fluorescent lighting gave it away for what it really was - an office.

He was still thinking about the word spectacles. What a goofy and absurd word. He remembered the little rhyme his father would say before he left the house so that he wouldn't forget anything; "spectacles, testacles, wallet, and watch". His father was a very severe man and the rhyme was one of the few instances that Billy ever saw him being clownish.

"Billy? Can you find what you're feeling here on the feelings chart?"

"I guess...this one" Billy said as he leaned forward and pointed to the little yellow circle containing two big eyes with little dots down in the left corner and a zig-zag mouth like a zipper. On the poster there were many other little circles, each wearing a different expression with a word printed below it. At the top in block letters it said HOW ARE YOU FEELING TODAY?

"Can you read what it says there underneath?" the woman asked.

Billy squinted and said "Nervous."

"Good, goooooood," said the woman. "Can you think of another word for nervous?"

"Um. Anxious, maybe?"

"Yes. Good. It's important to be able to name our feelings. The first step is always to put a name to the emotion. Then we can think about why we might feel that way. Can you tell me why you are feeling anxious?"

"Well," Billy shuffled his feet on the thin carpet, "I just feel a little weird."

The woman tilted her head and looked back at Billy quizzically.

"I uh. It just feels kind of weird, you know, to talk about this stuff."

The woman nodded seriously. Billy knew she was wanting more and he was struggling to find the words.

"I guess it's just that I don't really know what I'm supposed to say."

The woman gave him a forgiving smile. "When you were outside in the waiting room I saw that you were reading a magazine about archaeology. Do you like archaeology?"

Billy gave a curt nod.

"Sometimes it's hard for us to know why we are feeling a certain way, and so we need to be like the archaeologist and do a bit of digging. Do you understand what I mean by that?"

Billy's eyes narrowed and moved to the top corner of the room. "I think so. You have to uncover things that are buried."

"Yes Billy, that's exactly what I mean!" she said, a little too enthusiastically.

"I think I feel anxious because...this is a new situation for me and... I've never really done this before."

"That's great Billy. Now you've *identified* your emotion, and you've *attributed* it to something. Can you remember from before what our next step might be?"

"Uhhhh..."

"Starts with an A."

"Accept?" Billy said hesitantly.

The woman nodded and smiled so big that her unnaturally white teeth gleamed like tiny versions of the Roman pillars Billy had seen a picture of in the magazine about archaeology.

Billy exited the office and walked a little way down the sidewalk. He leaned back against the red brick building, across from the big standing ashtray that stood on the edge of the sidewalk. The afternoon sun was shining and the tops of the large oaks that lined the street were shimmering green and silver in the breeze. They shaded the sidewalk and building and the brick felt cool through his button-up shirt. He checked his watch. Just enough time for a quick smoke. He

pulled a package of cigarettes from his front shirt pocket and lifted his leg to strike a match on the heel of his cowboy boot.

He took a long drag on the cigarette, then tilted his head back against the cool brick and exhaled slowly.

When his smoke was finished he dropped it into the sand in the top of the cylindrical ashtray, took the keys out of his jeans pocket and got into his long box pick-up truck. He drove slowly for a couple of blocks to another brick building and then parked again. He rolled the window down and scanned the entrance. The quiet exterior came to life as children began piling out of the dual front doors, laughing and howling their freedom cries.

The passenger door of the truck opened and a school bag was hoisted up into the cab. Billy grabbed it with his right hand and pulled the bag into the middle of the bench seat. A little mop of golden hair piled in after it and then used two arms to pull the door shut.

"Hi dad."

"Hello son."

Billy started the truck and adjusted the rearview mirror. He pulled out of the parking spot slowly and in behind a brown car with a yellowed and cracked baby-on-board sticker in the window.

The boy was quietly looking out the side window, watching some kids racing down the sidewalk.

"Hey son?"

"Yeah dad?" he turned from the window and looked up at his dad's face, his grey whiskers twinkling silver in the sunlight.

"How...how are you feeling, right now?"

The boy blinked back at his dad. He was expecting the usual *how was your day?* He waited for a moment to see if this was some kind of trick question but his dad's eyes kept shifting from the road back to him expectantly.

"I'm feeling...happy I guess? Happy school's over and I get to come home."

Billy glanced at his son and grinned. "How about we go for some ice cream first?"

The boy's eyes sparkled blue and he was lost for words.

As they sat in the truck with their ice cream cones the boy suddenly stopped licking and looked at his dad. Billy stared back.

"Dad?"

"Yeah?"

"How are *you* feeling?"

Billy thought for a second and then said; "I feel....happy. Yeah. Yeah, I'm happy too."