

On pain, courage and moving forward

The new year has brought out a lot of sentiment to move on and not look back. "It's a new day," some people say about Washington, D.C., or about the vaccine. "Looking forward" is a reassuring phrase and truly a helpful thing; when you're feeling sick on a boat at sea, one remedy is to get your face in the wind and gaze in the direction the boat is headed.



by
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Looking backward is not viewed so highly. The root of the word nostalgia means sickness from wanting to return home. In Genesis, Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt for looking back at the devastation of Sodom, the city her family had left behind.

So it is confusing and unsettling when, after a terrible event, your mind goes back to it again and again. Like many Camp Fire survivors, for instance, I go back to Nov. 8, 2018. It is almost as if

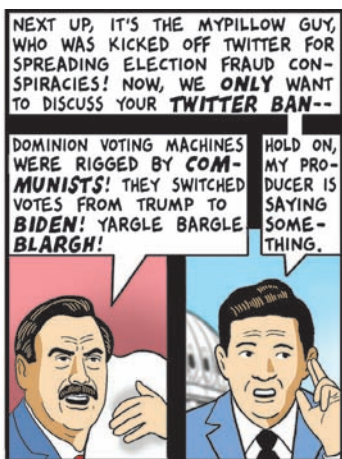
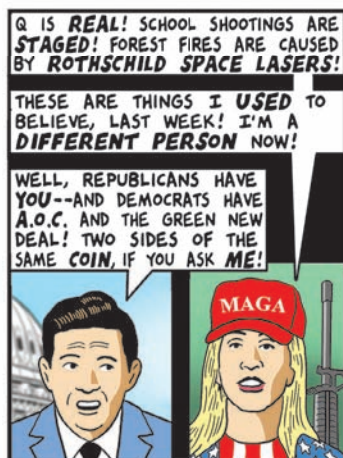
your mind is being cruel, bringing you to the same moment in time over and over.

I have found, however, receiving and providing therapy, that painful recurring memories also come with an invitation. They can be a story to tell. If that sounds easy or simple, then you are not thinking of an incident you wish had never happened. Something you have longed to forget.

So it is with courage you tell someone what happened. And then you tell someone again. With repetition, the story loses some of its sting. You may also find that it, naturally, seems different. You can't step into the same river twice, the old saying goes. The details may be the same, but your sense of the story, the meaning of it, isn't. You may like the changes, or not, but the feeling of being stuck with an awful, unchangeable memory is gone.

By going back to what is painful, you get to move forward. It sounds counterintuitive, but that's how I've found life is sometimes. To let the arrow fly, you have to pull back the bowstring first.

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BY TOM TOMORROW

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