



One reason the music of James Taylor has had such staying power is that he tells stories with universal themes. “JT” – to those of us who grew up singing along with his gorgeous harmonies – sings of life’s rhythms, its ups and downs. “When this old world starts getting you down....” What a concept that even a famous musician might have those “off” days, but of course he does. We all do.

I remember in my 20’s, when I’d broken up with someone, my sympathetic mother was listening to yet another of my phone diatribes on how he’d “done me wrong” and “I’d thought this was the one” and “would I ever find a good man?” For a while she hung in patiently, murmuring sympathetic reassurances. Finally, she gave me a piece of life wisdom.

“You’ll have lots of great days in your life,” she said. “Embrace them with all your heart. But know that the down times will always come, too. Just think of those as growth spurts you have to work your way through and learn from.”

Sighing, I replied, “I’ll be glad when I’ve outgrown *those*.”

A few seconds of total silence followed on her end, probably to keep from laughing. “Well,” she finally said, “I’m 64 and I’m still having them.” I remember being appalled that I’d never reach a point in my life when I’d finally achieve happiness and ride off into the sunset in pure bliss forever. I didn’t want to believe her. Bless my heart.

However, I’ve now lived long enough to know that she was right. As she used to say, “You’re not the only pebble on the beach.” Those days of feeling “down doobie-do-down-down” happen

to everyone. Maybe even a few in a row. Sometimes you can see them coming, while other times they just sneak up on you and club you over the head.

Learning whatever has been presented for you to learn is a good focus, but survival is key. And having a fallback of “emotional tools” can help you make it through. A few ideas follow.

Mother Nature is without a doubt the *best* healer, so get outdoors and immerse yourself in some of the amazing array of options in our gorgeous South Carolina Lowcountry. Take a stroll on the Spanish Moss Trail and let the sun warm your face; ogle egrets poking for supper in the low-tide pluff mud and see the sun set from a comfy bench. Hit the beach at Hunting Island, inhale the salt air, admire those lovely dolphins arcing through the waves, and climb the lighthouse, perhaps to work off that pint of Haagen-Dazs you inhaled last night. Or just set up a folding chair on the Bay Street Bluff, watch the tide come in and enjoy *not* being in the bridge traffic.

My second suggestion is to write about what’s going on and how you feel about it all. The old “Dear Diary” route. If you choose, keep a journal for just that purpose and fill it with gripes and grumps. I know that if I don’t write on a regular basis about any stressful issues going on in my life, I can become “emotionally constipated” and writing about them becomes literary prune juice!

Another benefit to penning your peeves can be improved physical health. In his best-selling book *Back in Control: A Surgeon’s Road Map Out of Chronic Pain*, spine surgeon Dr. David Hanscom promotes writing daily about whatever’s on your mind, then tearing those pages up and throwing them away. That’s part of a program that helped him heal his 15-year chronic pain.

The next tool is to make a “Who Cares?” list of people who care about you and vice versa. Keep it handy and when those down-in-the-dumps set in, reach out and make a call. Depending upon your relationship with a particular person on the list, you can ask how *their* day’s going and give them a lift, which always helps you feel better. Or you can just have a good ol’ let-it-all-out whine session. Get it off your chest, thank them roundly and go on with your day.

Yet another possibility is to do a task or tasks that require little thought, just rote doing. Like washing the car, mowing the grass, cleaning the bathroom, weeding the flowerbed, cleaning out the kitchen “catch-all” drawer, doing laundry. Don’t make it too big a job and set yourself up for failure. You’re not trying to dispel the shoulda/coulda/woulda’s here. Those can become involved activities. Make a list of do-ables that don’t take too long, that allow you to see your accomplishment when finished, like a stack of clean clothes atop the dryer or a yard mowed to checkerboard perfection. Keep that list ready for a time you need a boost. Then pick one and rock with it. You’ll feel at least a little better when it’s done.

Though there are certainly many more, the last tool in this particular toolbelt has several interchangeable parts. It’s simple. Get quiet. Sit in a comfy chair and do a bit of deep breathing. Integrative medicine specialist Dr. Andrew Weil recommends inhaling through your nose to the count of 4, holding that breath to the count of 7, and exhaling completely through your mouth to the count of 8. Repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four complete breaths.

You can meditate. Find a slew of Deepak Chopra’s terrific guided meditations on YouTube. Take a nap, or listen to an audio book. Revel in stillness.

Just for clarity, I’m not talking about clinical depression. If that’s your issue, get professional help. There’s lots available. My focus is your basic everybody-gets-‘em-sometimes blues that can feel as if you’re the only suffering soul in the world for a while. You know, the “this, too, shall pass” (my grandmother’s talking now) variety.

And if all else fails, you can always join JT “up on the roof”...