

How's it Going?

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A lot of people have been asking me how I'm doing lately.



WHERE THE
HELL IS
WAYNE, ME

"Chris," they say, "how are you doing?"

I've given this question a lot of thought. I'm not doing well. I've been a little down. I may just be depressed. Slightly.

Which is fine, which would be fine, if everyone would just stop asking about it. I can't go to the bathroom without passing somebody who wants to know how I'm doing, without passing somebody who has a deep interest in my emotional well being. "How's it going?" they ask.

"Good," I reply, without thinking. The American Medical Association estimates that half the people who suffer from depression go untreated and undiagnosed. It's easy to see why. I don't even give it a second thought anymore when someone asks me how I'm doing. Fine. Good. Great. Alright. How're you?

"What's up," "How's it going," and "How are you?" have replaced "Hello" as the greeting of choice in this country, and most people are so automatic in their response that the questions have lost nearly all meaning entirely. Especially now, in the full-on doldrums of March, there's no way so many people are fine, or good, or great, or even okay. I know I'm not.

And being a guy, I'm trapped. Women build support groups for themselves, they set them up in advance. They choose their friends to complement each other, and they train them to compliment them-

selves. They buy tissues and low-calorie ice cream, and they stockpile them away, behind the hand towels and underneath the ice cube tray and the box of frozen spinach. Women take hot baths and set aside special, scented hand lotion and aromatherapy candles. Women talk and cry and grieve. Women bury their faces in pillows and scream and pound their fists into their bed, and then women tear up and throw away pictures of ex-boyfriends and fathers

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Back in high school, back when I shaved but didn't have to, back when I couldn't dance, my parents, kind and worried, sent me once to a psychologist. He was tall and thin. He had glasses that were comically plastic and orange, and much too big for his face. I kind of felt like our roles should have been reversed.

As near as I could gather, this man needed counseling far more

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and feel better ten-fold, better than they've felt in months. I know all these things about women not because I am intuitive, or caring, or effeminate, or a good listener even. I know all these things about women because I have read "Bridget Jones's Diary."

Men do none of these things. We talk to each other sometimes. We talk about papers and classes and weekends, and sometimes we talk about women. Most of us haven't sat down in a bathtub since our mothers last bathed us, and I, at least, am lactose intolerant. Men do none of these things.

Men, in my experience, live in a more central state of emotional being. We are never as happy, sad, excited, or melancholy as our female friends. We don't often, as a whole, cry at movies, or become giddy with the announcement of a newborn cousin. Men shy away from their emotional fringes. That said, when we slip outside of the comfortable middle we've created for ourselves,

than I ever did. But, for insurance purposes, we began by trying to find out just what was wrong with me. It was important that we pin a label on it, identify it, whatever it was. We sat in a sparsely furnished room with a wooden floor, and I sat in a rocking chair while he flipped through a small red book. The chair creaked and rubbed against the graying floorboards. He read me a list of symptoms from the book, and I nodded yes or no while I studied the crooked molding on his window, overlooking one of Augusta's busy rotaries. We ticked through a few conditions. Apparently, I was depressed. I thanked him and left.

Over our next couple of sessions, we talked about a lot of things. The man with the orange glasses, he hated psychiatrists. Pill pushers, he said. They think they can solve everything with a prescription. Assholes, he called them. He swore a lot, I used to think it was to gain my trust. It shocked me the first couple of times, shocked me to

hear an adult speak that way so casually. He smoked, and I waited in a little room with outdated copies of "Wired" and "Psychology Today" while he stood, shivering, outside.

We talked about the current political climate. Bush and Gore were in the early stages of their candidacy then, and we talked about sports and school and the price of gasoline. Sometimes we sat there in silence, and I learned to arrange my arms so I could see my watch without moving my wrist.

After three sessions, I concluded that the way out of my professionally diagnosed condition didn't lie in the professional that diagnosed it. I told the funny-looking man that I felt much better, he'd been a great help, and that I wouldn't be coming back next week, or the week after.

I later found out he told my parents I'd said that therapy was "bullshit" and that I didn't want any part in it.

Which brings me back to the original question: how am I doing? I'm not fine, or good, or okay, but at some point I will be. That, really, is what I learned from a few hundred dollars of well-spent therapy money. Men have to pull themselves out of whatever mental state they wander into. Men need four-wheel-emotional-drive. Men need bootstraps.

And I have these things.

So I will pull and drive and beat my doldrums from my body, and send them moping and complaining to the tall, thin man with orange glasses. And he will open his little red book, and shut them inside. He will smoke and swear, and rock back and forth on his gray wooden floor, and he will set down his red book, and flip absently through an ancient copy of "Wired Magazine." And then, I will no longer be down.