

# MOODS

Serving People with Unipolar and Bi-polar Illness, Their Families and Friends, since 1981

April 2016

## From the Chair by Dr. Li Faustino

Many years ago our newsletter was a hard copy publication that went straight from our printer to your mailbox. Each issue featured a letter from the Chair about things that were going on at our organization. Now our newsletter is electronic and it has been awhile since our Chairperson has written a letter.

An exciting change at MDSG is our modification of the lecture series. Coming up this year, we are planning workshops for our members and the public that are educational, supportive and community-building. We featured a test run about a year ago and it was a great success, so look for more soon!

We are also working on a new website and have added new officers to our board, which we think will bring us new energy and relevance.

Most importantly, our support groups continue. We never stop striving to provide a safe and non-judgmental environment for our group participants. This means that even though we have been offering groups for decades, we need to respond continuously to the modern day issues that arise. In order to facilitate this goal, our volunteers and board members are working on new policies and

guidelines to protect our groups.

Lastly, I would like to thank my predecessor, Paul Urbanski. His vision, patience, diplomacy, and tireless dedication to MDSG made it definitely better after him than before, and I can only hope to have as positive an impact during my time as chair.

So I write this letter in the spirit of the past to highlight the bright future at MDSG. And we wish you the best in fighting these devastating illnesses.

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## The Reader's Corner with Betsy Naylor

Uncovering Happiness

By Elisha Goldstein, PhD

Atria Books, 2015

320pp.

Humans have always been on the lookout for calamity. Our cave-dwelling ancestors lived in constant danger and had to be alert at every moment. Hence it's no surprise that negative thinking has carved deep routes into our outlook on life. But part of what happens with depression is that the mind goes deeper and harsher into a vicious circle of self-criticism. We berate ourselves, telling ourselves things

we would never say to another person. Then we ruminate on them, repeating the cycle and upping the pain.

*Uncovering Happiness* outlines a path to counteract this. Elisha Goldstein, PhD, is a psychologist who cites evidence that we can change our depressive thinking by tapping into the brain's natural power for healing.

The first step involves mindfulness. This is the practice (and yes, it takes plenty of practice!) of being actively engaged in the present. With mindfulness we focus our attention on noticing feelings and events without getting lost in them. This is akin to

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## The Reader's Corner

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Buddhist practices, though Dr. Goldstein only twice mentions Buddhism, once in a footnote and in his introduction.

Mindfulness interrupts the spiral of depression by helping us observe ourselves without engaging – and thus validating – our negative thoughts. "We are not our thoughts" Dr. Goldstein writes, and "Thoughts are not facts."

Self-compassion is another key element in healing. We naturally feel compassion for others, like the thousands of migrants in Europe in the rain. But we must also have compassion for ourselves. When we are hurting we need comfort, and to some extent we are able to comfort ourselves. Learning to do this regularly, and acting on the inclination to help ourselves, takes practice.

Dr. Goldstein notes that self-criticism is essentially a strategy that uses a thorn to remove a thorn. He notes that "We spend a lot of effort protecting or avoiding our thorns; this merely keeps the thorn in place. Only through approaching them can we see how to pull them out and care for the wound they caused."

A third ingredient in happiness is play. Yes, play. Dr. Goldstein urges us to do things that are fun for the sake of fun, that keep us in the moment, connect us with others, and give us hope. Being a bit silly helps us lighten up, and maybe even smile.

*Uncovering Happiness* does not discuss medication, biology, or brain chemistry. Dr. Goldstein's focus is on how we can

change our lives by practicing mindfulness and self-compassion, softening the harsh inner criticism which fuels the negative downward spiral of depression. These techniques offer an alternative to ruminating on our pain, allowing us to step back with openness of mind, curiosity, and understanding of what is going on.

Some questions that might help us change include:  
- What is my purpose in life?  
This question goes deeper than counting accomplishments and material goods.  
- How much time am I willing to invest in learning how to change my perspective?  
- How do I want to be remembered? Focuses on your values and what matters most.

What Dr. Goldstein says makes sense. *Uncovering Happiness* is a thought-provoking and potentially life-changing book. If you're interested in buying the book, you might take a look at this brief [Huffington Post article](#) by the author. It's worth a read.

### .Ask the Doctor

Send your questions about depression and bi-polar illness to

[newsletter@mdsg.org](mailto:newsletter@mdsg.org)

Questions will be answered by a psychiatrist or psychologist as appropriate. Questions will be answered as space in MOODS permits.

## As Read Elsewhere

Wall Street Journal: Dr. Leana Wen, the health commissioner for the city of Baltimore, in an opinion piece, writes that many emergency room doctors are unaware that a benzodiazepine, such as Xanax or Valium, when combined with an opioid, such a Percocet or OxyContin, could be fatal.

Science News Magazine: Preliminary studies suggest that the right bacteria in your gut could brighten mood and perhaps even combat mental disorders including depression according to a research review. Gut bacteria can be improved by eating probiotic food such as yogurt or kefir. A diet heavy in "prebiotic foods" such fiber, garlic, onion, and asparagus is also recommended.

Did you know that May 5 is National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day?

Mood Disorders Support Group  
New York

### MOODS

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