Jill Baughan

TRANSCRIPT FOR EPISODE 29
AN UNOFFICIAL, INCOMPLETE GUIDE TO FINDING JOY DURING A PANDEMIC

I'm Jill Baughan, and you're listening to the podcast called Find Joy...No Matter What.

This is Episode 29.

If you're in a tough place right now, your joy may seem like it's hiding--or gone.

I understand. But it's still there, I promise, just waiting to be resurrected. And this podcast is designed to help you do just that...no matter what else is going on in your life.

For just a few minutes each week, I'll tell you a story--one that might inspire a way to uncover a piece of joy you've been looking for. Then, we'll consider how it could speak to your life, because even though you'll hear quite a few of my stories during our time together, I believe you'll find your own in every one of mine.

Finally, I'll offer a benediction to send you into your day--or into your night.

So. If you're up for doing joy shots with a friend today...have a listen. (Music fades)

By now you are thoroughly acquainted with The Pandemic.

It seemed like it descended so quickly...and then refused to leave, lingering on and on, like Cousin Eddie in *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation*: uninvited, rude, inappropriate, and unsettling, making you want to just pack up and run away. Somewhere. Anywhere out of its reach.

And even though I'm writing this weeks before you'll hear it, I'm guessing that you're still dealing with the lifestyle, and you're just--understandably--over it.

If so, while we wait for the other side of this thing, may I offer you a little encouragement in the form of a few helpful hints for finding some joy in the midst of pandemic unknowns? I learned these from another unfortunate incident of my own.

Not so long ago, Ben and I took a fateful little trip to Savannah, Georgia. It was the weekend that a hurricane was due to hit the East Coast. But since it had veered off into the Atlantic, we figured we were just in for a little rain as we traveled south.

And this held true on the way down. On the way back, however, we were forced off of I95 at the little town of Manning, South Carolina because the interstate was flooded for 75 miles.

We got off at the exit and turned left. To our dismay, all we saw was a flooded road (as in, the water was up to the waists of the people who had jumped out of their stalled truck), and people were lining the road, just sitting in their cars.

This was rather disconcerting, but we'd encountered flooded roads and detours in road trips before, no big deal.

So we went the other direction, only to find the same problem. We stopped at a little local gas station, and asked the owner about alternate routes out of town.

His response, accompanied by a slightly sinister smile, was “You folks might as well get a room and plan on staying a while.”

"Whaaaat??" we said. "There *has* to be a way out of here!"

"Nope!" he said, almost triumphantly.

And after a little research, we found out that he was right. No way out. As in NO way out. It was like a scene from some creepy Stephen King movie.

We called the local police who directed us to a high school where the Red Cross had set up a shelter in the gym, so we had no choice but to hoof it on over. There were only a few people there, until a tour bus arrived. And then the truckers, who had been rescued by police and *told to leave their rigs on the interstate*, trudged in. And as the day dragged on, more people dragged in: people of all sizes, all ages, all stations of life. We had one thing in common, though: nobody wanted to be there, having our lives all interrupted like that.

At first, it was like a little game; we figured we'd be out of there later that day.

But as hours crawled by, we realized we weren't escaping any time soon. We were bummed and increasingly agitated.

Let's be honest, though: this could have been much worse. It wasn't the Super Dome during Katrina. We were safe and dry, and the Red Cross, bless 'em, provided cots, blankets and pillows.

Unfortunately, we found, they did not provide clean underwear.

But people were generally very nice to each other, and as the hours passed at a glacial pace, we had no choice but to make our own entertainment. We talked with each other, made a few new friends, played Scrabble (no idea where that came from!), shared magazines, and swapped stories.

The Red Cross and local authorities did their best to offer us what closely resembled food (our first encounter with Meals Ready to Eat) (hopefully our last) (Ask anyone who's been in the military.) Plus we grazed on whatever was in the vending machines until we emptied them out of Famous Amos chocolate chip cookies, Little Debbies, animal crackers and Sun Chips.

Boredom, obviously, does not inspire good nutrition.

The biggest challenge, though, was not the food or the boredom. The biggest challenge was the unknown.

We had no idea when we could get out--the next day, the day after, the day after that? Maybe never, ever.

Welcome to the Hotel California.

We spent the night there, in what I imagine to be an introvert's nightmare: a big ol' group sleep, nose-to-nose with 100 strangers.

The next day, more hours crawled by, and we were forced to do the old summer camp trick of turning our underwear inside out since...you know...we were trying to stay "fresh" with limited resources.

And it was about then that the inside of my head descended into darkness. You may know this feeling, when you find yourself in an undesirable situation--all perspective goes to the dogs and you end up stewing in your own pitiful juice.

It is not unlike living in and through a pandemic, right? Let's be honest, who hasn't indulged in a little episode of spiral mind in the past few months? How low can you go in your head and in your spirit? How many times have you asked yourself or people around you or even no one in particular, "When and how will we get out of here? When will this all be over and turn into a story we can tell our grandchildren some day?"

If this is a little bit true for you, may I offer a few survival skills to preserve your joy in these times, based on our experience in the Flood Zone?

1. Have some fun somewhere in the middle of all this.

In Manning, SC, the rain would let up on the second day, and the police told us there was no way we were exiting that night.

Since I talk about finding joy no matter what a lot, I figured I'd better get crackin' on a little something that would be fun, even in a shelter.

I had an idea.

The local ladies in the kitchen who showed up and stayed and worked just to feed us didn't have to be there. Why not show them a little love? I had my phone. I could make an appreciation video. That would be fun.

So I walked into the kitchen, introduced myself, learned their names, told them I needed to reassure my daughter that we were doing fine, thanked them for taking such good care of us, and asked if I could interview them on camera. They were delighted. And delightful.

Likewise, we need to be proactive about having a little fun, even during a crisis. It does not discount the seriousness of our circumstances; rather, regaining some perspective is vital to our mental health. All joy has not drained out of the universe; you may need a reminder. Make a list of activities that bring you joy. Then go and do a few. Please. For your sake and the sake of those around you.

2. Say thank you, thank you, thank you.

Eventually, I shared the video of these wonderful ladies with the Mayor of Manning, all the first responders and the Red Cross, just to thank them for their hospitality and for giving us a safe port in the storm.

We, too, must remember to be consistently grateful to God and anyone for any kindness--and I mean *any* kindness--shown to us. Someone opens a door for you. Someone sings a song that lifts your spirits. Someone shares food. Someone cleaning a restroom you're using. You might even start a photo journal of something good that happens every day, like the kind I described in Episode 19.

3. Comfort each other.

One of our new friends, was a lady who was traveling solo, and uneasy about the overnight arrangement. She asked if she could set up her cot next to ours. (Apparently we appeared "safe." Go figure.) We learned she was on her way to see her mother, who was in hospice care, nearing the end of her life. Ben and I (and the family on the other side of her cot) did our best to surround her. And that first night, when we saw her weeping on her phone, we rushed over.

"My mother died without me," she said. "I tried. I tried to get to her, but she died without me."

And we did just about the only thing you can do: we cried with her.

Who among your friends, has lost a loved one in this season? Who has had the misfortune of getting sick during this inconvenient time? Who is just plain freaking out, having to make decisions about their kids' education and a thousand other deep concerns? We can't resolve their issues, but we can be a steady, comforting presence that just might talk a friend off the ledge for today.

4. And finally: Relax and remember that the path to the other side of this thing isn't going to be a straight line.

Around 8:00 the second night, Ben decided to take an Advil PM to help him get some rest. Then around 10:00, a state trooper came in to tell us they met with the Governor and the Mayor and whatever other officials make decisions, and were doing everything they could to get us out of there, but it probably wouldn't be that night. They had to get the trucks off the interstate before the rest of us could exit. So we settled in.

And then, twenty minutes later, he was dashing into the gym, yelling at the truckers to follow him out. And not ten minutes after that, the National Guard bounded in with a lot of drama, and yelled (lots of yelling that night) to the rest of us, "If you want to leave, you have to leave NOW!" Bridges were being washed out and dams were breaking, and it was gonna get worse before it got better. If we waited until morning, it would be too late, and we'd be stuck there for several days, at least.

This would have been great news if Ben, the only authorized driver of our rental car, hadn't taken those pesky SLEEP meds. But amid all the flying pillows and blankets and people, a compassionate Red Cross worker gave him her last Monster (caffeine loaded) drink, and told us to call her when we landed somewhere safely for the

night. So we all jumped into our cars, formed a convoy with a police escort to I95, waited an hour for the trucks pass us, and were led about twenty miles out of town (down the closed interstate!) to Route 26 where, the trooper told us, “You’re on your own from here on out.”

At 2:00 a.m., we got the last room at a Hampton Inn in Columbia, did a face-plant into the bed, got up four hours later, drove south, then west, then east, then north, and got home around 4:00 p.m.

This crisis isn't over.

But please know that you, too, will arrive on the other side.

You don't know when or even exactly how you'll get there. You've already encountered the unexpected in uncharted territory, and you've probably felt like there was an authority figure at your back, yelling, "You're on your own from here," and sending you into the dark without clear directions.

But please know that somehow, some way, some day, you will look back on a road full of detours, twists and turns, unexpected exits, and find--maybe just as unexpected--some beautiful scenery.

And so, my friends,

May you find the heart to pursue some fun these days.

May you remember to say thank you, thank you, thank you,

May you crawl out of your own funk long enough to help someone through theirs.

And may you find yourself trusting God through it all, and listening when He says, "Oh my child. All you have to do today is turn your underwear inside out and keep going."

Thanks so much for joining me.

If you know people who *need* a little encouragement to keep on keepin' on during this time of shared crisis, I invite you to share this podcast with them, and subscribe yourself on Apple Podcasts, or wherever you listen to podcasts. Or you can go to my website at jillbaughan.com, click on a podcast episode and sign up to receive

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episodes in your inbox. Just don't miss a single one, because I so look forward to being with you again soon.

Keep truckin' though storms and floods and detours and necessary sheltering of your own, my friends. And always, always remember, if you go looking for joy, you'll most likely find it.

Till next time...