

TRANSCRIPT FOR PODCAST EPISODE 72-HUG

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

This is Episode 72.

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 just might inspire a way to uncover a piece of joy you might be looking for. Then, we'll consider how it might 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.

Are you a "hugger"--someone whose natural inclination is to hug people in sorrow and gladness, and just as an informal greeting, just because?

Or maybe you're more inclined to shy away from the big squeeze?

Soon after my husband and I were married, it became evident to me that we had been born into differing "family hug" cultures. My family was not stingy with affection, but I learned right away that Ben's people hugged ALL the time. They hugged hello. They hugged goodbye. They hugged in between. When we visited them, I occasionally found myself retreating to the bathroom just to get a little space.

Mind you, I loved these folks right from the start, and totally understood being glad to see people you love after being apart. There's nothing like reunions that are joyful and exuberant and celebrative. And expressions of gladness after separation are natural and right.

But I had a hard time believing anybody could be THAT glad to see me because wow...*we lived across the street*, people. We saw them every day.

So if you are not prone to excessive hugging, I get it.

But consider this: During this past year, when we were limited in who we could hug, for safety's sake, we may have lost some significant ground when it comes to our health, because the emotional and even physical benefits of hugging are many.

Here are just a few:

A hug may make an individual feel happy by reducing feelings of loneliness and harmful physical effects of stress. Hugs can also change negative moods by helping the body and brain, boosting feel-good hormones, like

--Dopamine, the pleasure hormone

--Serotonin, the antidepressant hormone that elevates mood, controls anxiety and reduces feelings of loneliness

--Oxytocin, the “cuddle” or “love” hormone that reduces stress and boosts heart health and lowers blood blood pressure

A 10-second hug helps the body fight infections, eases depression and fatigue.

A 20-second hug reduces the harmful effects of stress. Now let me just say that 20 seconds is a loooong hug. Like this long: (wait 20 seconds). So it's probably a good idea to know the other hugger fairly well before you set a timer for that little marathon, right?

Nevertheless, research shows that a “proper deep hug” may also build trust and a sense of safety, and that “gentle pressure on the sternum and emotional charge stimulate the thymus gland, which regulates and balances the body's production of white blood cells, which keep an individual healthy and disease free. Hugging can also reduce aches and pains by increasing circulation to the soft tissue. It has even been shown to reduce the worry of mortality, making us feel safe and alleviating existential fear.”

[https://www.medicinenet.com/how do hugs make you feel/article.htm](https://www.medicinenet.com/how_do_hugs_make_you_feel/article.htm)

So, good grief, why aren't doctors writing more prescriptions for this stuff?

And if they did, what if you didn't have a huggie readily available for whatever reason?

Well, you have a couple options:

1. You could stand on a street corner with a sign that says “Free Hugs” and wait for bingo. Which isn't as outrageous as it may sound, since Juan Mann, the Australian founder of the Free Hugs Campaign, did just that. He says:

I'd been living in London when my world turned upside down and I'd had to come home. By the time my plane landed back in Sydney, all I had left was a carryon bag full of clothes and a world of troubles. No one to welcome me back, no place to call home. I was a tourist in my hometown.

Standing there in the arrivals terminal, watching other passengers meeting their waiting friends and family, with open arms and smiling faces, hugging and laughing together, I wanted someone out there to be waiting for me. To be happy to see me. To smile at me. To hug me.

So I got some cardboard and a marker and made a sign. I found the busiest pedestrian intersection in the city and held that sign aloft, with the words "Free Hugs" on both sides.

And for 15 minutes, people just stared right through me. The first person who stopped, tapped me on the shoulder and told me how her dog had just died that morning. How that morning had been the one-year anniversary of her only daughter dying in a car accident. How what she needed now, when she felt most alone in the world, was a hug. I got down on one knee, we put our arms around each other and when we parted, she was smiling.

Everyone has problems and for sure mine haven't compared. But to see someone who was once frowning, smile even for a moment, is worth it every time.

<https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/free-hugs-video-for-social-distancing-tbt/>

And thus, the Free Hugs Campaign was born. It's been described as a social movement involving individuals who offer hugs to strangers in public places. The hugs are meant to be random acts of kindness--selfless acts performed just to make others feel better. In fact, International Free Hugs Month is celebrated on the first Saturday of July and continues until August first.

So here we are.

Now, as you can imagine, initially there was a fair amount of distrust of Juan Mann's motives, but eventually that distrust gave way to a gradual increase of people willing to be hugged, with other huggers, both male and female, acting as distributors.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_Hugs_Campaign

And, as you can also imagine, such a campaign is not without risk on a number of levels. People all over the world have launched Free Hugs Campaigns with varying degrees of success, and you yourself might be thinking "In this perverse and crazy world, NO WAY am I thinking about hugging a stranger just because it's free."

But here's the thing: just the fact that someone felt the need to launch such a movement and hundreds of people who felt the need for positive human contact responded is a testimony to the value of--and our need for-- a simple hug.

But, if hugging strangers isn't your thing, you have another option: You can engage in some heavy duty cow cuddling.

Yes, cow cuddling. It's actually a thing these days, and gaining in popularity.

Listen to this report by Kellie B. Gormly in the Washington Post:

Renee Behinfar lives alone in Scottsdale, AZ. The pandemic has been painfully isolating for her and has left her longing for warmth and touch. On a recent afternoon, she finally was smothered in long-awaited hugs--by a 2,000-pound cow.

"It was my first real hug of the year," said Behinfar, 43, a psychologist who sought out bovine comfort with a friend.

People are signing up to hug cows at sanctuaries across the country, many desperate for affection [after} a year of social distancing during the pandemic. When Sammy the cow, who was rescued from a dairy farm, laid her head in Behinfar's lap and fell asleep, Behinfar began to cry. The pandemic, she said, has been a time of unprecedented loneliness.

"In the end, I really didn't want to let her go," Behinfar said.

Aimee Takaha cuddles Moothias at her sanctuary in Arizona. Takaha says she gets around 20 calls a day about her cow-cuddling service. The farm has about 100 rescued farm animals, many with disabilities. Cow-cuddling sessions cost \$75 an hour. Business has picked up dramatically in the past year.

"They're just like happy pills, just to be around," she said of the cows.

The nine cattle at her farm include Adorabull, an Angus steer rescued from a ditch; Moonicorn, who has one eye and one horn; and a miniature cow named Moochacha. The bovines will amble over to guests for hugs and cuddles, she said. They also like to roll over on their sides and rest their heads in people's laps...

The bovines helped Jeannie Whalen cope with grief after losing her husband, Walter, in May. She credits Moothias and other animals at Aimee's for comforting her.

"It brings a smile to my face and just a wonderful sense of awe," said Whalen, 76.

I am desperately searching for a viable cow-cuddling opportunity near my home. You might want to do the same. And word to the wise: All cows are not suitable for cuddling, so you can't just hop a random farm fence and help yourself, okay?

And if you can't find bovine ops near you, other animals will do: goats, lambs, all kinds of rescue animals. It really is biologically, emotionally--and even spiritually--good for what ails you.

And now that, this far along in the pandemic trajectory, and we are able to hug more freely, you might want to consider--even if you're not a "hugger"--including a few humans on your dance card.

And so, my friends,

May you remember that God hard-wired us to benefit from hugging,

May give thanks for this gift that costs nothing but a little time...and maybe a little space,

And may you recognize the need for such when someone in your orbit needs to be in the circle of at least one of your arms.

Thanks so much for joining me.

If you know people who could use a little contact-encouragement, I invite you to share this podcast with them, and subscribe yourself on iTunes, 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 episodes in your inbox. Just don't miss a single one, because I so look forward to being with you again soon.

Go on and hug someone, my friend. And always, always remember, if you go looking for joy, you'll most likely find it.

Till next time...

NOTES:

<https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/free-hugs-video-for-social-distancing-tbt/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_Hugs_Campaign

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2021/03/08/cow-cuddle-sanctuary-covid/>