

Jill Baughan

TRANSCRIPT FOR PODCAST EPISODE 93-RECEIVE

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

This is Episode 93.

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.

What's the most hideous gift you've ever received? And exactly *how* did you receive it?

Some people are really bad at hiding their amusement, disappointment, disgust, or disbelief. These people should take a cue from my mom.

Her birthday was December 4th, and when I was a child, I thought the most wonderful birthday gift I could give her was a corsage that she could wear during the Christmas season. She actually kept these in the drawer of her nightstand next to the bed.

Year after year, I blessed her with corsages made of fake snowmen, fake poinsettias, sparkly fake holly leaves and evergreen sprigs, and tiny goofy-eyed elves. I was proudest, though, the year I found a corsage with a disproportionately large aluminum snow shovel in the middle.

What right-minded adult designed this thing, I have no idea. Maybe it was a kid, because I remember being absolutely ecstatic at the thought of my mom parading around all of December with a snow shovel pinned to her chest.

It was, let's be honest, perfectly hideous.

But, you know, she accepted my offering like it was a diamond from Tiffany's, and actually wore it on her coat that season. (For the record, I never ever saw it again after that year, but whatever.)

And she did it because--news flash--she was my mother, and that's what mothers are prone to do. They know that the gift itself isn't even a little bit important; it's the relationship--the love made tangible that makes a tacky present so sweet.

They've perfected the art of "receiving well"--because--hear me--they **love the heart of the giver.**

We should watch and learn.

I know--it's not always that easy when you're gift-interacting with adults. To that end, someone wrote in to *Real Simple* magazine, asking this question:

A certain family member likes to give things that she clearly received for free. (Light-up Lipitor pen, anyone?) It has become quite offensive. Is there anything we can do? — K.E.

And author Catherine Newman responds: *I'm sorry. I know this is a real issue, but I can't stop laughing at the image of unwrapping a light-up Lipitor pen and feigning excitement. ("This is just what I wanted!") I'm aware that regifting of all kinds is a serious and rampant epidemic. And people who are prone to it—because of either financial restraints, laziness, or genetic predisposition—are unlikely to give it up. For the recipient, there's always that sting of "Ouch! You couldn't buy me a real gift?" along with the icky element of being part of an elaborate theater of deception. She's pretending to have bought you something; you're pretending to believe her. I say, if you're going to commit the act of regifting, just be honest and say, "OK, I got this as a present, and it's wonderful, but I'm never going to use it and thought you would love it." Then everyone feels a little less slimed. But as the recipient, no matter what useless piece of junk it is, your job is to accept it graciously. The truth is, a gift is just that: a gift. So I'd suggest adjusting your expectations along with your own, uh, generosity when planning the regifter's gift in return.*

If you exchange a gift, should you tell the person who gave it to you? — Name withheld by request

For my birthday, my wonderful, generous in-laws sent me a number of DVDs from Amazon. The fact that I already owned most of the movies they had chosen didn't take away from the thoughtfulness of the gift. In fact, it proved how well they know me and my taste. I wrote them a thank-you note, praising their choices and saying (OK, fibbing) that I couldn't wait to watch them. I then returned the DVDs to Amazon, thinking that at some point I would pick out a few

different films—or books or diapers or face creams or whatever other new, crazy thing you can now buy on that site.

A few days later, I received an e-mail from my father-in-law acknowledging my thank-you note but expressing confusion about an e-mail he had received from Amazon telling him that I had returned the gifts. In other words, not only was I busted for sending back the items but I was also busted for thanking my in-laws for something I had sent back. Yes, I'm officially the most polite liar ever to walk the planet. Knowing that the cover-up is always worse than the crime, I confessed to everything.

While my first reaction was to channel my humiliation at Amazon, upon reflection, I realized that this situation raises a larger issue: Even if you're pretty certain that the gift givers would prefer you to exchange their gift and be happy (as I'm sure my in-laws would have been), is it necessary to communicate such information? And if so, how? There's just something tacky and ungrateful-seeming about picking up the phone to say, "Thanks so much for the slow cooker. I already have one at home!" Or, worse, writing a thank-you note that says, "That scarf you gave me was so beautiful, I went ahead and exchanged it for something else."

But I have another perspective on this predicament, says Newman. My sister has returned many a present I've given her over the years. And while it used to sting when she told me, I now know not to take it personally, and I actually love getting the call in which she excitedly describes the new earrings she picked out for herself in exchange for the sweater I gave her. So I say that if you're close to the giver, or if she has said something like "The gift receipt is in there—please use it," then by all means take her up on the offer and let her know that you did. As for the rest of the gift-giving population? There's a real chance they might be personally offended, and in those cases, if you must return their gifts, keep that information to yourself.

Luckily, my in-laws were quick to forgive and even started ribbing me about the whole DVD fiasco. So, for me, maybe the moral of this story is to read Amazon's return policy very closely. And always buy my sister a gift certificate.

Ah, the dilemma of giving a simple gift has become rather complicated.

So author Rachel Miller gives us a few things to consider: She says that it's important to remember that

- *Not all "bad" gifts are created equal; there's a massive difference between a meh gift from a family member who doesn't know you particularly well versus an egregiously off gift from your partner of five years. (More on both in a bit.)*
- *Not everyone values gift giving, a reality that can be really hard to accept if you put a ton of time/money/energy into creating the perfect gift and expect others to do the same. But before you take any action, consider that you might be going above and beyond because it's important to you, but that the other person did enough by most standards.*

- *Yes, the thought absolutely counts!!! If someone, say, bought you a giant Houston Astros hat that's also a cat bed because you love both the Houston Astros and your cats—totally not realizing that this is something you'd never buy yourself because it makes zero sense in your home and couldn't be less your style—it's kind of hard to fault them for it. The person genuinely, honestly tried! Even if they obviously just walked into a Bath and Body Works and said, "What would a 25-year-old woman like?" and bought one of the gift baskets that a well-meaning employee recommended well... again, they tried!*
- *On the other hand, sometimes the reason a gift is upsetting is because it shows an unmistakable lack of thought from someone who you think about a lot, and who you expect to think about you, too. **And if you're feeling super upset about a bad gift, it probably isn't really about the gift.***

So what are some responses you can use when you get a terrible gift? Writer Debby Mayne has a few suggestions:

- *A simple, "[Thank you](#)," or if you're feeling a little extra kind, you might say something like, "Oh, wow! Thanks so much."*
- *"What an interesting gift. Is there a story behind it?" Stop talking and listen. You might be surprised to discover that more thought went into the gift than you originally realized. For example, the person may have purchased that item especially for you during his or her last vacation or trip abroad. Perhaps it's something that holds special meaning to the giver. Or maybe something you said triggered the idea for the gift.*
- *"This is such a thoughtful gift." While this is okay to say, your lack of enthusiasm may clue the person in to your true feelings, so be careful with this one.*
- *State what the gift is and show gratitude. For example, you can say, "A nose hair trimmer. Thanks!"*
- *"Thank you so much for such a generous and thoughtful gift." Make sure you smile, or this may come across as sarcastic.*
- *If this is a gift exchange with a large group, say, "Check it out, everyone. A marble-handled potato peeler." Then pass it around so everyone can admire it. This takes the attention away from you. Maintain a pleasant expression, in case people look to see your reaction.*

If you're thinking, "What a first-world problem--getting gifts you don't 'like'"-well, I think you're right. And for that reason, we'd all do well to turn our focus to loving the heart of the giver...as Kate Scott learned when she was very young. She tells this story:

When I was about 8, we had a secret santa gift exchange in my 4H club. The only rule was that it had to be home-made (at least in part).

The girl whose name I drew loved cats, so I spent a long time making her a jewelry box with a cat collage on it. Inside, there was a pair of earrings that were kitties.

I was beaming when she opened her gift- she loved it! Even her mom thought it was cool- I totally nailed it!

Then, I was told to get my gift. It was the only one wrapped in newspaper instead of regular wrapping paper, but I still had high hopes.

When I picked it up, it seemed to be....oozing?

I peeled the paper back and there was... peanut butter. Everywhere.

I looked a little closer and saw that there was a pinecone amidst the gooeyness. And a piece of string.

Awkwardly, I looked up towards my mom and my 4-H teacher for some sort of direction. "Help me" my eyes begged.

Finally, one of the other kids' moms said, "It's a bird feeder!"

I looked back down at the goopy mess in my lap.

I should mention: I was taught to always say thank you when you get a gift and to pretend you like it. I didn't know what to do, so I.... overshot the mark a little bit.

"It's wonderful! Wow! Thank you!" I yelled.

"This is the best gift ever! And you made it yourself?! My word, how magnificent! Gee golly, I want to run home right now and hang it up outside my window! Can you just imagine all the birds that I'll be able to see? And right outside my very own window?! Good heavens and gracious me! THANK YOU!"

The kids were all staring at me like I was a total nut-job.

I looked at my mom, hoping I had sold the act.

I couldn't quite tell her reaction, since her eyes were rolled so far back in her head.

Later, my mom said she figured out who my secret Santa was: the only girl in the room who was beaming from ear to ear when I made my thank-you speech.

And so, my friend,

Maybe this year, you've received a "gift" that's not something you want or even recognize-- maybe, figuratively speaking, a life-gift you have received is oozing.

And if that is true, and you don't care for what is under your tree or in your life this Christmas, may you consider the original Christmas gift--which came humbly, certainly not what anybody was expecting--from God Himself who most probably sat beaming, saying, "Just for you."

And then... may you concentrate on loving the heart of the Giver.

Thanks so much for joining me.

If you know people who are prone to giving you gifts that ooze, 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.

Fall in love with the giver's heart, my friend; be glad. And always, always remember, if you go looking for joy, you'll most likely find it.

Till next time...

NOTES:

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