

TRANSCRIPT FOR PODCAST EPISODE 182-THIS CHRISTMAS: TRY SOMETHING NEW

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

This is Episode 182.

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.

Sometimes we need a little novelty to bring us up out of the pit of sentimentality. Maybe someone you love is gone, and Christmas brings out all the feelings of grief and longing; maybe your formerly cuddly little child whose eyes lit up with the magic and wonder of the season is now an adolescent or an adult who parcels out semi-obligatory hugs and has hormones or obligations and stresses of their own. Maybe it's hard not to look back at comforting, familiar traditions of the past, and not grieve a little.

Of course, if we can, carrying a number of these traditions into the present can be meaningful and fun.

But there can also be great joy in trying something new. Like a new food, for instance. Like, say, Spam Figgy Pudding.

Writer Mia Mercado, says this about this holiday phenomenon:

While your stomach is still full of turkey and stuffing, I'm sure the last thing you want to think about is Spam™. However, I have seen the Spam Figgy Pudding, and it is now my duty to talk about it. Once you feast your eyes upon this limited-edition holiday canned meat, the duty will fall unto you as well.

Everyone say it aloud on the count of three. One, two, three, Spam Figgy Pudding! Doesn't it feel awfully good to say? It's so wrong, and yet so right. But of course Spam has released a seasonal version of its rectangle meat.

Spam has added “cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, and allspice, along with orange and fig flavor” to its gorgeous pink pork brick. What does this mean for you? Anything, really. Spam suggests putting it onto skewers with caramelized onions and figs or adding it to your charcuterie board and waiting for a distant relative to fight you. If the artwork on the Spam Figgy Pudding can is to be believed, you could also try shoving the Spam into a Bundt-cake mold. How? I suppose with reckless abandon.

The tagline for figgy-pudding Spam is “flavor, spice, and everything nice.” As someone who has worked as a copywriter, Mercado says, I feel a traumatic kinship with whoever was made to come up with this. On the other hand, I would like to have a stern conversation with whichever godless creative director is responsible for this Spam Figgy Pudding ad. It’s a 90-second video where a choir of different animated holiday characters (and one pig??) sing “We Wish You a Merry Christmas” while passing around a can of Spam. Show us the actual Christmas meat brick, cowards.

The words “Spam Figgy Pudding” raise a lot of questions. What even is figgy pudding? Also, what is Spam? And what does it mean for these two culinary freaks to come together in festive union? Figgy pudding — known for such classic holiday lyrics as “Now bring us some figgy pudding” — is a steamed cake-like dessert typically made with dried fruit, candied fruit peels, spices, and nuts. Kinda like a wetter fruitcake? However, figgy pudding dates back to the 14th century and used to refer to a dish consisting of a wet, sticky porridge made with “boiled figs, water, wine, ground almonds, raisins, and honey.” Later, figgy pudding referred to a dish that was made with ground meat and grains. Figgy pudding is weirdly complex. On the other hand, given its reputation, Spam is deceptively simple: a mixture of pork and ham meat, salt, water, potato starch, sugar, and sodium nitrite. That mixture is put into cans, sealed, and cooked. Voila! Meat rectangle.

Though I have not had the opportunity, honor, privilege, etc., to try Spam Figgy Pudding, some reviews are in! And, as to be expected, they are mixed. Washington Post writer Emily Heil said it “tastes like a hot dog fruitcake” and suggested you “run away.” The Takeout’s Dennis Lee said, “There’s a lot of pronounced nutmeg, clove, and allspice, enough to clobber you over the head,” but in the right context (e.g., alongside some eggs), it tastes “perfectly okay.” One customer review for Spam Figgy Pudding reads, “We live in the timeline God has abandoned. This cursed item will haunt you to the grave.” The reviewer gave it five stars.

Balk as we may at the idea of some Christmas-spiced Spam, it really isn’t that absurd. A BBQ Spam slider? Yes, several, please. Some cranberry sauce atop the turkey, m’dam? Don’t mind if I do. Both Spam and holiday dinners have long incorporated savory and sweet. We simply hadn’t pushed the combination to its limit.

As we all know, humanity’s eventual collapse will be caused by our undying commitment to making foods taste like other foods. There have been candy canes flavored like gravy and potato chips made to taste like white chocolate. What if ice cream tasted like macaroni and cheese? No need to wonder, my friend. It already exists. Could we Willy Wonka a chip to taste like all the parts of a turkey dinner? Yes, Pringles did that, too. Somehow the

most confusing part of this Jones turkey soda isn't its existence or the fact that it's been around for two Thanksgiving seasons. It's the part of the product description that quotes the Backstreet Boys. Almost distracts you from the fact that we're talking about soda that tastes like poultry.

Anyway, what could possibly come next? Pumpkin Spice Spam?? Ha-ha, no! Don't be silly! That can't be next, because it's already here. Pumpkin Spice Spam came out in 2019. Spam Figgy Pudding has always been inevitable.

But! If you're not game for the likes of Spam Figgy Pudding, what would be something new you haven't done before? Something fun or meaningful, big or small? A new recipe? A new book, a new movie? A new tradition? A trip somewhere you've never been? With others? All alone, even if just for an afternoon?

Sometimes we're forced to change things up—by circumstance or location—and that's not always a negative.

Maybe you could reach out to someone you don't know.

When she was in her eighties, my Aunt Flo lived in a two-level apartment complex where there were four apartments on each level, with doors facing a common breezeway. Her husband had died years before, and so had her mother; she had no children, and Christmases of her past had evaporated. But she decided to celebrate in a new way—by inviting her neighbors in for a little Christmas party, to help these nodding acquaintances get to know each other. So she went knocking on their doors with invitations...and they all came. It was the hit of the season.

Sometimes, something new can involve lowering your standards. I know you want your culinary creations to wow everyone, but often there's just not a lot of time for wow-ing. In that case, try the timesaver my friend Debbie discovered when she took a box of Little Debbie Swiss Rolls, cut the little logs into bite-sized pieces and arranged them artfully on a plate. Everyone loved them, and begged her for the recipe.

Maybe you could celebrate Epiphany this year, the twelfth day of Christmas, on January 6. You may have taken down your decorations, or you may decide to leave them up and enjoy them post-New Year's with folks you missed during December or folks who don't get invited to much of anything.

Whatever you decide, doing even a simple new thing can bring new meaning, new possibility, new delight to this, let's be honest, loaded time of year.

And so, my friend, may you be adventurous in your celebration this season,

May you look for unexpected ways to make merry,

And may all your seeking bring you closer to the joy Jesus came to give you.

Thanks so much for joining me.

If you know people who need a fresh perspective on December, 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.

This Christmas: try something new, my friends. And always, always remember: if you go looking for joy, you'll most likely find it.

Till next time...

NOTES:

Dargatz, Jan. *52 Simple Ways to Make Christmas Special*. Thomas Nelson, 1991.

Mercado, Mia. "I Can't Shut Up About Spam Figgy Pudding." *The Cut.*, November 25, 2022.