

TRANSCRIPT FOR PODCAST EPISODE 184-THIS CHRISTMAS: DELIGHT IN THE DUMB
STUFF

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

This is Episode 184.

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.

You may be familiar with the ever-popular children's books about the Berenstain Bears, having read them as a child, or to a child or grandchild at one time.

For the uninitiated, the Bear family lives down a sunny dirt road deep in Bear country. Mama Bear is the commonsense parent, and Papa is rather a doofus of a dad. And lots of people have had plenty to say about that.

Sara Peterson, writing for The Washington Post, says this about Papa Bear:

There are countless pictures of Mama wielding a broom or rake while Papa swings in a hammock chewing on straw, napping or reading the paper...

*After flipping through only a few of these old favorites... **it's clear to all readers that Mama knows best and Daddy is a bumbling fool who forces Mama to parent him in addition to her children. To the cubs (and probably to my children), she says, Papa Bear is decidedly the fun one. He lets the kids eat too much candy, stay up way past their bedtimes, and follow all of their most base impulses. He models a way of life that any of us might envy, a life in which all of his emotional, dietary, household and even psychological needs are met with no effort on his part, but by his eternally patient, kind, wise wife. In this case, the word "partner" can hardly be appropriate.***

What Ms. Peterson says is not wrong; however, not long ago I read a Berenstain Bears book that not only made me see Papa Bear a little differently, he and Mama Bear gave me a

perspective on Christmas (yes, Christmas) that painted a vivid picture of joy no matter what.

The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Vacation begins with the bear family packing the car to go on a vacation to the Great Grizzly Mountains. At the last minute, Papa runs back to the tree house, saying, "We almost forgot the camera. [Okay, it was written in 1989!] What good is a wonderful vacation without photographs to remember it by?"

"It had been Papa's idea to take their vacation in the Great Grizzlies." He had seen an ad for trying a wilderness vacation, and he had visions of catching their breakfast in a clear mountain lake, bathing in sparkling water, snacking on wild berries while they hiked mountain trails, gazing at the mountain sunset and sleeping in the peace of a mountain night.

As they approached the mountains, however, and Papa was waxing poetic about the mountain air, he took a deep breath and choked. "That's not mountain air," complained Brother, making a face. "That's skunk!"

And Mama thought it was a good time to start taking those pictures. "Pew!" said Papa. "Click!" said the camera. Then they rounded the bend and saw the cabin, not exactly as advertised. Crystal Lake look like mud soup and the cabin was a wreck. Mama noticed there was no electricity running to the house, but Papa exclaimed, practically gleeful, "That's the last thing we need. What you need on a live-off-the-land vacation is plenty of can-do spirit and lots of forest smarts, and I've got enough of those for all of us."

You can see where this is going.

Papa proceeded to trudge off into the woods to gather the fixings for his "fabulous wilderness stew," while Mama and the cubs found that the inside of the cabin was an even bigger disaster than the outside, full of leaves and rodents.

"Time for another picture," thought Mama. Scurry, scurry went the mice. Click went the camera."

Papa then returned from the woods with an assortment of nature's bounty for his stew. Everyone took a taste. "Yugh!" said Sister. Blech! said Brother. P-tooney! said Papa. Click! said the camera."

One day it rained, the roof leaked, and as Papa swept the water out of the cabin, he was swept out the door, down a muddy slope and into that mucky lake. Mama, of course, snapped a picture.

Mama is my ever-lovin' hero.

The next day, she took the film to be developed. (Remember those days?) And when the pictures came back, the family passed them around, and started laughing so hard they cried at the memories of all the dumb stuff that happened that week.

And every so often, the ending goes, through the years, they take out those pictures and have an absolutely wonderful time enjoying the worst vacation the Bear family ever had.

Oh what we can learn from the Bear family this Christmas.

I know Papa was maybe a tad unrealistic in his exuberance here. But aren't we all a little bit like Papa, with our dreams of what we want Christmas to be—full of joy and sentimental good times, amazing pumpkin and peppermint foods we don't eat the rest of the year, lovefests of gathering friends and relatives, life-changing gifts—you know what I'm talkin' about.

But we all know (like Mama Bear) that the holiday just might not be the one of our dancing sugarplum dreams, that there just might be a blip or two on our celebration radar—a hundred little disappointments, changes in plans, recipes gone wrong.

So—what if we follow Mama Bear's lead and take pictures of all the dumb stuff that happens this year? To be clear, I'm not talking about tragedy and deep grief here—just things that don't go according to our Hallmark holiday plan.

For instance, my parents said that, more than once, on our way home from the relatives' house on Christmas night, my dad would have to stop the car so my brother could throw up on the side of the road, just from the pure excitement of Christmas. I'd give a whole lot of money to have a picture of that.

One time I made a special dessert for Christmas Eve that ended up looking like a two-year-old sat in it. I didn't have time for a re-do, so I stuck some fake holly in it, took a picture, and called it a day.

Or how about our friends David and Sharon, who found their 12-foot tree, lying horizontal after an epic thunderous descent to the floor. Might as well take a picture of it.

Even a crooked tree that you just didn't have the energy to straighten up is worth a photo.

Or one year, a friend of ours made cookie ornaments for us to hang on our tree. Our four-year-old asked for a taste, and I let her eat one. Maybe three. The next day, I told our friend, who said, "She ATE them? I put three coats of shellac on those things!" Should have taken a picture of the Mr. Yuck sticker with the phone number of Poison Control on it that I used to call. Just to be sure. She was fine.

When she was about ten, I decided to make her a Christmas jumper out of red and green plaid material with gold metallic thread running through it. I wanted to make it big enough for her to wear for the next year's Christmas too, because sewing was punishment for me

and I didn't want to have to sew two years in a row. The pictures from that year made the poor thing look like she was wearing an enormous Christmas tablecloth. The next year, it was even bigger on her, and shorter. I believe it was even too big when she was 14. We finally took the material and had it made into a stuffed bear, but those photos make us laugh every time.

What I'm suggesting is what I'm going to do: Take pictures of non-optimal moments this Christmas. Put them in a little album, and year after year, as you enjoy a book full of photos of little things that went wrong in your Christmas history, smile. And even laugh. Let them help you keep your Christmas preparations in perspective.

Writer Jan Dargatz takes it a step further by saying, *Think back over all of your favorite holiday memories. What really stands out when subjected to the test of time?*

It's probably not the gifts you have received. I suspect that you can't recall all that you received as presents the year you were eight years old. Try listing those things that you received just last year!

It is probably not the events in which you have participated...The beauty, meaning and feeling of special moments often fade fairly quickly.

So what is it that lodges so deeply in our memory that it cannot be erased by time? I am convinced that relationships are the heart of the holidays.

--It's the reason God sent His Son as a baby—so that we might have a relationship with Him.

--It's the reason we give gifts—to build relationships.

--It's the reason we plan holiday reunions and parties—to share moments of joy with those we love.

So, she says, Don't expect the holidays, per se, to provide something that they can't. Do expect to have to reach out in love to others and to embrace openly the outstretched arms of affection extended toward you, including the outstretched loving arms of the heavenly Father Himself.

And so, my friend,

May you relax if your Christmas is less like a Hallmark movie and more like a blooper reel

May you be reminded that these moments of malfunction can actually be part of the joy of your holiday,

And may you remember that, as Jan says,

When all the visitors have gone home, the wrappings have been discarded, the journals have been shelved and the decorations have been put away for another year, this fact remains: God gives to us His Child—over two thousand years ago and again every year—and our relationship with Him is all that ultimately matters.

Thanks so much for joining me.

If you know people who might be taking the preparation of holiday accoutrements a little too seriously, 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: Delight in the dumb stuff...focus on the best stuff...and always, always remember: if you go looking for joy, you'll most likely find it.

Till next time...

NOTES:

Awkward Family Photos—Christmas.

<https://awkwardfamilyphotos.com/category/photos/christmas-2/>

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Petersen, Sara. "Mama Bear Knows Best: The Enduring Problem with Children's Picture Books." *Washington Post*, October 22, 2018.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2018/10/22/mama-bear-knows-best-enduring-problem-with-childrens-picture-books/>