

TRANSCRIPT FOR PODCAST EPISODE 197-BE LIKE JELLO

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

This is Episode 197.

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 twice a month, 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.

In the days following my breast cancer diagnosis, I wrote in my journal *And then there comes a time when you get stinkin' sick of thinking about mammograms and tumors and treatment options and hormones and radiation and percentages of chances this will come back and wondering where it came from and what I might have done to cause this, and if there was something I could have done to avoid it, and if so, how could I be so stupid, and where will it all end and what if it does come back and whatif, whatif, whatif, whatif? and should I start planning my funeral before it's too late because I certainly don't want any half-baked, boring funeral and maybe I should start a file for that. Plus I'm sick of all the inadvisable Googling I'm compulsively doing that's filling my mind with worst case scenarios and questionable information. I can't stand living in my own head sometimes. I can't think about this any more. I just want to think about...Jello.*

I am not making this up.

Sometimes you just need to think about something uncomplicated. Sweet. Positive. Fun. Shimmery. Delightful. Comforting. Something that feels like home and makes you feel like everything is going to be all right. And apparently Jello fills the bill.

I would go so far to say that Jello is a little bit sacred, something that is worthy to be pondered and emulated.

That said, Jello has a story. *CNN Business* writer Nathan Myersohn tells it like this:

The genius of Jell-O was to transform an elegant, complex dessert and make it cheap and easy to make.

Desserts with gelatin, which is essentially purified glue, have a luxurious history. During the Victorian era in Europe, [decorative gelatin molds](#) were a symbol of high society and served to royalty. Gelatin desserts were for the elite who had cooks and servants to labor through the elaborate and time-consuming process of making gelatin, often extracted from the feet of calves or other animal parts.

“If ever there was a food calling out for a convenience product solution, it was gelatin,” Carolyn Wyman wrote.

In 1897, [Pearle Wait](#), a carpenter in LeRoy, a small town outside of Rochester, New York, found an answer to the problem. Wait, who dabbled with developing cough remedies and teas, added flavoring and coloring to granulated gelatin, a flavorless food ingredient.

Wait came up with a sweet, flavored powder that could be added to boiled water, cooled, and was ready to serve. The first flavors of his product, which were extracted from natural fruits, were orange, lemon, strawberry and raspberry

Wait trademarked a name for his invention, Jell-O, based on an idea from his wife May. How she landed on the name has been lost to history, but some historians believe it was inspired by the product Grain-O, a substitute for coffee, that was also made in LeRoy by the Genesee Pure Food Company.

Wait couldn't get his new product off the ground. In 1899, he sold the rights to Jell-O to Genesee for \$450.

Jell-O's fortunes quickly changed under Genesee, who turned over the advertising to firms in New York.

The advertising, targeted at women in magazines like Ladies' Home Journal, stressed how easy the new product was to make — and for only 10 cents, about the cost of a loaf of bread.

Genesee tried to turn Jell-O into a brand consumers would ask for by name, and salesmen would go door-to-door to local grocers to persuade them to place ads of Jell-O in windows and behind the counters. The ads, depicting fancy Jell-O molds in startling new colors, stood out. Jell-O also distributed free recipe books, a new marketing strategy at the time.

By 1907, Jell-O sales crossed \$1 million.

Early Jell-O advertising depicted women as needing the help of a simple recipe like Jell-O.

“How often some ingredient is forgotten or not rightly proportioned and the dessert spoiled,” ran another ad. “I couldn't keep a house without Jell-O.”

Early ads emphasized the beauty and glamor of these desserts that were formerly unattainable to the average household.. “Even you can serve this dessert to your family, without the use of a servant.”

By 1925, Geneese sold Jell-O to the Postum Cereal Company (which would eventually become the giant General Foods and is Kraft Heinz today) for \$67 million.

Jell-O shifted during its next phase.

During the Great Depression and World War II era, Jell-O was pitched as an affordable food, a way to turn a few ingredients into a family meal people could use to stretch their dollars.

So Jell-O once again gave middle-class consumers access to a luxurious food that had only been accessible to the wealthy. Then Jell-O turned into a salad, a staple dish of the mid-twentieth century, and morphed into a fun snack for kids. It was adaptable and versatile. Jell-O even went to space.

Granted, it was more popular in your parents’ day. When we cleaned out Ben’s grandmother’s pantry after she passed away, we found upwards of 30 boxes of it. My own mom’s pantry also always had stacks of boxes of it in case a zombie apocalypse wiped out the nation’s supply. And my Grandma Ellis used to drink Jello dissolved in hot water out of a cup, like coffee or tea. I have no idea why. But then this is the same grandma who kept a deep freeze full of Milky Ways in the bedroom. So there’s that.

And okay, it *has* been used in some unfortunate ways—like the “perfection salad” they used to put on the lunch menu at my school. It was lemon Jello with VEGETABLES in it—like shredded carrots, and cabbage, and one time, even peas. The principal, Mr. Lee, called that decision into question once. It was truly a crime against humanity.

But it’s hard to argue that Jello is the pinnacle of **versatility**, able to suspend all manner of weird stuff and still stay strong and hold its shape. In my extensive research, I’ve discovered that people have added some unbelievably unexpected ingredients to Jello, such as, in addition to those peas, salmon, cucumbers, radishes, cauliflower, green peppers, red peppers, pressed ox tongue, jellied beef mold (beef encased in Jello, sometimes garnished with olives), anchovies, pickles, pickled beets, Spam, boiled eggs, onions, and ham.

Pretty gross, but very, very versatile.

And back in the day, it was this country’s national dessert, eaten by presidents at the White House, depicted in advertising by leading actors and artists, and a symbol of Americana.

Jell-O "displays so many elements of the American character," wrote [Carolyn Wyman](#) in her book "Jell-O: A Biography." Jell-O is the "food that most resembles a toy."

That means that Jello is just **plain fun**. It can take on different wiggly shapes that you can hold in your hand. Remember Jello Jigglers? You could use less water in the recipe and shape it into eggs, or blocks or just about anything else, and actually play with it before you popped it into your mouth. Who couldn't have a good time with the most joyful processed food in existence?

Jello also offers **nourishment to the sick**. (Spend time in the hospital, you'll figure it out.) You've probably experienced this even outside the hospital. It's light and colorful and cheerful, and the only thing you can stomach after a bout with the pukes. It's like popsicles that don't melt.

And it also **comforts the grieving** in the form of the ubiquitous Fluffy Jello Salad that appears when church ladies get to cookin' after someone has passed.

In Podcast Episode 42 I recounted this story:

My father died suddenly when I was ten. People rushed in with casseroles and fluffy Jello salads and cards and flowers and condolences--trying desperately to tie tourniquets to stop the bleeding.

Which, of course, they couldn't.

The funeral was on a Saturday. The next day I asked to go to church.

My mom, understandably, just couldn't. So my big brother took me.

When people said, "I'm so surprised to see you here," I didn't understand it. Church was where I felt safe and surrounded.

True, they couldn't "fix" my father's absence. But they could hang around with us and just know that we were hurting. They fed us in so many ways.

When someone you care about is hurting, you might be frustrated by your inability to make the pain stop.

Though sometimes we can actually fix it. and sometimes we can make it better, often, there's nothing we can do except sit with each other in the middle of it--and look around for God.

But here's the remarkable thing about that: If we sit around and search together long enough, we'll most likely find Him.

He may be hiding in the cake. Or in a chicken casserole. Or—best of all—in a fluffy Jello salad, where He does some of His best work.

And so, my friend,

May you let Jello teach you how to be versatile, to live in color, to try new shapes,

To be playful, like the best toy ever, to wiggle and jiggle just because you can,

To be light and sweet and old school,

To nourish the sick, to hold space for the grieving, to be a vehicle for God's comfort,

To live a life of joy.

Thanks so much for joining me.

If you know people whose lives could use some refreshment these days, 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.

Be like Jello, my friend. And always, always remember: if you go looking for joy, you'll most likely find it.

Till next time...

NOTES:

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