

TRANSCRIPT FOR PODCAST EPISODE 199-BE AN OBSERVER OF JOY

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

This is Episode 199!

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.

The story I'm about to tell you is true, and I hope you'll respect my decision to be vulnerable, and refrain from ridicule, disbelief and condescension.

Many years ago we were visiting our good friends in Baltimore where crabs are king. When dinnertime rolled around, they suggested, "Hey let's go get some crabs."

I'll be honest, I was a little apprehensive, but I thought, "Hey, why not get out of your culinary box, and try some crab cakes?" I was always game for trying a new restaurant with friends. I was, however, surprised when the car ended up not at a restaurant but at a shed that functioned as a crustacean killing field.

We walked in, and the first thing I saw was a basket on the floor with a mountain of terrified animals stacked on top of each other, writhing and wriggling, obviously aware of their fate, desperate but powerless to escape. Then we moved on to the counter behind which I could see live crabs being tossed into boiling kettles. I swear I could hear them frantically clawing at the sides of the kettles, their silent screams filling the ears of my heart.

Our friends ordered up, and the owner tossed a bunch of lifeless bodies into a common paper bag. Then we set off for home, everybody else in the car chattering on about how they couldn't wait to dig in. Once in the house, they spread newspapers on the kitchen table and proceeded to horrify me by cracking the things apart and sucking the meat out of legs like cannibals.

I tried very hard to be nice and polite. I tasted the meat that someone else had extracted, but it tasted like seafood which I do not enjoy; even the smell is unappealing to me.

And when our friend decided to educate me by saying, “Look, here’s a bad one. Don’t eat anything that looks like this,” as he showed me the black gunky guts of one crab. That was it for me.

Of course, all during this seafood orgy, the Old Bay Seasoning was flying around the table like wine at a wedding.

“What’s the deal with Old Bay?” I wanted to know.

I have since found out, as the manufacturer says, that No crab dish is complete without the beloved seasoning Old Bay. A blend of 18 spices, it was invented by a German immigrant named Gustav Brunn and become popular in the 1940s. In 1990, Baltimore-based McCormick & Co. bought the recipe and it remains the same as it did nearly 100 years ago. The full recipe is top secret, and while you may find some pretty good imitations, nothing compares to the original. And Baltimoreans love to put it on just about anything—seafood, chicken, fries, popcorn, pizza, [corn on the cob]—the list goes on and, they say, we encourage you to experiment.

Sorry, Charlie. The smell of Old Bay reminded me of that food with a face, which made me sad.

I never did learn to love crabs, as you might expect. So please do not message me, telling me “You don’t know what you’re missing,” because my own taste buds know exactly what they’re missing. And I am fine with missing unpleasantness. As I’m sure you are.

But here’s what I learned about my introduction to crab-cracking: watching people who love crabs have so much fun digging into them brought me great joy. And it still does. Even though I don’t participate in this strange ritual, I love watching their enthusiasm as they toss them onto the table and start trolling for tiny pieces of meat.

And therein is a source of great delight: finding joy in someone else’s joy.

Recently we were in Italy at a restaurant famous for their seafood and also for their presentation. “The waiters here LOVE to accept your appreciation for their art,” our guide told us. So when they bounded into the room with positively gleeful pride at the beauty of their platters of clams and an enormous, enormous fish who was, by the way, looking back at us, their joy was absolutely palpable. And it made us smile and applaud and shout “Bravo!”

I won’t lie, the sight of that thing lying dead as a doornail on that platter turned my stomach a little. But their joy...their joy turned my heart inside out.

It was a little like that scene in *A Christmas Story* where the family goes to a Chinese restaurant on Thanksgiving for a very nontraditional Thanksgiving dinner of duck—and the waiters bring the duck out with the head sticking up in the air. And, they're all a little creeped out because, as the dad says, "It's smiling!" So the waiter whacks the head clean off, and everyone applauds after they scream. I love that scene so much.

There are so many ways to take delight in someone else's delight.

Writer Kelly McGonigal shares a few everyday practices to do just that. *As you strengthen your intention to notice joy, she says, you will surely discover your own favorite ways to witness and share in the happiness of others.*

She suggests that, for instance, that you

Watch a child or animal play. What's better than watching kids on a splash pad, at a birthday party or in a bounce house? Or watching monkeys having fun?

Delight in their joy, energy, and wonder, she says. Let yourself smile or laugh as their playfulness awakens a similar spirit in you.

Watch an athletic, artistic, or other kind of competition without taking sides. *Appreciate the effort, skill, or artistry of all competitors—and celebrate the joy of whoever wins. Feel glad for their success, and watch how they celebrate it with others. See if you can extend your empathic joy to how they share the moment with friends, family, coaches, or teammates.*

Witness the good in others. *Set the goal to notice when others display character strengths like kindness, honesty, courage, or perseverance. Take joy in seeing the good. Feel heart-glad about what you observe. Let yourself feel inspired by their actions to do good yourself.*

Help someone else celebrate their happiness. *If someone shares good news, ask them to tell you more, and listen whole-heartedly. If you become aware of an accomplishment or milestone in a person's life, write them a congratulatory email or Facebook post. Go beyond "pro forma" congratulations and really feel the joy of helping someone savor something positive.*

Watch happy reunions at airports. Just look up from your phone and watch.

Somebody celebrating a birthday in a restaurant? Help sing.

Or—maybe you don't dance. But can you take joy in watching someone else shake a leg? Or go to a dance recital. If you've ever been to one of these where there are what seems like

thousands of kids with made up faces and lacquered hair, shuffling off to Buffalo in a synchronized stampede...and you'd like to leave after your person has performed, but the organizers strategically schedule multiple performances at different times during the evening so the house won't empty out until the bitter end...well, can you revel in the joy of kids you don't know? Yes you can.

Finally, Let someone else do something nice for you. This might not seem like a practice of empathic joy, but it becomes one when you begin to pay attention to how happy it makes the other person. Sometimes our own discomfort with receiving kindness, or fear of being a burden to others, gets in the way of seeing that joy.

And so, my friend,

May you keep your eyes open for moments of delight that others are experiencing,

And when you see those moments, may you stop and catch one of their smiles,

And as a result, may you learn that if you become an observer of joy, and you just might find yourself an unwitting participant.

Thanks so much for joining me.

If you know people who might need to borrow some happiness today, 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.

Take a moment and revel in the gladness of others, my friend. And always, always remember: if you go looking for joy, you'll most likely find it.

Till next time...

NOTES:

"A Guide to Maryland Crabs." *Visit Baltimore*, 2024.

<https://baltimore.org/guides/crabs-guide/>

McGonigal, Kelly. "How to Overcome Stress by Seeing Other People's " *Mindful*, July 12, 2017.

<https://www.mindful.org/overcome-stress-seeing-peoples-joy/>