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Happiness and Joy During Turbulent Times: Jayne Jaudon Ferrer On How To Live With Joie De Vivre, Even When It Feels Like The Whole World Is Pulling You Down



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Spend time with young children. There's a poem in my first book about the healing power of baby giggles, but conversations with toddlers and preschoolers can have a similar effect. At that age, there's no pretense; you just get raw honesty and unrestrained jubilation. It's absolutely cathartic.

It sometimes feels like it is so hard to avoid feeling down or depressed these days. Between the sad news coming from world headlines, the impact of the ongoing raging pandemic, and the constant negative messages popping up on social and traditional media, it sometimes feels like the entire world is pulling you down. What do you do to feel happiness and joy during these troubled and turbulent times? In this interview series called "Finding Happiness and Joy During Turbulent Times" we are talking to experts, authors, and mental health professionals who share lessons from their research or experience about "How To Find Happiness and Joy During Troubled & Turbulent Times".

As a part of this series, I had the pleasure of interviewing Jayne Jaudon Ferrer.

*Jayne Jaudon Ferrer is the founder and host of www.YourDailyPoem.com, a website originally designed to show the diversity and appeal of poetry and dispel the notion that poetry is boring. Over time the site, now in its twelfth year, has gradually evolved into a source of positive, uplifting poetry. Ferrer is the author of six books; her latest, *POEMS TO LIFT YOU UP AND MAKE YOU SMILE*, is an anthology of 100 poems especially selected for their upbeat perspectives, feel-good scenarios, and humor.*

Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Before we dive into the main focus of our interview, our readers would love to "get to know you" a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your childhood backstory?

I've loved words for as long as I can remember, and I knew I wanted to be a writer early on — although cowgirl and department store gift-wrapper were serious considerations, as well. I was reading by the time I was four; my mother would call out words for me to spell while she sewed, and my Aunt Erma loved to put a Bible in my lap then point and say, "What's that word?" My parents bought me a set of Childcraft books when I was very young, and I remember sitting on the floor in my father's den reading those stories and poems over and over. I grew up in a tiny rural town in central Florida — Wauchula — but it had a wonderful public library chockful of Trixie Belden, Cherry Ames, Nancy Drew, and Bobbsey Twin books; I read ALL of them! Our church also had a wonderful library, with a full-time librarian, Lola Dietz, who introduced me to Robert

Louis Stevenson's A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES and Maj Lindman's delightful book series.

What or who inspired you to pursue your career? We'd love to hear the story.

I was blessed with some outstanding teachers who offered both encouragement and opportunities to write. I credit four, in particular, for encouraging my efforts. My sixth-grade teacher, Agnes Moore, had us write a story every week and read it aloud to the class on Friday. In middle school, I was in an advanced writing class taught by Bill Ferguson. He thought nothing of assigning an overnight 1000-word essay and constantly threw multi-syllable vocabulary words at us. In ninth grade, Diane Knight assigned a poetry notebook project; we had to select the poems, explain what they meant to us, and illustrate them. That's when I fell in love with poetry. A year later, John Masterson broadened my poetry horizons and argued with me that Rod McKuen (whose work was introduced to me by my big sister) was not a "serious" poet; given his popularity and sales figures, I maintained McKuen was VERY serious — and to a 16-year-old girl, he was a lot more interesting than Wordsworth!

None of us can achieve success without some help along the way. Was there a particular person who you feel gave you the most help or encouragement to be who you are today? Can you share a story about that?

Two people: Jim Kelly, editor of my hometown newspaper, The Herald-Advocate, and Glenda Gilmore, a staff writer at the Tampa Tribune. Jim published a story I wrote when I was in elementary school, then assigned me a weekly column to write when I was in middle school. Glenda published a series of interviews I did with country music stars the summer I was 16. I give them full credit for turning my early ambition into a tangible career.

Can you share the funniest or most interesting mistake that occurred to you in the course of your career? What lesson or take away did you learn from that?

I failed to provide phonetic information about the pronunciation of my name to a radio talk show host that was interviewing me, and he failed to ask. I didn't want to correct him on air, so he mispronounced my name the entire time. Since then, I always include "Jayne Juh-DON Fur-RARE" in my promotional materials!

What are some of the most interesting or exciting projects you are working on now? How do you think that might help people?

I'm very excited about the timing of my latest book, Poems to Lift You Up and Make You Smile. I'd hoped to publish it a couple of years ago, but things didn't work out. When the pandemic hit, and dragged on and on, I decided maybe it was divine intervention that the project got delayed because, suddenly, the need to be uplifted and to find some source of joy in our lives became far more important. I started by asking my subscribers to tell me the poems they found most enjoyable, then I waded through the nearly 4000 poems archived on the site, several times, to try and find those most likely to bring a laugh, trigger a happy memory, or just give the reader a moment of pleasure.

You are a successful leader. Which three-character traits do you think were most instrumental to your success? Can you please share a story or example for each?

Courage, because the marketing side of publishing is about as far removed from the writing side as you can get. My mother tried to teach me to be fearless; I'm *not*, but when I get in situations where my self-confidence is wavering, I hear her saying, "If anybody else could do a better job, THEY'D be doing it instead of you!" Graciousness, because manners matter. I'm a Southern girl, so being polite is right up there with the Oxford comma for me, but being respectful and appreciative goes a long way toward getting your foot in the door — whether that door belongs to an editor, an interview subject, or a bookseller.

For the benefit of our readers, can you briefly let us know why you are an authority about the topic of finding joy?

I don't think I deserve the title of "authority," but I've been a glass-half-full person all my life. I wake up with a positive perspective every morning and I try to focus on blessings instead of burdens. That doesn't mean I don't get down, but I rarely stay that way. Something as simple as a beautiful tree, a child's laughter, or a great song on the radio puts me right back on the joy ride.

Ok, thank you for all of that. Let's now shift to the main focus of our interview about finding joy. Even before the pandemic hit, the United States was ranked at #19 in the World Happiness Report. Can you share a few reasons why you think the ranking is so low, despite all of the privileges and opportunities that we have in the US?

We are very much a materialistic society, bombarded from our earliest days with the message that you must have this or that product to be happy and successful. I think people with the means to buy all those products develop a superficial understanding of what happiness is, and people without those means feel they're missing out and got a raw deal, which leads to anger and frustration.

What are the main myths or misconceptions you'd like to dispel about finding joy and happiness? Can you please share some stories or examples?

The most obvious is that money can't buy happiness. I think we've all known plenty of nasty people with money and, conversely, people of modest means who live very happy lives.

In a related, but slightly different question, what are the main mistakes you have seen people make when they try to find happiness? Can you please share some stories or examples?

The one that comes most readily to mind is a business associate who, after her divorce, said, "I married for love and ended up miserable. Next time, I'm marrying for money." I've often wondered if she ended up happy. More often, though, I've known people who pretend to be something they're not — pursuing careers or hobbies or friends they don't really like, only because they think it will eventually result in happiness.

Fantastic. Here is the main question of our discussion. Can you please share with our readers your "5 things you need to live with more Joie De Vivre, more joy and happiness in life, particularly during turbulent times?" (Please share a story or an

example for each.)

1. Limit your exposure to electronic news media. Face it, there's not much daily news devoted to happy stories. You don't need to stick your head in the sand, but listening to the repetition of traumatic events, discordant talking heads, and negative predictions for hours at a time can take you to a very dark place.
2. Interact with nature. If you can't go hiking in the woods, frolic at a beach, fish in a lake, or climb a mountain, plant something and watch it grow. Wander through the shrubs and flowers at The Home Depot or Lowe's, go to a zoo, or sit back and watch the clouds.
3. Do something for somebody. Whether you make a pot of soup for a sick neighbor, write a check to a charity, run a booth at your church bazaar, ship off some books for Operation Paperback, or call your mother, focus on somebody else instead of yourself for a while.
4. Spend time with young children. There's a poem in my first book about the healing power of baby giggles, but conversations with toddlers and preschoolers can have a similar effect. At that age, there's no pretense; you just get raw honesty and unrestrained jubilation. It's absolutely cathartic.
5. Keep music handy. Maybe it's not a mood-brightener for everyone but, for me, music lifts my spirits immediately — whether the pleasure comes from the music itself or from a memory associated with it. How can anyone stay in a bad mood while listening to “The Lion Sleeps Tonight” or “Cossack Dance” from The Nutcracker Suite.

What can concerned friends, colleagues, and life partners do to effectively help support someone they care about who is feeling down or depressed?

It starts with listening — not talking, not giving advice, but LISTENING. Whether you end up validating or dispelling a person's fears and concerns, you must first hear them identified.

Ok, we are nearly done. You are a person of great influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good for the greatest number of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger.

Be kind. We could eliminate so much pain and suffering in the world if we would just consistently practice kindness. Parents need to teach children from Day 1 — and practice it themselves — that you don't hurt people with words, weapons, attitudes, or prejudice. We can disagree without being hateful, and it costs nothing to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

We are very blessed that some of the biggest names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US, whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might just see this, especially if we both tag them :-)

I would love the chance to chat with Nikki Haley, who did an outstanding job as governor of my state. She's an exceptional role model — smart, articulate, focused, fair-

mindful, skilled at dealing with people, and full of common sense. I think hearing her thoughts on current events and listening to her suggestions on where we go from here would be fascinating.

How can our readers further follow your work online?

My personal website is www.JayneJaudonFerrer.com, which lists all my books, any events I have scheduled, and writing tips and links I recommend.

www.YourDailyPoem.com features nearly 4000 classic and contemporary poems from writers all over the world; a new poem gets added every day.

Thank you for these really excellent insights, and we greatly appreciate the time you spent with this. We wish you continued success and good health!

Wellness

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