virtues & vocations

HIGHER EDUCATION FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING

SPRING 2026

Joy

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ARBOREAL RHYTHM PATRICIA MACDONALD

Painting for me, is a joyful experience. *Arboreal Rhythm* was inspired by the "slice of life" views I see around me every summer when I live among the trees. Through the stylistic use of a heightened colour palette, rhythmic brushwork and the addition of painted collage papers, this painting visually expresses that sense of happiness and well-being.

—Patricia MacDonald

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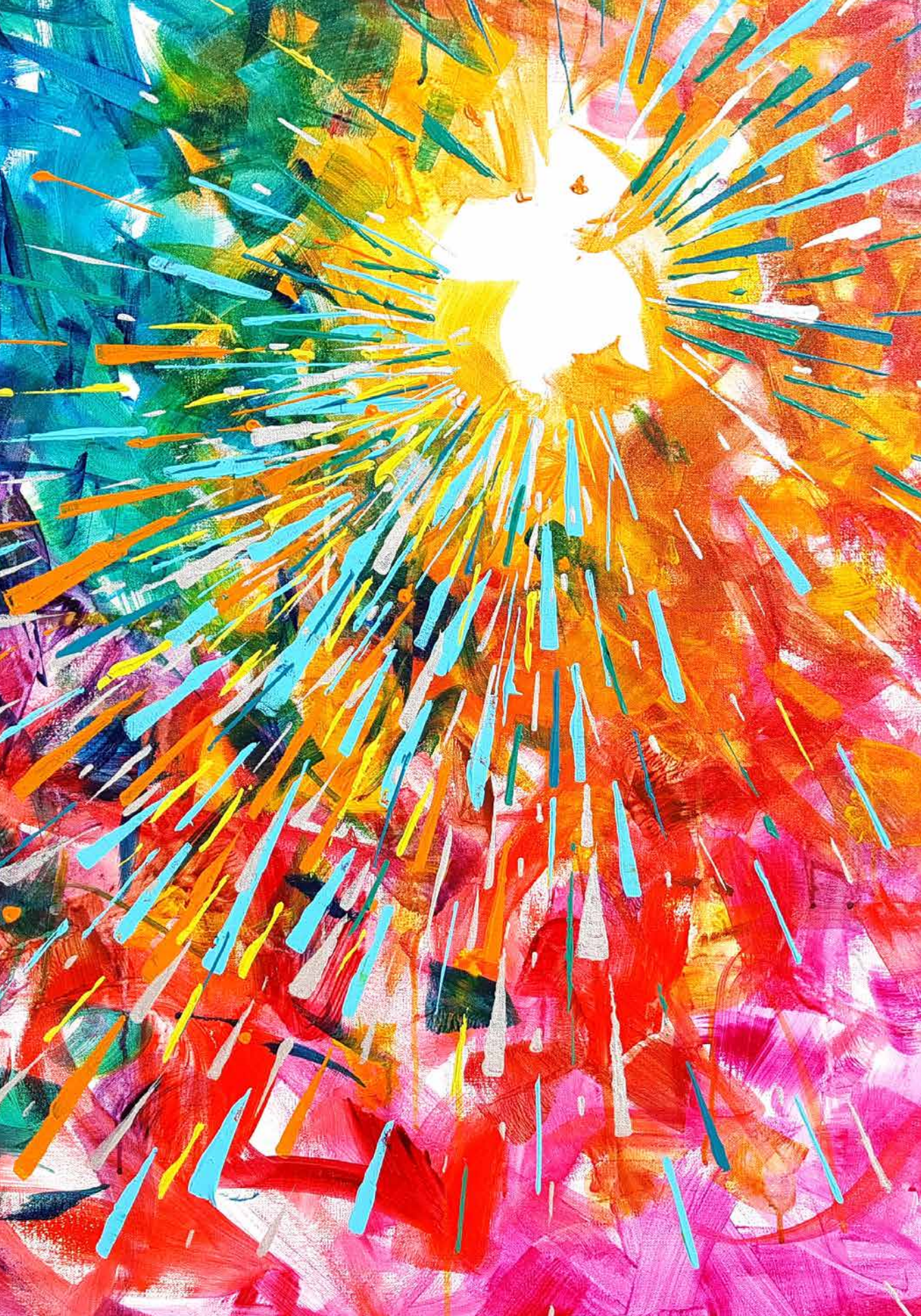
Virtues & Vocations: Higher Education for Human Flourishing is an open invitation to a conversation, a community, and a set of contested aspirations for both how we ought to live together in this world and how higher education might serve those aspirations. It is a product of an initiative with the same name, Virtues & Vocations, sponsored by the Kern Family Foundation and hosted by the Institute for Social Concerns at the University of Notre Dame. The initiative—comprised of a set of publications and convenings, both virtual and in person—seeks to foster a community of thought and practice to integrate questions of character, meaning, and purpose into the fabric of higher education. The *telos* of this community is human flourishing.



SUZANNE SHANAHAN, EDITOR

Welcome

Everywhere across whatever sorrows of which our life is woven, some radiant joy will gaily flash past . . .

—NIKOLAI GOGOL IN *DEAD SOULS* (1842)

The first time I really thought about the notion of joy was after reading Zadie Smith's 2013 essay, "Joy" in the *New York Review of Books*. Smith described joy as something distinct from pleasure. Joy was a "human madness" and "strange mixture of terror, pain and delight." I was familiar with Daniel Gilbert's science of happiness. And I had considered myself an expert of whimsy, having been deeply influenced by a Polish roommate in graduate school who insisted we celebrate every victory, however small, with champagne, and buy fresh flowers for every disappointment or just because. Tiny pleasures make the grind of daily life more than tolerable.

ARTWORK BY HEATHER W. ERNST

The logic and roots of happiness, whimsy, even pleasure seemed straightforward. There were strategies to cultivate them, to practice, and to master them. Later, inspired by authors like Laurie Santos or Arthur Brooks, I considered myself quite good at doing happiness. Enacting gratitude, attentiveness, and purpose were all doable. And later, devouring the work of Ross Gay during the Covid-19 pandemic, I became a dedicated practitioner of the art of delight. I require students every year to read his *Book of Delights,* seeing it as a how to guide to a life well lived.

Joy still remained more elusive, harder to understand. But joy wasn't—as I misunderstood Gogol implied—something that broke through or interrupted the sorrow. It was fully a part of that very sorrow. I also misread, or perhaps misapplied, Gay. His work in *Book of Delights*, *Book of (More Delights)* and *Inciting Joy* are fundamentally about what he calls 'adult joy,' or about where my suffering meets your suffering. It is in life's hardest moments, in pursuit of deep commitments, in the vulnerable recognition of our shared and full humanity that we find joy. It is the moment in which we truly see and are seen. Joy is that paradoxical, transcendent experience when I interview survivors of human trafficking or displaced refugees and hear both of their horror and of their hope. It is also when we experience collective effervescence and know we are part of something far bigger than ourselves—at a concert, sporting event, religious service, or a rally. It is why the funeral following my father's heartbreakingly sudden death felt so oddly joyful. Joy is not *done* alone but exists in messy relationships and in

the complicated, hard fought solidarity of community. It thrives on sorrow and struggle. Because it requires relationships, joy requires, as Zadie Smith would say, risk. To seek joy is to court possible suffering. Joy requires courage, creativity, and compassion. Joy demands justice. Joy is knowing you are where you were meant to be, however hard. As such, joy is at the center of all human flourishing and what it means to pursue the common good.

In this seventh issue of *Virtues & Vocations: Higher Education for Human Flourishing*, ten different authors bring very different life experiences and scholarly backgrounds to reflections on what joy means to them and their work. The issue introduces us to the science of joy, speculations about joy, and experiences of joy. The essays are themselves sad, profound, lyrical, and joyful. This issue also features a wonderfully rich and at times enigmatic interview with author Alain de Botton and a poem by Ross Gay.

To my naïve surprise, this was one of our most challenging topics for many of our authors. Indeed, some folks refused to even consider writing about joy, with one noting "I don't do joy." I wonder if this struggle with joy is precisely because, as Smith reminds us, "there is actually very little pleasure in it." Happiness and whimsy are far more seductive, even when they seem compulsory. That joy is hard is then what makes these ten essays so provocatively rich and engaging.

To seek joy is to court possible suffering. Joy requires courage, creativity, and compassion. Joy demands justice. Joy is knowing you are where you were meant to be, however hard. As such, joy is at the center of all human flourishing and what it means to pursue the common good.

Welcome. V&V

Suzanne Shanahan is the Leo and Arlene Hawk Executive Director, Institute for Social Concerns, University of Notre Dame.

ARTWORK BY PATRICIA MACDONALD

PART I

Joy as a Virtue

"Joy is an orientation toward life, rooted in meaning, truth, goodness, beauty, love, and transcendence, even and especially in the midst of hardship. As such, joy is not optional. It is critical, not only for individual lives but also for our educational institutions, our workplaces, and whole societies."

ANGELA WILLIAMS GORRELL

ROBERT A. EMMONS

Joy
Its Nature and Contribution to Human Flourishing

"And the true realism, always and everywhere, is that of the poets: to find out where joy resides, and give it a voice far beyond singing. For to miss the joy is to miss all."—ROBERT LEWIS STEVENSON

Poets, priests, prophets, sages, and saints in every culture and religion in human history have regarded joy as essential to human life and well-being. Yet until recently joy was virtually absent in contemporary culture, replaced in the academic lexicon and in common vernacular by the more general concept of happiness. The "happiness industry" of recent decades has produced important scientific insights that have reached a wide popular audience. Conversely, with a few minor exceptions, the serious study of joy has been ignored.

ARTWORK BY SUZANNE ALLARD

Happiness and joy are not the same. Joy is an emotion—positive, intense, and transient. Happiness is a longer-term evaluation that the conditions of one's life are desirable. Joy offers a fuller and richer portrait of a person's capacity to live a life of purpose, meaning, and value, or an experience of "elation of right relation" between ourselves and the world. Robert Lewis Stevenson may have exaggerated a bit, but was on to something when he said, "to miss joy is to miss all."[1]

Fortunately, the picture is beginning to change. Scientists are slowly following the poets' quest, to find where joy resides and to explore ways in which, through the idioms of science, they can give it a voice. Recent years have seen a developing science of joy, the goal of which is to bring joy back to the center of serious academic inquiry and popular interest. Joy—how much and how well a person is joyful and the extent to which joy bears on action and behavior—is being recognized as a vital positive emotion and a basic explanatory variable in social science, theology, and ethics. Positive psychology, the field at the nexus between affective science, virtue ethics, the psychology of religion and spirituality, and human flourishing has begun to nurture the incipient science of joy to ensure that gains in the psychological and neuroscientific understanding of joy are integrated with insights from humanistic research and applied in ways that improve individuals and society. In this incursion, joy and the flourishing life have been studied in a way that recognizes the integral relationship between them: Joy is an essential element of flourishing, and the flourishing life is essentially marked by genuine joy.

Toward that end, I edited a special issue of *The Journal of Positive Psychology* on joy.[2] The issue contained articles from scholars and researchers from the academic fields of psychology, philosophy, neuroscience, affective science, religious studies, theology, public health, and human development. The goal of the issue was to aid in the return of joy, understood not as a synonym for happiness, but as the summit of integral well-being, or human flourishing. Since that issue appeared, a handful of additional articles have contributed vital, novel understandings of the nature and

functions of joy.[3] Despite varying definitions and conceptualizations of joy, consensus is emerging that to grasp human flourishing and thriving, and quite possibly flourishing in other species as well, we must understand joy. In terms of the latter, comparative studies can help us understand the evolutionary, developmental, and genetic origins of joy. Collin Allen contends that joy is an aspect of intelligence in four non-human animals: chimpanzees, bonobos, the New Zealand native kea parrot, and the bottlenose dolphin.[4]

WHAT IS JOY AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Emerging perspectives from the aforementioned disciplines generally agree that joy is an emotion, understood as a concern-based construal—that is, a judgment about something one cares about. As an emotion in this sense, joy has an intentional object that it construes as good. Yet, a purely cognitivist description of joy is insufficient; joy has an inalienable affective and relational dimension. Psychologist Edward Hoffman and his colleagues asked respondents to describe a recent joyful experience.[5] Experiences of interpersonal joy were reported by far the most frequently, outnumbering all other categories combined. Some of the joy-producing experiences frequently reported were the birth of a child or grandchild, family togetherness, recovery of a family member from illness or accident, romantic bliss, the wedding of an adult child, caregiving to a nonfamily member such as mentoring or volunteer work, and vicarious achievement (i.e., parental pride in a child or grandchild's accomplishment). Joy is an emotion, then, that involves both a perception of the world (or some small part of it) as being as it should be, and an attendant positive feeling triggered in circumstances involving connection, attachment, and reunion.

As it connects us outward and upward, joy is also spiritual. Devotional writers have long located the emotion of joy within the human spirit. The Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, among other spiritual giants, prefer the term joy over happiness. This is because joy is part of the very essence of human nature, intrinsic to what it means to be

human. For scientist and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, joy was the most infallible sign of the presence of God. When C.S. Lewis wrote of his childhood in his memoir, *Surprised by Joy,* he noted that joy involves both memory and longing. "All joy reminds. It is never a possession, always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still 'about to be.'" In this sense, joy indicates something deeper, more embodied, more acute—it is akin to aliveness, or animating force. According to C.S. Lewis, "it must have the stab, the pang, the inconsolable longing."[6] Joy also signifies a broader and more transcendent sense of goodness, one that links not just to personal well-being, but also to the larger reality, and to a vision of broader human flourishing. It is right at the heart of what it means to be fully alive.

Joy is importantly different from both happiness and other pleasant feelings because joy is typically intense and takes place over shorter durations of time. Joy often contains a sensation of being light, airy, uplifted, and typically energizes and motivates the agent for immediate and long-term action. Joy makes the agent more open to engagement with new experiences and often propels the agent into action. Chris Meadows identifies four phenomenological features of joy. Joy includes a dimension of being in harmony, unity, or equilibrium with oneself and other agents. Joy includes a sense of vitality, aliveness, and potency. Joy includes an experience of transcending beyond ordinary life or ordinary experiences. Joy is characterized by a strong experience of freedom and agency.[7] Emerging conceptualizations of joy share the following consensual assumptions and hypotheses:

- Humans are evolutionarily adapted for joy. Joy drives the attachment system by reinforcing return to the attachment figure.
- Joy can be studied as both a transient state and as an enduring state.
- Joy is not a synonym for happiness. They operate on a different temporal scale and emotional register and have different levels of cognitive evaluation and specificity.
- Joy maps onto both central and peripheral physiological processes and thus is a key driver of health-related outcomes.
- Joy is malleable and modifiable. Individual and communal practices can foster joy, and joy drives both personal well-being and prosocial actions aimed at benefitting others.

JOY AS VIRTUE

It has been argued that joy—more than any other state—is a linchpin between emotion and ethics.[8] According to some teleological accounts, experiencing joy is tied

to performing actions that align with what we narratively consider most important in a human life. Joy is an experience that accompanies virtuous action. When an agent finds themselves doing actions directly tied to that which they find to be most important in life, they feel joy. Thus, joy is tied to each agent's self-understanding and narrative about what is most important in a human life. Research shows that when we believe our actions are tied to something that is 'transcendentally' important, we tend to experience joy. Pamela King argues that "joy is the virtue that involves thinking, feeling, and doing what matters most."[9] That is, joy is produced by doing activities that aid in bringing about the highest human goods (our self-perceived *telos*, or purpose). For example, many people are raised on the moral and (often religious) belief that volunteering to help those in need is one of the most noble and virtuous actions. Such people often report feeling great joy when volunteering, even in the most difficult of contexts. For example, volunteers engaging in disaster relief often report feeling joy despite the devastation and suffering around them. This is because these volunteers understand themselves to be doing something that is tied to what is most important at an existential level.

This conception of joy makes it enactive. Joy cannot be experienced passively. On this account, joy is tied to action and must be performed. Since joy is tied to a

Yet becoming more skillful at joy requires consciously examining, reevaluating, and reminding ourselves of what truly matters and how our actions align with those values.

telos, there are better and worse ways to perform joyful actions. In connection with this skillful aspect of joy, one can likewise improve or decline in one's capacity to experience it; agents can cultivate greater joy through intentional practice. Yet becoming more skillful at joy requires consciously examining, reevaluating, and reminding ourselves of what truly matters and how our actions align with those values. Collective joy, related to yet distinct from individual joy, is a highly desired shared experience of doing something considered meaningfully important in relation to others and experienced from a communal perspective.

Festivals, celebrations, holidays, sporting events, concerts, and worship services are just a few examples of settings that induce collective joy.

PROMOTING PROSOCIAL ACTIONS VIA JOY: THE "BIG JOY" PROJECT

If the above analysis of joy's role in the economy of human behavior is correct, it would not be surprising to find that joy can motivate and inspire acts of kindness, generosity, and other forms of pro-social behavior. The results of a recent ground-breaking large scale intervention study suggests indeed that felt joy motivates individuals to make the world a better place.[10]

A landmark global-scale well-being intervention deployment study, BIG JOY, recruited 18,000 participants from 172 countries and regions (mean age = 52) to examine the impact of joy-augmenting activities on prosocial behaviors. The week-long BIG JOY intervention consisted of seven daily micro-acts (i.e., brief actions that require minimal effort), each adapted from validated positive psychology interventions. Participants engaged in one micro-act each day for seven days, delivered through digital devices. These micro-acts included gratitude listing, doing something kind for others, celebrating another's joy, a lovingkindness meditation, and dwelling in experiences of awe. Upon completion of the seven-day intervention, participants responded to questions assessing the degree to which they had engaged in prosocial behaviors such as helping or supporting others or engaged in activities to protect the environment.

Of the seven micro-acts, three were especially effective in improving prosociality across all age groups: making a gratitude list, celebrating another's joy, and dwelling in awe. This is significant because these three activities show a generalizability across a wide range of ethnic and cultural groups. Celebrating another's joy was the most impactful micro-act for the older (55 and over) persons in the study, whereas doing something kind was the only micro-act to enhance prosociality in the youngest participants (34 and younger). The results of projects like BIG JOY that examine the prosocial contours of joy suggest that large scale initiatives designed to create global interventions across a variety of sectors and stakeholders can foster a more compassionate and connected world, a noble and humane purpose worth envisioning and striving for.

CONCLUSION

Joy is a quintessential human experience that has, for too long, been hiding in plain sight. Until recently it was the last major

Joy *by Robert A. Emmons*

unexplored positive emotion in psychology and a neglected subject in the humanities and sciences. The nascent science of joy has ratified what has been anecdotally understood throughout history, namely that joy is fundamental to human existence and well-being. "We cannot understand human beings unless we understand joy and how joy comes to be" wrote George Vaillant.[11] By giving expression to our ecstatic nature, joy points beyond itself to something deeply true about human nature and purpose. Whether experienced in isolation or as part of a collective, joy elevates, energizes, inspires, and transforms. People are moved, opened, and humbled through experiences and expressions of joy. Without joy, life can be lonely, depressing, impoverished. To the extent that joy both opens us up to the benevolence of others *and* motivates us to behave prosocially in turn, joy may be thought of as a social resource that is deserving of further study, reflection, and cultivation for the development of a global society built on goodwill. V&V

NOTES

1. Robert Lewis Stevenson, "The Lantern Bearers", Across the Plains (1879), quoted in William James, *Talks to Teachers* (New York, Henry Holt, 1925).

2. Robert A. Emmons, "Joy: An introduction to this special issue," *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 15, (2020): 1–4.

3. Jeffrey J. Arnett, "Joy: An Integrative Theory," *The Journal of Positive Psychology,* 18, (2023): 1–14.

4. Collin Allen, "Do animals feel joy?" Talk presented at the Annual Meeting of the Templeton Philanthropies, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, June 2025.

5. Edward Hoffman, "Peak experiences among Americans in midlife." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology,* 52, (2012): 479–503.

6. C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955).

7. Chris Meadows, *A Psychological Perspective on Joy and Emotional Fulfillment.* (Routledge, 2014).

8. Charles Potkay, *The Story of Joy*. (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

9. Pamela King, "Joy as a Virtue: The Means and Ends of Joy." *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, (2020).

10. Hitesh Goel, et al, "Promoting Prosociality via Micro-acts of Joy: A Large-Scale Well-Being Intervention Study,"(2025) ACM Chi Conference, doi.org/10.1145/3706598.3713947.

11. George Vaillant, *Spiritual Evolution: A Scientific Defense of Faith*. (Broadway 2008).

Robert A. Emmons is Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of California, Davis, and a leading scholar of gratitude and positive psychology. He is the founding editor and editor-in-chief of *The Journal of Positive Psychology* and has authored over 250 publications and eight books, including *Thanks! How Practicing Gratitude Can Make You Happier* (Houghton-Mifflin), *Gratitude Works! A Twenty-One Day Program for Creating Emotional Prosperity* (Jossey-Bass) and *The Little Book of Gratitude* (Hachette). Emmons received his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

FRANCIS SU

A Meditation on Mathematical Joy

By my son's bedside is an enchanting illustrated volume called *The Quiet Book*, featuring silent scenes from a teddy bear's life. My son and I love reading it as a calming activity, because it's a meditative reflection on the meaning of quiet.

Not all quiets are the same. For instance, you can be "hide-and-seek quiet" (depicted by the teddy bear hiding from a companion), or "coloring in the lines quiet" (our bear concentrating, with crayons), or "right before you yell SURPRISE! quiet" (our bear anticipating, at a party), or "first look at your new hairstyle quiet" (our bear contemplating his reflection at the barbershop). Quietness presents as silence, but it is really an inner state of the soul with varied manifestations.

In a similar way, *joy* is an inner way of being, and comes in many forms. It may sometimes present as happiness—like the unbridled

ARTWORK BY JASON WESAW

delight of a toddler squealing in a swing—but, as many writers and thinkers have described, it runs deeper than happiness, which can be fleeting. Joy is more enduring, like the satisfaction of spending time with a lifelong friend.

As a mathematician, I often speak of the joy that math can bring. This strikes most ears as a strange sentiment, even an oxymoron. Math, for many, has been a source of boredom, or worse, anxiety. It conjures drudging memories of memorizing arithmetic facts or algebraic formulas, without enjoying any deeper understanding.

Devoid of joy, though, I wouldn't call that math at all. Just as literature is more than the grammar or the sentences that comprise it, mathematics is more than the logical rules or the formulas that summarize its truths. Literature captivates us because words convey meaning, and stories move us. Similarly, mathematics can enthrall us because symbols carry meaning, and true understanding evokes feelings of joy. Indeed, joy is central to the mathematical experience. If I were to write a *Joy Book* to parallel my son's *Quiet Book*, math would show up on all of its pages.

For instance, such a book might begin with "toddler-in-a-swing joy." That's the adventurous pleasure a child feels as their stomach drops, a gentle breeze rushes past their face, and they squeal in delight at the sensation of flying. I hear the same joyful exhilaration in my 5-year-old son when I count whole numbers—at first correctly and then out of order—and he chuckles in protest. Or, when we play "the opposites game" (what's the opposite of a given word?) and I ask him for the opposite of "kleenex." His response, in giggles, shows me that he thinks we're doing something bold and daring and maybe even forbidden. He knows that I'm playfully messing with him, and yet he still works to formulate a response. He says "sneezing," and we all have a good laugh. Things that don't seem to have opposites, actually do! So it won't be long before we talk about negative numbers, and his stretched imagination now has a way to embrace the new idea.

At his age, my son has also experienced a thrill that might appear in a *Joy Book* as the "completion-of-a-puzzle joy." This is the satisfaction he feels after working on a Lego project, studiously following a 100-page instruction book to produce a gloriously intricate model car. That joy comes after much labor, and it is because of this toil that he experiences a euphoria that is

correspondingly longer and more enduring. Perhaps you've felt this too, after finishing a crossword puzzle or playing a game of Sudoku. It's the feeling of winning, without being in competition. Notably, your success is not diminished by, nor does it tarnish, the success of others. The winning is both a feeling of accomplishment as well as the prize at the end. That Lego work resulted in something beautiful to behold! That crossword puzzle had a hidden surprise in it, spelled out by answers to several clues! You are trained by the prizes to expect that each new puzzle will bring a similar reward. Unspoiled mathematical joy is like this joy. It follows the hard work of thinking, often resulting in a glorious solution. Not every problem yields such elegance, but glimpses from time to time keep you coming back for more. Such joy is not threatened by the success of others; in fact, you find camaraderie and community with those who scaled the same mountain and beheld the same beauty.

My son has been asking lots of "why?" questions lately. He seems to relish them, which I link to a more subtle form of joy that one might call "chewing-on-an-idea joy," or contemplative joy. He takes pleasure in asking the same questions over and over, even after I've answered them multiple times. "Why does ice float?" "Why does gravity cause things to fall?" Maybe he enjoys hearing me repeat my answer—affirming the truths of the world, like a catechism. Or maybe he likes to see me squirm to answer his question in different ways. I can't be sure. But he clearly enjoys chewing on ideas. Philosopher Thomas Aquinas suggested that human beings delight in contemplation because we are rational beings, so we desire to know and seek after truth. Furthermore, he says: "more delightful still does this [knowledge of truth] become to one who has the habit of wisdom and knowledge, the result of which is that he contemplates without difficulty."[1] By this he implies that contemplative joy becomes more available to us the more practiced we are at it. Thus, my son peppers me with a creative variety of "why" questions because for him it is both a source of, and a continued practice of, joy. Similarly, mathematical thinkers, who are practiced at the joys of contemplation, find great delight in continued investigations. They have learned to crave the exercise of the mind. Asking "why" has become second nature.

Aquinas further emphasizes that contemplative delight also follows from the quality of its object, which suggests that our *Joy Book* should make space for "beholding-beauty joy." Picture a teddy bear savoring a spectacular sunset the way that my son beholds Lego creations—with wistful wonder. Surely every person has felt this longing: for a striking piece of art that takes our breath away, for a painting that captures an ineffable feeling, for

When I see the same beautiful pattern arise in many places, it's like an echo of a deeper truth that I have not yet fully understood. I yearn to grasp it, to know it fully.

a person who is our beloved. An object of beauty makes us look closely, and if it has depth, it holds our gaze. We are drawn to study it, because with each look we see something we didn't see before. Its richness is never ending, timeless. Poet John Keats got it right when he said, "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever."[2] Mathematics, too, is like this—it is the joy of grasping enduring truths, whose beauty unfolds in layers and whose depths yield only to persistent contemplation.

The most poignant page in our *Joy Book* is the one I'd call "painful joy"—like the emotions my son felt about the recent loss of a favorite stuffed animal. His pain was mitigated by the thought that his prized stuffie might now be enjoyed by another child. But painful joy does not necessarily involve sorrow. As the writer C.S. Lewis explained, a telltale sign of this joy is the yearning. Lewis described this joy as "an unsatisfied desire" and "distinct not only from pleasure in general but even from aesthetic pleasure. It must have the stab, the pang, the inconsolable longing."[3] This is the longing we've been discussing—the kind that draws us to beauty. Even in mathematics, one encounters it. When I see the same beautiful pattern arise in many places, it's like an echo of a deeper truth that I have not yet fully understood. I yearn to grasp it, to know it fully. A grown-up version of the *Joy Book* might call this transcendent joy: a painful longing that anticipates a joyful resolution.

And then, that resolution might have its own page in the *Joy Book*—an "aha! joy." This is the joy of understanding, like when a mystery gets explained and everything makes sense. It might not be instantaneous. It could be a slowly growing understanding over time, unfolding in stages, each more revelatory than the last. And an "aha!" moment may still be tied to a longing or a hint of some greater transcendent truth, not yet revealed, causing us to ache for something more. Math is like that, too. As a triumphal project of human ingenuity to grasp the divine order, mathematics is full of this kind of joy, and it is a joy that we should all hope to experience.

So when people think of math as a bunch of things that a calculator can do, they have a crucial misunderstanding. A calculator can't do math, it can only calculate. Sure, an AI (an artificial intelligence) can do more. But

to speculate whether it will someday reason like a human being is to miss a broader point—that by outsourcing our thinking to an AI, we lose something valuable for human flourishing: our own ability to experience joy, to have "aha!" moments that give life texture and richness.

Too many people see math as cold and austere, divorced from human virtues and devoid of the adventurous pleasure, deep satisfaction, contemplative rumination, and the expectant longing that its joyful adherents know. It's no wonder then, that math is used these days in ways unmoored from deep reflection on its responsible use. It's just a tool for sorting us and dividing us, rather than a way to bring us together.

That's why I would end the *Joy Book* with "sharing-the-joy joy." This is an outward-facing joy that dignifies others, that shares our bounty with the people around us. I want my 5-year-old to realize that when we experience the delights of joy—whether it's completion-of-a-puzzle joy or beholding-beauty joy or "aha!" joy—we should want it for others too. I want him to understand what an old Swedish proverb captures well: "A shared joy is a double joy." I want him to see that the fruit of introspective contemplation is not only a greater grasp of truth and beauty, but also a greater responsibility and care for the people around us.

Math can be a vehicle for a joy that uplifts us and dignifies our neighbors. We need a *Joy Book* that can remind us of this in the increasingly technological world that my son will inhabit. My earnest hope is that he'd find math on every page of the *Joy Book,* and so find joy on every page of a math book. V&V

NOTES

1. Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica,* Part 2, Volume 2, Issue 6 (Princeton University, 1922), p. 120.
2. John Keats, *Endymion: A Poetic Romance,* Part 1, line 1 (1818).
3. C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (Harcourt, Brace, 1956), p.15, p.68.

Francis Su is the Benediktsson-Karwa Professor of Mathematics at Harvey Mudd College and former president of the Mathematical Association of America. His research is in geometric combinatorics and applications to the social sciences, including game theory, voting theory, and the mathematics of fair decisions. His book *Mathematics for Human Flourishing* won the 2021 Euler Book Prize.

JENNIFER FREY

Joy Amidst Suffering

In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine makes the striking claim that happiness is most properly described as finding our "joy in the truth."[1] This claim is difficult for contemporary readers to understand, because we tend to think of happiness in terms of pleasures or good moods, and it is challenging for us to imagine what distinctive pleasures, feelings, or moods we associate with searching for or possessing the truth. For instance, I currently hold in my mind many true propositions, such as: 'It rained yesterday in Tulsa,' 'I am wearing jeans,' and 'Humans die.' When I reflect on the first two, I feel nothing; contemplating the third, I feel an uneasy dread. And while we can acknowledge that there is a certain thrill of insight—the "aha" moment when we finally see the answer to a difficult problem or a great idea comes to us unbidden—we might be deeply skeptical that this is the best form of pleasure we can experience.

ARTWORK BY GIULIANA LAZZERINI

Wittgenstein's last words suggest that joy and suffering are not necessarily antithetical to each other, and that the deepest joys we can experience might even demand great suffering and sacrifice on our part.

A further impediment to understanding Augustine's meaning is the fact that the pursuit of truth can cause us great suffering. One of the most brilliant philosophers of the twentieth century, Ludwig Wittgenstein, was relentlessly devoted to the pursuit of philosophical wisdom—a goal worthy in itself—but no one who knows anything of Wittgenstein's biography would say he was joyful in any sense readily available to contemporary discourse. Much of his life seemed to consist in the tortuous pursuit of the dissolution of philosophical puzzles—a deep wrestling with language and concepts that is admirable, but one that necessitated great sacrifices. Were the philosophical insights he experienced worth the price he paid for them? Wittgenstein himself insisted that "the joy of my thoughts is the joy of my own strange life." On his deathbed, his final instruction to those present was to relate the following message to his friends: "Tell them I had a wonderful life."[2]

Wittgenstein's last words suggest that joy and suffering are not necessarily antithetical to each other, and that the deepest joys we can experience might even demand great suffering and sacrifice on our part. When we think of the sort of joy that Augustine had in mind in his famous formulation, we must move beyond our simple concepts of pleasure or good feelings. To make sense of the depth and complexity of his idea of happiness, we will need a richer moral psychology, one we find in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas's discussion of joy allows us to understand it as a spiritual rest in a distinctively intellectual possession of the good.

Aquinas argues that love is manifest in all its forms as a tending out of ourselves towards the good, and joy is our experience

of resting in the good according to the measure we have attained it. We enjoy a good because we are first drawn to it by love through desire, but the enjoyment is experienced in our resting in the good rather than in our yearning for it or our active pursuit of it. Furthermore, Aquinas recognizes different kinds of love that correspond to different forms of desire we experience. There is sense desire based on sensory experiences, as when I catch a whiff of bread baking and this immediately elicits a desire to consume the bread. The consumption is the enjoyment of the sensory good, and this is a recognizable form of bodily pleasure. But there is also rational desire or will—the sort of desire that is associated with choice and follows a judgment of reason that this good is to be pursued. When the will rests in its object, it is a deeper form of joy—a spiritual rather than material enjoyment, as the will is an essentially rational appetite, whereas sense desire can "listen to" reason (habituated over time so that it is aligned with reason) but is not itself rational.

Because an intellectual joy does not necessarily have a bodily manifestation or feeling, it can be experienced even in the absence of the material possession of the good. Aquinas mentions, for example, that a lover can rejoice in the goodness of the beloved even when she is absent from him materially—this joy is in the lover's memory, imagination, and reflection, rather than in any kind of sensory experience. What one attends to in these cases is the good of the beloved, as this can be appreciated intellectually, or at a distant remove from the real presence of the person. In such a virtual or merely intellectual presence, we can savor and enjoy the good of the beloved in a way that grows our longing and affection for them. We can remember their beauty, we can contemplate their positive attributes, and we can appreciate their goodness in our lives. As

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the old adage says, "absence can make the heart grow fonder." Sometimes this physical distance can help us better appreciate the good of the beloved than when they are readily available to us, and therefore readily taken for granted.

Aquinas claims that the deepest spiritual (most complete) joy is caused by charity, the virtue by which we love God above all things, and all things through our love of God.[3] Joy, Aquinas argues, is the interior effect of charity, caused by the goodness of the presence of God in our lives. Charity is the cause of the deepest joy because God is the highest good. Therefore, the measure of the depth of joy is the measure of the good that causes it and the love that propels us towards it.

If we take this rich moral psychology in a somewhat more secular register, then we can make sense of the spiritual joy that Wittgenstein felt in his pursuit of philosophical wisdom, while also seeing that it is mixed with various pains and deprivations that he suffered for its sake. If philosophical wisdom was the highest good for

Wittgenstein, the good around which he ordered his life as the place of his spiritual fulfillment, then it is rational that he sacrificed lower goods for its sake, and it makes intelligible the patterns of suffering that he endured and the sacrifices he made for the deeper joys that this wisdom brought him. Not all enjoyment is on a par, and we can willingly endure suffering for higher forms of enjoyment that we value the most, just as we can sacrifice lower goods for the sake of higher goods. We can accept that there is always an admixture of suffering and sorrow amidst our deepest and most meaningful joys. It is the goodness of the objects of our deepest longings that makes sense of the sufferings and sacrifices that we endure.

More generally, our life's work typically involves suffering and sacrifice, but so do our friendships and the relationships that make our lives both deeply meaningful and joyful. A father must sacrifice and suffer for the sake of his children and his spouse, in ways big and small. He does this, presumably, because he understands his good as intimately bound up with the common good of his family, and he sees that these sacrifices are necessary for the full flowering of that good in which he participates. The sacrifices he makes for his family are perfectly intelligible in this larger practical context—he gives up certain goods that would benefit him as an individual for goods that he takes to be higher, as they contribute to the common good of the family in which he is an active participant. The higher joys of family, seem to him to be worth the price he pays for them. He too can rest in the knowledge that his family flourishes, knowing that it is his flourishing too.

I was recently speaking to a headmaster of a school who described his job as janitorial in nature. He said, "I clean up the messes here so our students can learn and thrive." He describes his job as deeply rewarding, meaningful, and fulfilling, despite being "a daily slog that will probably put me in an early grave." I was struck by his testimony, as this was a man who I knew had many other opportunities to make more money and take positions of greater prestige, but who didn't want to be anywhere other than where he was, deep in the everyday muck of his school. It would be incorrect to say of this man that he endured his job so that he

In the midst of our daily struggles, which, if we are honest with ourselves, we know will never go away, we should remind ourselves where we find our deepest joy, and ask ourselves if we are struggling for it.

could find his joy elsewhere. He had found his joy in the school, and his daily suffering was for the sake of his knowledge that his students were thriving. This knowledge brought him deep joy.

I hope we are beginning to see our way to a sense of joy that can help us understand Augustine's formulation of the happy life. In the midst of our daily struggles, which, if we are honest with ourselves, we know will never go away, we should remind ourselves where we find our deepest joy, and ask ourselves if we are struggling for it. Suffering and sacrifice are not good in themselves. The measure of their goodness comes from the object for which they are endured, and this good is where we find our joy. Joy, paradoxically, is a guide to our suffering. For just as the question of what is worth living for is the same as what is worth dying for, so the question of what is worth suffering for is the same as the question of what brings us joy and why.

Augustine believed that the deepest form of joy that humans could experience was "joy in the truth" understood as the possession of God in our mind and will. Regardless of whether we agree with this understanding, I hope these reflections help us take a fuller measure of his meaning. First, that joy follows upon love and desire, as its interior effect. Joy is experienced when we rest in the good we have been longing for—it describes our experience of fulfillment. Second, those spiritual joys that are more stable and enduring are the ones that should order our lives, rather than the fleeting pleasures of the body, or the unstable pleasures of power and fame. And finally, not only are

Suffering and sacrifice are not good in themselves. The measure of their goodness comes from the object for which they are endured, and this good is where we find our joy.

suffering and sacrifice *not* incompatible with the joys of human flourishing, they are a natural and necessary part of such flourishing. A difficult life can be a wonderful life because the measure of the depth of our joys is the worth of the goods that we are living for; our choices are based in our knowledge that these goods are worth what we suffer and sacrifice for them. Augustine recognized that our spiritual capacities of intellect and will enable us to transcend our pain and suffering, not only to make sense of them rationally, but through the experience of the more spiritual joys that redeem them. V&V

NOTES

1. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick, *Oxford World's Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 199
2. Attributed to Ludwig Wittgenstein in Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 95.
3. ST II-II 28.

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ANGELA WILLIAMS GORRELL

The Gravity of Joy

In March 2016, I was hired to research joy. I was ecstatic. For the first few months, I read everything I could get my hands on about joy. I believed deeply that our work mattered, even as I realized early on that I would need to regularly defend it. When I reached out to scholars about joining our project, I often had to explain why joy was worth studying at all.

Eight months into the project, tragedy struck. Three of my family members died in the span of four weeks, each in devastating ways. My cousin's husband died by suicide at 30, just a week before Christmas. My 22-year-old nephew died suddenly of an undetected heart condition. And five days later, my dad died after years of opioid addiction.

Suddenly, I felt like the skeptics I had been trying to win over. *Study joy?* How trivial and shallow in a hurting world, I thought. Surely there were more important things to research. In my grief, I could hardly bring

ARTWORK BY EMMA HIGGINS

myself to get out of bed each day. With the help of EMDR therapy, I managed to keep working, focusing on nurturing partnerships in our research network and overseeing the grant's metrics and evaluation. I couldn't bring myself to write about joy, so I set that work aside.

A year and a half later, I became a volunteer chaplain at a women's maximum-security prison. It was strange that I said yes. I felt empty, and yet I sensed God nudging me toward this opportunity. It changed my life.

Inside that prison, in a circle of blue plastic chairs, I began to discover joy as the ultimate counteragent to despair. The women there had endured profound suffering, yet they demonstrated a remarkable capacity for joy. As we shared our stories, sang songs, prayed, supported one another, laughed, cried, and imagined hopeful futures together, joy erupted.

Since then, my research on joy has been tested again and again. I know what joy is and what it's capable of, and why living open to it matters deeply. But it is often far easier to nurture pessimism, hopelessness, and distrust in human goodness and in the integrity of institutions. Most days I find myself more inclined to point out what is wrong than what is right. I revel in sarcasm, and I've mastered the art of cultivating disappointment and worry.

It is hard for me to be a joyful person—let alone a joy scholar—in an overwhelming, unjust, and divided world. And yet, as I reflect on what I learned in that prison, I see more clearly that it's possible for me to keep longing for and giving myself over to joy, because it is neither a superficial feeling nor a form of naïve optimism. Joy does not depend on ideal circumstances. It is not fragile. To recognize and embrace joy is not to ignore reality or to betray grief. Joy and sorrow can live intermingled in our hearts. While sorrow is not necessary for joy, the two can be companions. Lament tells the truth about what is wrong, so it can open the heart to also recognize what is good and right. Both lament and joy are

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forms of truth-telling—honest lament can clear the way for genuine joy.

Joy is an orientation toward life, rooted in meaning, truth, goodness, beauty, love, and transcendence, even and especially in the midst of hardship. As such, joy is not optional. It is critical, not only for individual lives but also for our educational institutions, our workplaces, and whole societies.

GRATITUDE: ATTUNING TO THE GOOD

Joy is not the same as happiness, entertainment, or mere positivity. It cannot be reduced to pleasure, optimism, or comfort. Joy often arises through meaningful connection to others, to what matters most, and to something higher and beyond the self. It may mean being captivated and grounded by truth, arrested by goodness or beauty, or transfixed by what makes life, even for a few minutes, feel astoundingly worth living. Joy is illumination, a sudden glimpse of more than the eye can see. That "something more" gives life meaning and empowers us to resist hopelessness. There is no imprisoned mind, barren space, or deafening silence that joy cannot break through. Joy is a form of moral and spiritual resilience. It has grit.

When cultivated as a virtue, joy becomes a posture we take, a practice we nurture, and a lens through which we see the world. It is a gift, an action, and an orientation all at once. To cultivate joy as a virtue, we can engage in "'gateways to joy," practices that open us to its presence and allow it to take root within our communities.

One of these gateways is attunement to the good. The practice of looking for the good has helped my students tremendously. In one of my college courses, I pulled a student aside after class who I could tell needed some extra support. She whispered, "I've tried to take this class two other times and bailed the first week." The theme of the class stirred worry in her. I made it a point to regularly check in. I encouraged her when I could. And in the classroom, I asked students weekly to do the same for one another: name strengths, and call out what they saw that was good.

Slowly, I noticed her change. Her voice grew steadier. Her shoulders lifted. During the middle of the semester, I gathered everyone into a circle. We stood together,

and I asked: "What's one thing you've grown in this semester, something you can celebrate in yourself?" When her turn came, she didn't hesitate. She named the change she saw in herself out loud, and she rejoiced. We all rejoiced with her. When we practice attuning to the good, we learn to notice what elicits joy: positive transformation, the beauty that surrounds us, and the truths that remind us who we are.

We can train our brains to notice the good that is present rather than just what is difficult, painful, or missing—a practice that can help us to resist despair in especially difficult circumstances.

In the prison group I led, I once got permission to bring in a flipchart and a box of markers. I split the women into groups, handed each one a giant sheet of paper, and asked: "Prison takes away so much. What do you still have?" The women were always full of curiosity and eagerness to learn and share. That night was no different. They turned to each other ready to dive into conversation, and words began to tumble out. They wrote and wrote, filling the pages. Fifteen minutes later, we stood around those lists in silence, mesmerized by the abundance they had created together. This exercise didn't change the fact that they were experiencing tremendous hardship and had navigated many struggles, but it reminded them that their lives still mattered and were full of worth. Even in prison their lives held meaning, and they had some agency and things to offer one another.

A deeper form of attunement to the good is gratitude, which not only deliberately seeks out what is good but also turns our attention toward what is life-giving and sustaining, and gives thanks for it.

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Practiced over and over, gratitude reshapes people. It sharpens our perception of light in ordinary things, and prepares the ground of our souls for joy to take root. That is why, in every class I teach and every program I lead, I always end the same way, with gratitude. Participants are invited to share thanks for one another, for what they've learned, and for the journey itself. These closing circles never fail to undo me, because gratitude, especially when practiced in community, becomes joy embodied.

PURPOSE AND VOCATION: MAKING MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

Another gateway to joy is the experience of meaningful connection. In my public speaking class for Santa Fe Community College, I designed an assignment in which each student had to give four talks, but they had freedom in topic and genre. These could be anything from a marketing pitch to a wedding toast to a speech at a protest. I encouraged them to choose subjects and formats that connected to their sense of purpose or vocation. One student, training to be a chef, took a unique approach. He recorded his talk in his kitchen, standing beside a raw chicken. As the camera rolled, he demonstrated how to break it down properly and then described the variety of meals that could be created from just one bird. A class he had assumed had little to do with his vocation became a space where he shared something central to his joy and calling. He transformed a public speaking exercise into a celebration of meaningful work.

That moment reminded me of something I've witnessed again and again: joy emerges when our daily activities align with our deeper purpose. Most of us reach a point when we begin to wonder: Who am I? What am I doing here? What sense can I make of my life? What I've realized is that we cannot answer these questions alone. In those seasons, we need guides who help us connect the ordinary rhythms of our days with a deeper sense of why it matters that we keep rising each morning. This is why teachers, mentors, and leaders play such an important role: they help us recognize and connect the threads of meaning in our lives. When our lives feel integrated—when the tasks of daily living contribute to our organizations, our communities, our relationships, or our values—we discover a centering kind of joy.

This truth became especially vivid when I taught Life Worth Living at Yale. As part of the course, we took students on a retreat. It is just one Saturday and technically optional, yet every student always chooses to attend. During the retreat, we asked them to wrestle with the question: *"How do you*

hope to engage the world, and why?" It was intentionally expansive. Students could speak about their future careers, but they could also reflect on how they wanted to contribute to their families and communities and the mark they hoped to make. The retreat created space for students to name and connect their deepest values to the shape of their lives. In that space of reflection and guidance, I began to see how joy emerges not simply from achieving goals, but also from discerning meaning. When people are invited to consider what is truly worth living for, even brief encounters can become sites of transformation.

I saw this same truth come alive one evening in the prison group where I was given permission to bring white paper and markers for our version of "vision boards." Though the context could not have been more different, the underlying dynamic was strikingly similar: when people are offered a setting in which to explore purpose with honesty and hope, joy begins to surface. I invited the women to draw or write words that represented the vision they had for their lives. I asked them to consider what matters most and to describe what is truly worth living for. They wasted no time. Scattering around the room, they bent over the paper, sketching and writing with focus and energy. When the boards were finished, we hung them on the walls and invited anyone who wished to share their thoughts. One by one, they spoke with hope: about becoming counselors, reclaiming peace and self-worth, living without shame, making their families proud, helping others, and staying attuned to God.

One of the students, Amy, raised her hand and, after being invited to share, bluntly said she wanted to wipe people's butts in a nursing home one day. The way she said it was funny, but no one laughed because she was incredibly excited and serious about it. Amy went on to lovingly explain that people had cared for her and she didn't mind caring for others, especially those who really need help like older people in nursing homes who often are forgotten. She said she knew what it was to feel forgotten. Amy rejoiced over her vision board because it is joyful to have experiences that encourage us to become the people that we know we most deeply and truly are.

A deeper form of attunement to the good is gratitude, which not only deliberately seeks out what is good but also turns our attention toward what is life-giving and sustaining, and gives thanks for it.

At the end of the night, after the women exited the room, I gazed at the visions hanging on the wall. The images and words they left behind and what they had shared about them testified to the same truth I had witnessed with my students: that joy can grow in the soil of meaning and connection. One woman wrote, "Not just a person from the projects who dies without changing the world, even if it is something as small as the ripple effect," surrounding her words with hand-drawn ripples of water. Another vision board had several concrete aspirations that together demonstrated not just what sort of life would be worth living, but how she might get there too: "Recovery, God #1, trauma therapist, motivational speaker, work with inner-city children." I stared for several minutes at another sign: "Love without anger and fear, never forget where I came from and where I was headed." These words stayed with me long after I left the prison.

Across the contexts—community college, elite university, and correctional facility—I saw the same movement of the human spirit: the awakening that occurs when people make meaningful connections between their daily activities, convictions, and sense of purpose. Integrative or existential joy arises not only when we know what we are living for, but when we discover, often through the help of wise guides and shared reflection, that how we live also matters.

COMMUNAL JOY: FOSTERING COLLABORATION AND BELONGING

Communal joy is ignited when people in a group feel known, honored, and bound together. Educational spaces often only foster competition and comparison. Yet, educators have opportunities to cultivate communal joy as well. I have noticed that when I name and celebrate the ways students support, rely on, and uplift one another that they tend to enjoy turning to one another more. Making acts of solidarity more visible teaches that success is shared, and it invites participants in an educational setting or staff in an organization to learn how to lean on each other, grow from one another's input, and explore new ideas alongside each other. Honoring collaboration in this way reshapes how we understand what it means to show up in a learning community or in a workplace. It clears the ground for redefining participation itself, not as the performance of brilliance, but as the practice of connection.

My friend and colleague, Ryan McAnnally-Linz, helped me articulate this shift in my courses. In my syllabi, I explain that class participation doesn't just mean having a brilliant idea. It looks like asking a question or making a comment that shows interest in what another person says; or making a comment that underscores the

link between two people's contributions or signals that another person's ideas are interesting or useful. In this sense, participation becomes not just about sharing one's own insight but also about amplifying the voices around us. When collaboration is honored and participation is redefined as recognition, something beautiful develops: joy that is shared in common.

I often end my programs and classes with a truth-telling circle. On the final day, each participant has the opportunity to both receive affirming words and to offer them to someone else. To facilitate this activity, I reflect on the experiences we've had together and prepare and print a set of words that highlight what is good and true about the group as a whole—affirmations that reflect the values, strengths, and shared experiences of the participants. During the closing circle, a chair is placed in the center. One by one, participants sit in the chair while someone stands in front of them and reads the affirmations aloud. Every participant has a turn to both read words to someone else starting with their name and have words read to them. I begin with the person next to me, and the process continues around the circle. In the most recent Life Worth Living journey I led, this was the affirmation students read to one another:

> *"May you live a meaningful life. May you dare to hope and recover from failure. May you respond to suffering—your own and others'—in ways that carry meaning for you. When the spaces you work in feel overwhelming, may you turn to the relationships you've formed here. When the winds of life blow you off course, may you draw on the truths you discovered or reclaimed. Your life is worth living. Your life matters to us. You are free to live into your gifts, free to be yourself, free to live a life worthy of your humanity."*

The room grew still when the words of affirmation were spoken. Many participants cried. Everyone was moved. The group experienced a sobering, quiet joy. This is because when someone tells the truth about who we are, honors our dignity, or encourages us to be our true self—when they really see us and speak it aloud—it changes us. It happens too rarely. Rituals, celebrations, and moments of shared affirmation spark communal joy that is infectious. It is nearly impossible to witness someone else rejoicing, celebrating, or experiencing joy—whether exuberant, healing, transformative, or redemptive—without feeling more deeply connected to them or drawn into their experience. Experiences of joy point us toward what is worth doing, desiring, creating, and pursuing. In this way, joy nurtures human beings toward what is truly worthy of their relationships, time, work, and imagination.

JOY IS A VIRTUE

Joy is a practice, a lens, and a moral and spiritual orientation that can transform lives, classrooms, organizations, and communities. We experience glimmers of joy when we learn to attune to the ever-present good in us, in our lives, in others, and in the world. Joy also emerges when our daily activities as well as how we work and how we move through life aligns with our deepest values and sense of purpose. Joy flourishes when we celebrate collaboration and take part in communal rituals of recognition and care.

Joy is resilient, grounded in meaning, and capable of piercing despair even in the most difficult circumstances. From my early research at Yale to the women's prison where I first witnessed joy's radical power, to classrooms and programs I continue to lead, I have seen the same truth again and again: joy flourishes when we step through its gateways that help us recognize and feel connected to meaning, truth, beauty, goodness, others, or God. It especially thrives when we truly see one another and build communities where human dignity is honored.

We need joy guides—teachers, mentors, and leaders—who help us to engage in gateways to joy. Joy guides encourage practices that help us recognize the good and focus on and give thanks for what we have rather than what's missing; assist us with integration, living with purpose, and making meaningful connections; and create opportunities for communal joy.

Joy is both a personal and communal gift. We cannot make ourselves feel joy, but we can live expectantly—awake and alive to its possibility—knowing that joy can always find us, even when our hearts are broken. Joy can live within us even when disappointment, worry, or pessimism weigh heavy. And in a world that so often feels fractured and overwhelming, surrendering to joy when it comes is not only an act of resistance, it is an act of sustenance. It helps us endure. It roots us in belonging. It keeps hope alive. V&V

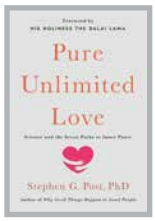
Rev. Dr. Angela Williams Gorrell is an author, speaker, and consultant whose work focuses on joy, meaning, purpose, and the intersection of spiritual and mental health. She is the author of *Always On*, *The Gravity of Joy*, and *Braving Difficult Decisions*. Her work has been featured in the New York Times, the Washington Post, and NPR. She has taught at Yale University and Baylor University.

Good Reads

We asked our authors to recommend a book they had read over the past couple of years. Here is what they said:

Pure Unlimited Love

Science and the Seven Paths to Inner Peace



BY STEPHEN POST

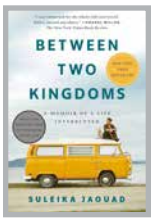
Dr. Stephen Post has devoted his life to the study of pure unlimited love—unconditional love freely given to all, without hesitation or reservation. This spiritual reality, initially called agape by the ancient Greeks, is held by many to be the highest ideal and purpose of our existence. Post weaves together scientific discoveries, spiritual insights, and personal stories, painting a compelling portrait of this eternal universal force that is needed in our world now more than ever. Foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. **—ROBERT EMMONS**

Gilead

BY MARILYNNE ROBINSON

In a series of letters from an elderly pastor to his young son, Robinson explores the beauty and meaning of the everyday ordinary world, the unmerited quality of love, both divine and human, the complexity of friendship and family relations, and the gap between Christian belief and practice that even those who try to their best to love God experience. I am not exaggerating when I say that this novel is a miracle that simply must be experienced rather than explained or summarized. **—JENNIFER FREY**

Between Two Kingdoms



BY SULEIKA JAOUAD

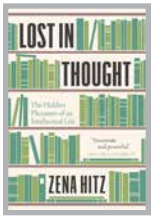
Suleika Jaouad's storytelling captivated and inspired me. The book follows her journey across the U.S. after entering remission from cancer. It explores life through her eyes amid pain and uncertainty, and reflecting on what it means to truly recover, connect, and restore a vision of a life worth living after significant struggle. —ANGELA GORRELL

Against the Machine
On the Unmaking of Humanity

BY PAUL KINGSNORTH

In moving beyond technological anxiety and by naming legitimate concerns for freedom in the face of late modernity, this book offers comprehensive insight into what it means to remain human in the machine age and mechanistic cultures. *Against the Machine* is theoretically expansive and practically unsettling, inviting readers to moral clarity and seriousness in our contemporary moment without being anti-modern. —EMILY HUNT-HINOJOSA

Lost in Thought
The Hidden Pleasures of the Intellectual Life



BY ZENA HITZ

This book is a deep exploration of the sustaining power of the inner life: for learning, for deepening our humanity, and for genuine community and connection with others. Hitz's meditations move fluidly between the profound and the personal. —FRANCIS SU

EMILY HUNT-HINOJOSA

Searching for Joy

FIELD NOTES

As an aspiring student at a Midwestern Christian liberal arts university, I took to heart the challenge issued by our long-standing university president: take the academic journey seriously. Long after his official role had ended, students would find the former president in the student union, having coffee with the grounds crew early in the mornings. He was famous for all kinds of sayings, for weaving humor and wisdom, depth and context, and most of all, for his impeccable delivery. Many of his anecdotes are still exchanged by alumni. One I recall vividly that felt both comforting and liberating to me, an 18-year-old who was mostly indifferent to intellectual pursuits, was some version of: You aren't going to turn over a rock and find something that will eat God, so look everywhere for truth.

ARTWORK BY JENNIFER CAVAN

This practice of refusing to avoid unavoidable questions has become a core part of my identity as an educator and an integral part of my scholarly efforts to better understand how modernity, culture, and institutions work together to shape (and misshape) reality and thus what it means to be human.

It was likely more eloquently stated than that, but the general idea was, since there was nothing to fear in life or death, there was nothing to fear in thinking and discovery. Our job as students was to know and better understand, no matter where that would take us. It was an invitation to the best kind of deconstruction, the kind that is loving, that assumes wholeness, and that draws upon the liberal arts. In a Wendell Berry-like way, this vision of thinking is one that never sits well with convenient truths or popular plaudits, arrogance, and hot-take perspectives—liberal, moderate, or conservative.

Over the past twenty years I've taken the words and the search for knowledge seriously most days since—pursuing graduating training, reading ferociously, searching high and low for the world's best conversation partners and colleagues, and approaching new ideas with sincere openness, particularly when it comes to things that make me uncomfortable. This habit has emerged as radical intellectual curiosity. At times this inquiry has been rooted in traditional academic pursuits, and at other times, squarely and intentionally outside of the ivory tower. I've somehow managed to always remain faithful and in service to the vocation of turning over rocks and unearthing their assumptions. This practice of refusing to avoid unavoidable questions has become a core part of my identity as an educator and an integral part of my scholarly efforts to better understand how modernity, culture, and institutions work together to shape (and misshape) reality and thus what it means to be human.

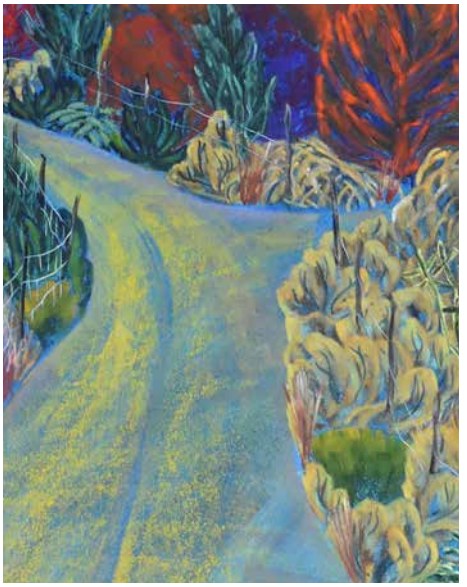
My experience and reflection on joy has followed this pattern. The very act of thinking can return me to the moments I have felt joy just as quickly as to those moments when it has been absent. I was concerned joy would be the kind of thing that this could evoke personal responses about experiences of having found joy but that could inadvertently leave out the important dimension of grief. I could imagine decrees from the initiated that joy is indeed possible, but that it wouldn't land well for victims of gun violence and war. I found myself rehearsing these and other possible perspectives in my mind, increasingly furious over the platitudes-masked-as philosophies that I've heard over a lifetime around mostly happy, calm, often wealthy people who haven't suffered much. Even the well-intentioned and radical Joy-as-Resistance framing can be hard to swallow in the moments you are sad or overwhelmed. Within a few minutes, the deepest parts of me knew that to attempt to encounter joy would involve wild and unmanageable terrain, both in me and out there in the world.

Drawing equally upon my training in sociology and my own practice of staying fully present to what is, one of the ways I regularly think is through active imagination. When presented with a topic of inquiry, like joy, I visualize a circle of "thought companions"—individuals who differ in demographic charactersitics and life experiences who help me think. The emerging "companions" inevitably form a circle of guidance. Over the years of honing this practice, sometimes non-human images like ideologies or cultural forces populate these circles too. Recently, concepts like power, love, inequality, polarization, virtues, and anomie have made an appearance—at times personified, other times as object or spirit. Inevitably, things outside of us and outside of others affect our ability to get to clarity, and often these qualities have things to say. Taken together and drawing on their diverse voices and histories, these "companions" often shed light on a piece of a larger story or thought.

Given that grabbing on to cosmic realities like joy is slippery, often evading us the minute we find it, I've used the imaginative exercise described above to consider different perspectives and collect wisdom about what a person might expect if they were pusuing joy. I invite you to open your own imagination as you read on and consider a sort of map of five markers that might help you in your journey.

Dear Fellow Travelers:

We invite you to join us on the Good Path to Joy, the brief though recurring experience of the world as it should be. This journey is highly specific to you



and your companions. You can begin from anywhere, but how you get there will very much depend on where each of you start. Throughout the journey ahead you'll encounter stone markers along the path that will aid you in your arrival at joy. These markers will be obvious to you, though they have different shapes and sizes. Each of them points to suggestions for what to see along the way, what kinds of things to take with you, and which way to turn at crossroads.

Be on guard. In recent days, we've received word that despite our best efforts at keeping the path clearly marked, some rocks have appeared that seem to be impersonating the ones we've left. Some seem to have appeared quite naturally, the result of tectonic shifts and time, and others nefariously placed without regard for these lands. These are increasingly sophisticated deepfakes.

1. Trailhead

The first marker you'll see will mark the beginning of the path. You can actively look for it or actively avoid it, though at times it may just appear before you. At this spot and whenever you encounter it, take off your shoes. Going barefoot is to remind you that this is not simply an intellectual quest, something to explore merely in your mind.

If you look under the stone marker, which will require some digging, you'll discover all your preconceptions about joy. These preconceptions include every idea and thought ever written about joy, both its affirmations and negations, left here by the elders who took the path. The accompanying endnotes will share how these ideas have been helpful guides up to this point, the point of being led to seek joy. Now is the time you must leave yours here too, along with your concerns about what other people think joy is, your papers, tenure, citations, grants and endowments that have anything to do with joy. Acknowledge them for their hard work and give thanks. Name any hangups you have about your fellow companions—how they should look or what they should be, as well as any you

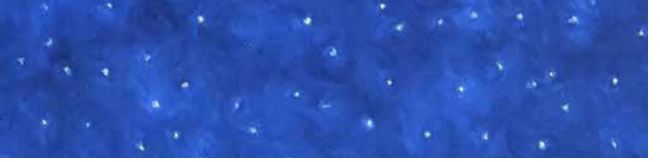
have about following your intuition, feelings, or experiences. You'll need to rely on these skills to get you through to the end. This path cannot be forced, demanded, or objectified, only felt.

2. Bypass

Another marker you'll encounter, most likely just when your feet are starting to hurt, will have a sign with arrows pointing to other beautiful sites such as happiness or pleasure that are worth visiting in this region of the cosmos. Some arrows also will direct you towards places you'll want to avoid, including pain and suffering. Both lists are alphabetized for ease. These places are breathtaking and distracting. They can be visited on the way to joy or as separate destinations. Since you'll be tired, physically and possibly emotionally, some will seem quite attractive and others extremely repulsive. It's important to know these trails are themselves bypasses that go around some important parts of the journey to joy, but on their own will offer views, waterfalls, and photo-ops. It is very easy to get lost on the bypass trails, particularly because of the impersonating markers. If you look under this rock, you'll see messages, some regrets and some satisfactions composted throughout the ages from travelers who ended up on these bypasses, got stuck, but never made it to joy.

3. Warning

The third marker will be painted red, warning you that you are now entering a region that predators call their home, and several places nearby prone to rockslides and shifting sand. The warnings listed on the rock remind travelers to stay on the path, to avoid feeding wildlife, and to not hike after dark. Never hike alone. Recently, there have been increased reports of guides just across the border trying to sell you their



services, promising to get you to joy for a small fee, and even apps some have downloaded that claim to map out the clearest path to joy. Do not trust any of them, particularly the shiny ones, they inevitably route back to the bypasses. If you look under this rock, you'll find notes from some travelers who stopped and turned back and reviews of the apps with accompanying star ratings. There are notes from those who listened to the snake oil sellers, lost their fortune, and still never made it to joy. Some describe hauntings in this part of the path, sensing some presences that were both drawing them to and away from joy.

4. Directions

The map marker appears somewhat deceptively late in the journey with a signpost map, noting North, South, East, and West, Up, Down, In and Out. This is a good time to review maps and their accompanying ideas and instructions for all directions, if you are curious. Each of them was placed there by some good-hearted people who, coming from their own direction, decided they knew the way. These instructions are well-meaning attempts to direct you on a path to joy. They will seem helpful, offering insight when it is dark on where to turn left and where to turn right on the path, when to ask for help, how much it will cost, and how much you will receive if you arrive. The instructions outline how to carry yourself, what to wear, which bathrooms to use, appropriate ratios of women to men in your group, how many kids are allowed and how old they need to be and how much time their parents must be with them, when to smile and when to laugh so as to show you are near joy, when to cry and when to mourn when you encounter suffering. They even share what age is best for what kinds of joy. These can be helpful, but they each assume their direction is the only one and thus there is only one way to get to joy.

If you look under this marker, you'll find notes from others sharing other orienting tools that can help you on the journey when you lose your way with the maps provided. These are soul maps made up of Poetry, Art, Dreams, scripture, visions, biographies, fire making instructions, herbs, dances, recipes, songs, prayers, and blessings that have helped people along the way. Use what is helpful, here.

5. Destination

When you arrive at the final marker, you'll see a welcome sign that at the same time bids you farewell. This path is after all a labyrinth. We would have told you earlier, but we didn't know it ourselves until we had been by it a few times, thinking we were lost. Most travelers forget they've been by it before only to see it again and suddenly remember they have been here before. If you look under this final rock,

you'll find all the letters from pilgrims since time immemorial sharing their own sense of the world as ultimately good and how they knew it to be. They speak of arrivals to joy and of departures, of journeys and their companions, of resistance to joy and joy as resistance. You'll read of the sunrises and new dawns, the dark nights and waning moons, the paths not taken, sickness and health, and of so many children born and of those who didn't make it. This is a moment to look around at your companions, but not to cling. Allow them to leave and linger in their own time.

I believe joy is allowed rather than demanded, surprising and not to be managed, experienced through connection.

This letter describes what my imagined companions—sociological archetypes to draw out complexities beyond my own experience and knowledge—might encounter together on the path to joy. At the end of the journey, I believe joy is allowed rather than demanded, surprising and not to be managed, and experienced through connection. It is beyond our individual selves, available in instants to which we are always invited to notice, and sustained for varying amounts of time, distributed both in abundance and unequally. Joy's full arrival—clearly seen and received by diverse companions—was made possible only by the weaving of each companion's experiences of love and pain with that of all others in the circle. No stone could be left unturned. M&V

Emily Hunt-Hinojosa works with colleges and universities to study and strengthen institutional conditions for character formation. Trained as a cultural and community sociologist, her research focuses on character education as a site to understand moral cultures and communities. Emily currently collaborates with members of the Educating Character Initiative community through her role as Senior Research Scholar and Associate Director of Partnerships for the Educating Character Initiative at Wake Forest University. She received her M.A. in Higher Education and Student Affairs from Taylor University, her Ph.D. in Sociology from Baylor University, and was a Research Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia. She is a member of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina.

ROSS GAY

Patience

Call it sloth; call it sleaze;
call it bummery if you please;
I'll call it patience;
I'll call it joy, this,
my supine congress
with the newly yawning grass
and beetles chittering
in their offices
beneath me, as I
nearly drifting to dream
admire this so-called weed which,
if I guarded with teeth bared
my garden of all alien breeds,
if I was all knife and axe
and made a life of hacking
would not have burst gorgeous forth
and beckoning
these sort of phallic spires
ringleted by these sort of vaginal
blooms
which the new bees, being bees, heed;
and yes, it is spring, if you can't tell
from the words my mind makes
of the world, and everything
makes me mildly or more
hungry—the worm turning
in the leaf mold; the pear blooms
howling forth their pungence
like a choir of wet-dreamed boys
hiking up their skirts; even
the neighbor cat's shimmy
through the grin in the fence,
and the way this bee
before me after whispering
in my ear dips her head
into those dainty lips
not exactly like one entering a
chapel
and friends
as if that wasn't enough
blooms forth with her forehead
dusted gold
like she has been licked
and so blessed
by the kind of God
to whom this poem is prayer.

Source: "Patience" from *Catalogue of Unabashed Gratitude* by Ross Gay, ©2015.
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INTERLUDE

Lessons from the School of Life

"There is this curious debt that joy owes to suffering."

ALAIN DE BOTTON

INTERVIEW

Joy and Melancholy

An Interview with Alain de Botton

Alain de Botton is the author of more than 17 books about life's biggest questions: How should we live with pain and pleasure? What is meaningful work? What does it mean to be happy? What is romantic love? What does it mean to think for oneself? Why do we travel? From his first novel, *On Love*, published in 1993, to his internationally acclaimed, *How Proust Can Change Your Life* in 1997, to his latest productions with UK based School of Life, including the 2023, *A Therapeutic Journey: Lessons from the School of Life,* de Botton's work is a philosophical balm for human souls.

De Botton read history at University of Cambridge, completed an MPhil in Philosophy at King's College London, and earned a PhD in French philosophy

ARTWORK BY PATRICIA MACDONALD

from Harvard University. Seeking a life where being an academic could involve a mixture of teaching, exploration, and involvement in the world, de Botton founded the School of Life in 2008. As he tells it, the School of Life was inspired by the idea that the philosophers of ancient Greece ran little philosophy shops. In this spirit, the School of Life began as a book shop in central London, and it has developed into a publishing house, a school, a shop, and a YouTube channel with about 10 million subscribers.

As we developed an issue around the theme of joy, it became clear that discussions of joy reverberate with many of the fundamental questions that Alain de Botton has dedicated his life to exploring. We sat down with him for an expansive discussion, which has been edited for length and clarity.

Suzanne Shanahan: **Welcome. We're so pleased you can join us. I was introduced to your work when *How Proust Can Change Your Life* came out, and I still carry with me that first sentence: "There are few things humans are more dedicated to than unhappiness." Can you talk a little bit about the moment that you started to engage in questions about what it means to have a meaningful life and how to address our daily challenges?**

Alain de Botton: Thank you. It is lovely to be here. I should say that, always and foremost, my project was a personal one. By that, I mean, I didn't ever really sit back and think, what does the audience want? What does the moment want? I took myself as my first patient and reader, and I used the word patient accurately. I do see writing and thinking as an attempt to be in dialogue with often troubled or pained versions of myself. For example, my first book *On Love*, was a series of essayistic digressions about emotional relationships. And that's because at that time and still today, love and emotional relationships are a source of great difficulty, as well as hope and excitement, and curiosity.

I find it comedic, but also touching, when people say to me, "How did you know that about me?" The truth is, I have no idea. I'm just talking about myself. Isn't it a lovely thing if it turns out that a dilemma or situation that's very personal also turns out to

be something that has an echo, or precisely maps onto a situation in somebody else.

It is one of the great mysteries and wonders that one could, by paying great attention to oneself, also come to know very private parts of a stranger. Differences between people often exist at the relatively superficial levels. But once you get to the more emotional marrow, the kind of stuff that people don't share publicly–the fears and longings–there is an astonishing degree of private, secret congruence. This is what makes poetry and art function. In each, people are quietly recognizing bits of one another and bits of themselves in the works of each other.

SS: I wonder how you arrived at this way of working through the personal as a public intellectual. Your style is rich, yet very accessible.

AB: One of the writers who deeply inspires me is the French 16th-century philosopher Montaigne. Montaigne lived in the countryside and believed he learned quite a lot from ordinary life around him, and he liked to speak in a plain and unadorned way about things. Montaigne takes a calculated risk with a kind of ordinariness. I also see this in Emerson, who says, "In the minds of geniuses, we find our own neglected thoughts." This is such an astonishing and wonderful quote. Emerson is not saying genius is some sort of strange, abstract thing. Rather, it is just about paying attention to neglected bits of oneself. Genius is remaining open to neglected sections of experience.

Across my work, I'm trying to imagine a reader who's also a part of me. And there are autobiographical roots to this too. Rather interestingly, I had a very erudite and scholarly father with whom I had a distant and not particularly congenial relationship. My chief maternal figure was a nanny who didn't have a formal education,

I think of happiness in terms of moments, not days or years.

but was, in my eyes, extremely intelligent—though she didn't fit the model of intelligence that I was growing up around. I didn't really know what to make of this. I felt an urge to defend someone whose way of looking at the world didn't fit into books and didn't fit into the educational structure that I was succeeding in. A wise person once said to me, "I think you're trying to write for your father and your nanny at the same time." And I thought, that's possibly right.

SS: I love that story of your father and your nanny: it would be wonderful to think that they could actually have a conversation about this work and fully embrace it. It's offering a depth of understanding to our daily existence that is accessible across educational spectrums, which is really extraordinary.

I once heard you say that you thought happiness was a coercive concept, which I absolutely loved. How do you conceive of happiness now, the importance or lack thereof?

AB: You're right to pick up on the coercive bit. I really have in mind occasions where happiness seems mandatory. I mean, we start with birthdays, but it could also be holidays or vacations. I wrote a book called *The Art of Travel* because travel is often an occasion when being content is very high up on the agenda. But there are all kinds of complexities.

I'm somebody who can't really be happy until I've at least had a chance to explore the opposite. Could we be miserable here? I'd like to at least have the possibility that it's all going to go a bit wrong. Once we've done that, then we might be able to laugh and have a nice time. A certain kind of modesty about our potential to be content feels wise.

I've observed that our minds are frustrating in their relationship to happiness. They give us a sense that if we only achieve the right thing or reach the correct place, it will make us happy forever. But it lasts

15 minutes, because we tend to be visited by newer longings, newer aspirations, and newer sources of things to be unhappy about as soon as we reach a certain stage. So, I think of happiness in terms of moments, not days or years.

SS: It strikes me that much of the literature on happiness, and indeed the expectations of many young people, is that happiness is a lingering state. So, you achieve happiness, and then you have it, you own it, you use it, you deploy it, and when you go on vacation you are bringing that state with you. Or, your friends all have it, and you're required to enact it so that you don't ruin their state of bliss and their fixedness. How do you think about communicating, especially with young people who are really trying to achieve a state of happiness?

AB: It's a beautiful idea. It is profoundly wrong, but beautiful.

Every single Greek story, every anecdote is about someone who thought they had happiness in their possession, but the gods had other plans. The more you think it's yours, the less the gods are going to leave you in peace. There's something there for us, something that's particularly useful for our own times. Precisely because it's so foreign.

"Call no man happy till he dies," is a phrase that captures this. I mean, wow. If we really are alive, the resonance of that line–that beautiful, somber, very compassionate line–is asking us to reassess a lot. It's asking us to tread very lightly on the ground and to be very cautious around anything that looks like stable happiness.

SS: I'm teaching a group of first-year students here at Notre Dame who believe that getting into Notre Dame is a pathway to extraordinary lifelong happiness. How might one interrupt that belief in a thoughtful and effective way?

AB: I would want to give them a crash course in the great thinkers of pessimism. What does it feel like to read Arthur Schopenhauer? What does it feel like to read Blaise Pascal or Samuel Beckett, and to immerse oneself in the darkest pronouncements of some of these people? And why is this not depressing? Put up on a screen the Seneca quote: "What need is there to weep over parts of life? The whole of it calls for tears." And another quote that says, "Enjoy today because it's so beautiful." Ask students which one they like best. Which sentence gives greater pleasure? Why are we

having a good time with this? Why is there humor here?

Humor accomplishes something very important. It's roping together the painful and the joyful. It's creating a joyful experience around something dark. And that's a real gift. Normally, we're stuck with this dichotomy: either you've got to be smiling or you've got to be weeping. But there is this kind of strange humor where it's drawing on the insights that you might be immersed in when you're weeping. It's marrying them up with this strange thing called laughing.

With your students, I would also want to look at laughter. What makes us laugh? Why are some of the things that really make us laugh quite dark? We are all on a journey to the gallows, ultimately. If we can make some jokes along the way, that seems pretty significant and pretty important.

SS: I think that for students who are 18 years old, that provides extraordinary relief, because happiness has come to mean that you have to be successful, you have to earn a living, you have to have a wonderful relationship, you have to be talented in all dimensions, and you have to be in a perennial state of happiness.

AB: There's a term I very much like, which is melancholy. It's a fascinating word, which doesn't really have a place in the modern lexicon. If someone said to you, "How are you feeling?" Melancholy would be a strange answer. And yet, what a good answer, I think. Melancholy is situated

somewhere between total despair and a naïve joy. It means that you're engaging with loss and grief and the darkness of existence, but you're not letting it subsume you. You've got it under control more or less. It is perhaps the wisest way to move through the world, especially with age and loss. It's a wonderful bridge to others as well; to exchange melancholy thoughts is a great thing to do.

But we do have this coercive kind of happiness everywhere. I was just writing a piece about resort hotels. You can imagine the sort of place—large buffets, swimming pools, sun loungers. Luxury resorts make this claim to the audience: "You will be happy here. Pay us thousands of dollars a week, and you will have a nice time here." They're such curious establishments, because nowhere else directly forces us to acknowledge this kind of materialist, non-tragic view of contentment as these hotels.

Their essential diagnosis of the human condition is that if you have 17 different fruits for breakfast and a sun lounger, you will then be content. An enormous industry supports this. It's not just the hotel. It's the banking job that will buy you access to the hotel. It's the vision of success. It's the college degree that will get you into that place. These establishments stand relatively close to the pinnacle of our understanding of what life is about, if I can be grand. But of course, if you've got to call up the reception in the middle of the night and go: "I'm having an existential crisis. I don't know what meaning is. I'm unhappy with my partner," despite the seven pools and 12 buffets, they couldn't help you. They would be utterly at a loss. They wouldn't even have the beginnings of an answer. And yet, they are what an ambitious 18-year-old aspires to gain access to.

It's very much the purpose of an education to work counter to the dominant narrative of society and prepare students for a more nuanced vision of how they might lead their lives in a world that doesn't subscribe to this neat vision of where happiness will live.

It's very much the purpose of an education to work counter to the dominant narrative of society and prepare students for a more nuanced vision of how they might lead their lives in a world that doesn't subscribe to this neat vision of where happiness will live.

SS: I want to transition through happiness to joy, because I think that a lot of people confuse joy and happiness. In your thinking, what is joy?

AB: I'm terrifically interested in the possibilities of joyful moments. They're so important because fear and loss and regret are haunting all the time. And I think it's a really contrastive thing.

When you're an adult reading to a child, let's say the child is three, and you're reading them a book about something very sweet and tender. Maybe a mother owl has gone into the forest, but she's come back. She really loves her baby owl, and it's all going to be lovely. I remember reading this to my children; it was so lovely that what I wanted to do was start crying. I wanted to sob at something in this book, and my child had no interest in sobbing at all. He was like, "Well, it's just a pleasant story, I guess." I think some of the reason why he was pretty sanguine about the whole thing is that his mother had always come back. His mother was present, and his home was safe, and life seemed relatively simple and coherent and good. For him, this little moment of sweetness and delight held no particular charm because there was nothing to contrast it with. But if you've gone through a succession of rather challenging things, then this kind of experience moves from being quite nice to being incredibly moving, and it might make you cry.

It's a very rare 20-year-old who would be stopped in their tracks by a bunch of daffodils, but it's a very rare 70-year-old who won't. It's literally the diametric opposite. What is it about spring flowers that makes an older person stop? It's time and suffering. The young person thinks, why would I stop at a bunch of flowers when I may conquer the world and happiness is going to be mine, not just for five minutes, but for decades. But with time, you learn it's really tricky. And so, appreciation increases.

There is this curious debt that joy owes to suffering.

SS: Can you say more about that?

AB: The first dictum of Buddhism is, life is suffering. What an extraordinary statement. And how totally at odds with modern American thought. How does life start to look if you have as your first principle that life suffers? Buddhism is not a joyless religion. It places great emphasis on joy.

I'm going to go on to a slightly risky ground. There's been a huge increase in the language of mental illness and mental health. Many young people report afflictions like anxiety and depression, and I think it's almost as though we've boxed ourselves in. We've defined health as being equated with happiness, with well-being, and with an absence of anxiety. Because we've defined it like this, the only way in which states of despair and loneliness can find their way into the psyche, a legitimate way, is by defining them as illnesses. It's good that despair and loneliness are on the agenda. But this way of thinking creates a slightly brittle division between health and ill health, one that pivots on contrast between joy and suffering.

If the acceptance that we're suffering creatures has a prestige, that really changes things. It gives us permission to be sad, permission to be out of sorts.

Experience with the so-called simple joys, such as moments in nature, moments with food, moments in company, with friends, moments of beauty, and relation to architecture, certain kinds of light, certain kinds of art, all of these things have a tendency to get more and more significant with time and difficulty, and loss—that is, with permission to be out of sorts. V&V

Our conversation with Alain de Botton was truly charming. Not only did he help us think about joy and happiness, he spoke with a rare kind of alacrity, sharing stories about his writing and becoming a parent all while plumbing the depths of Schopenhauer. It was a delight to encounter such whit, intelligence, and emotional vulnerability in one individual. You can find more of de Botton's insightful ruminations at **theschooloflife.com**.

ARTWORK BY PATRICIA MACDONALD

PART II

Joy as a Vocation

"Joy emerges when people take ownership of something meaningful, when they see that their contributions matter, and when they sense their work rippling outward toward purpose."

LAURA DUNHAM

J. DREW LANHAM

Remember Your OJ

"Joy is the justice we give ourselves."

I made this statement in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, in my side yard writing shack I called "The Thicket." During a podcast conversation with Krista Tippett (On Being), it was my off-the-cuff response to the question of surviving not just a viral attack that was killing hundreds daily, but also assaults on justice with the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. Sequestered, quarantined, and working remotely in a world that seemed to be falling apart, it was the first thing that came to mind when she asked questions about hope and joy in such a precarious time.

ARTWORK BY DMITRI WRIGHT

No longer able to depend upon finding rare birds in faraway places, patience and appreciation became my cues for joy.

When the call came for quarantine and remote teaching in the spring of 2020, and when we didn't return from spring break, I tried to figure out how to teach a field ornithology course from Zoom squares. It didn't work too well, but what did happen was an internal intensification of nearby noticing. That is to say, although I was away from my academic home base at Clemson University, with no access to field sites or ability to teach students the rudiments of bird ecology and conservation face-to-face in those earliest days of no contact, my backyard became a cauldron of rediscovery. With trips cancelled on my busy speaking-teaching tour, no visits to bird festivals, and distant birding hotspots off limits with air travel suspended, the half-acre our suburban home sat on began to re-initiate me into the rudiments of deep noticing. No longer able to depend upon finding rare birds in faraway places, patience and appreciation became my cues for joy. Common birds like northern cardinals and white-throated sparrows regained statuses as unique individuals with qualities that allowed me to not just identify them, but to identify with them. A female cardinal with an overbite beak became a rose bush nester, and I wondered if any of her "kids" would inherit her cheeky look. The white-throated sparrows hung out in the corners of the yard, but as spring progressed toward them leaving for northern homes, they became bolder and brighter by the day. When the last bird departed in May, I missed the lisping calls and plaintive songs from the privet thicket. I wished them safe journeys to wherever they were headed.

This isn't the behavior of a professionally trained ornithologist, is it? Should a fully tenured, chair-endowed professor be seeing and feeling birds as who's rather

than that's? Those are amateurish moves close to breaking the rule of objective observation and not anthropomorphizing non-human beings. But in the stress of all that 2020 and the following months presented, I regressed on many days between never-ending Zoom calls to a childlike state of discovery where the origin of my ornithological life began with unending curiosity before the rules of taxonomy, statistical rigor, and peer review came into play.

Fast forward past that global pandemic, racial injustice, treasonous riot, civil unrest, and school shootings, etc., etc., ad nauseum ad infinitum, to current day. We're back to "normal" (whatever that is) behind the ivy walls with students in front of us, but there are new, age-old threats to academic life that are not just resurfacing like some long lost ghost ship. No, these new threats have unfurled the rigging and set sail on a course to ignorance. They pose as much a threat to thinking and thriving as one might imagine.

How does one find joy in the midst of funding cuts bordering on programmatic obliteration? Labs lie empty, and fieldwork is understaffed because federal dollars flew the academic coop. Might the lesson of teaching field ornithology under Covid-19 and my backyard provide a roadmap here too? Is there joy in classrooms and labs where students and faculty increasingly feel disconnected from the educative purposes of higher education? Can there be joy in empty library shelves and journals discontinued as buildings rise around crumbling faculty morale? Free speech and academic freedom, once joyous hallmarks of why a career in the Academy was one of the best "jobs" one might attain, have

been severely strained, with faculty in silos with little to work for but a paycheck. Demonized by the current post-Covid politic and the state of higher education, what are faculty to do?

The solution is quite simple on the day to day. It has little or nothing to do with the ivy walls that have become toxic to the touch. My solution is to rediscover your passion, uncover your genesis for chasing knowledge, find your juice, your OJ; that is, your Original Joy.

I'm a conservation and cultural ornithologist, but I wasn't born with that multisyllabic moniker. I have a doctorate, but that "terminal" degree came long after the foundations of my true being were formed. My foundations are rooted in nature and stewarding the environment; from these, I developed a habit to pause and notice. I recall pausing at a mud puddle as a child. The sudden appearance of water in the middle of a dirt road after a rain stopped me for a leapfrog across or a stick-stirring on my daily trips between my Grandmother's and my parents' house. I paused to define the dimensions of that puddle and notice black dots in masses of jelly made me a bit of an explorer. The next day or two, when I paused, there were little black commas swimming about where the little black dots had been. Where had these little swimmers

come from? Was it some sort of magic? Perhaps some kind of spontaneous generation? A check in my parents' encyclopedia and a few questions to my grandmother introduced me to tadpoles. A little further investigation helped me understand that it took frogs getting together in something called "amplexus." With my introduction to the birds and the bees via frogs, I had firsthand field knowledge of sexual reproduction. I was a budding biologist. Because I'd counted the little comma tadpoles, I kept making counts and saw changes in some of the tadpoles to froglets. Just as critical, though, the puddle was drying up and I was concerned with its fate; I advised parents and siblings to keep car wheels and bicycles clear of the comma habitat. I was at that point a conservationist, caring for the fate of the wild world. In between puddle checks, I looked up in the surrounding trees to see new birds from distant lands. There were decisions to be made between birds and amphibians; between ornithology and herpetology. That could wait. I was a naturalist by age 10 and would spend those formative years establishing a foundation with no degrees, and with the only p-value being passion. Our peer review was showing friends our discoveries and sharing wonder and awe. Tenure was granted by sunrise, sunset, and birdsong.

But then career aspirations and the expectations of adulthood move us to other ends, no less real in grown folks' context,

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but rife with stressors that can cause joy to get lost in the shuffle, with faculty squeezed into husks of our former selves.

In these many years in the university, I've watched too many faculty, including me, forget what got us here. Degrees have advanced us; tenure given some degree of

achievement and security. But we must remember now, especially in these times of faculty depreciation, that for all the machinations and expectations we face in good times and bad, true joy isn't derived

We must remember now, especially in these times of faculty depreciation, that for all the machinations and expectations we face in good times and bad, true joy isn't derived inside the ivy tower walls, it lies outside of them.

inside the ivy tower walls, it lies outside of them. Here's my thirty years' worth of cynicism: do your work in the tower without expectation of anything resembling care or concern for your joy to be your employer's deliverables. Instead, find your juice. Remember your OJ, that original joy of discovery and curiosity; knowing that learning should be fun just as it was as a child, no degree or peer-reviewed permission required. It took the quarantine of a global pandemic, insurrection, social unrest, and rampant racial injustice to re-introduce me in sequestration to the original joy that led me to the professoriate in the first place.

I'm not suggesting you go maverick solo. Instead, I'm suggesting a shift in perspective in this age of faculty isolation and depreciation. Collaboration is a watchword in almost every institution, but in reality, limited resources curb that enthusiasm. Collaborating with peers down the hall or

Joy is justice that no one, inside the academy or outside of it, can ever take away.

across campus isn't easy. To find joy in collaboration and have actual fun with the peers with whom I want to develop kinship and share passion, I build collaborative teams outside of my institution and on my own time. Leave ego (and Principal Investigator status/headache) behind and agree to be a consultant or advisor of some sort. Make yourself useful and connect with your OJ.

Finally, on the teaching front, remember: freedom. Joy is justice that no one, inside the academy or outside of it, can ever take away. V&V

J. Drew Lanham is an academic, writer, artist and public intellectual, from Edgefield and Aiken, South Carolina. He is an Alumni Distinguished Professor, Provost's Professor and Master Teacher of Wildlife Ecology at Clemson University, where his most recent scholarly efforts address the confluences of race, place, and nature. He was a 2022 MacArthur Fellow. Lanham has published widely on conservation and ornithology. He is also an award-winning creative writer and poet, and author of *Sparrow Envy: Poems* (Holocene 2016, Hub City 2018), *Sparrow Envy: A Field Guide to Birds and Lesser Beasts* (Hub City 2021) and *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature* (Milkweed 2016/Tantor Audio 2018). Lanham earned his BA, MS, and PhD from Clemson.

CAMERON KIM

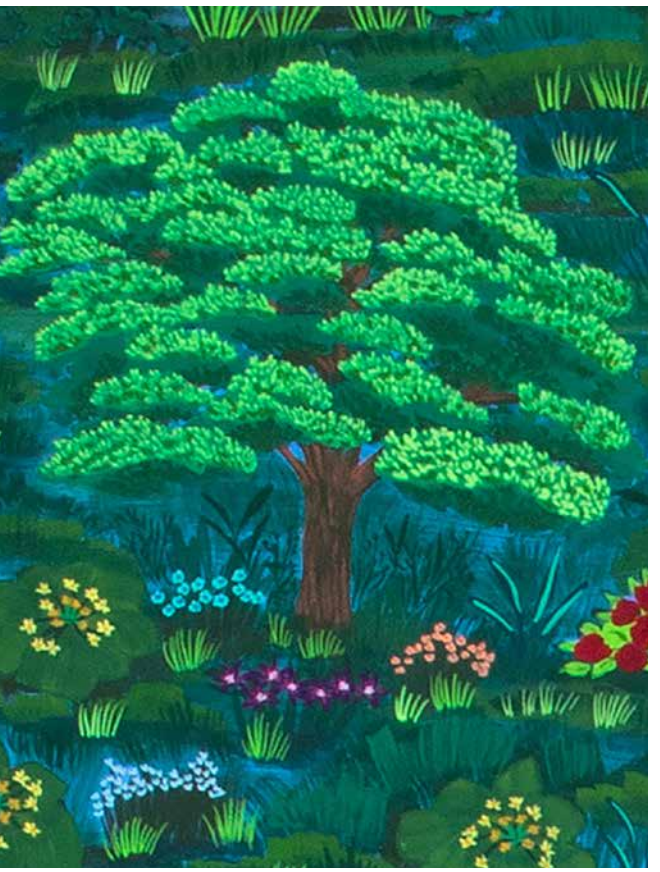
JOY IS AN ENGINE

Many engineers (and bike enthusiasts) have picked up a copy of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* by Robert Pirsig since its publication in 1974. Understandably, they may have been a bit disappointed, expecting some practical advice on staying calm while keeping your motorcycle going smoothly for years to come, and instead getting a healthy dose of philosophy. While this book may not be a manual for fixing engine-powered bipedal vehicles, it teaches something more elusive: that care and attention can transform maintenance into meaning.[1] Pirsig's motorcycle reflects an understanding of how we should care for ourselves in the practice of engineering, and provides a reminder that the mechanical and the moral are intertwined.

ARTWORK BY DANA KOHLMANN

SPARKS FLY AMIDST THE UNKNOWN

An engine runs through a rhythm of four strokes—intake, compression, combustion, and exhaust—each dependent on the others to sustain motion. Air and fuel, which mix in the intake, are pressed tightly together in compression, and then a small spark ignites combustion, releasing energy that drives the piston downward.



Finally, the exhaust clears the chamber for the next cycle. Perhaps we can evoke more joy and flourishing in engineering education through similar cycles of reflection—intake, compression, ignition, release—each fueling the next moment of insight.

In many ways, learning and engineering design follow this sequence: we take in new information, wrestle with it under pressure, experience a moment of ignition when ideas connect, and then release what we've learned into practice before beginning again. The spark itself contributes little energy, but it makes the entire process possible. So too with joy, an often fleeting, easily overlooked feeling. But without it, no motion begins. Joy is the spark that starts the engine. This momentary reaction jumpstarts a world of curiosity that no textbook could ever do. "The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existence. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery each day."[2]

My bioengineering career began with the invisible. I studied RNA molecules smaller than a nanometer, and formed by sequences of four letters (adenine–A, cytosine–C, thymine–T, and guanine–G); these govern

the diversity of life. During my Ph.D., I chased questions that no microscope could answer: *Why does this spliced RNA fold this way? How do molecular forces choreograph complexity? Why can a single base change, fewer than ten atoms, cause disease?* With such invisible molecules, I had to rely on myself and the annals of scientific discovery.

These questions sparked a quiet joy: in glimpsing order within chaos, I felt a satisfaction not of possession but of participation. Many nights in the lab, nine XY-axis, and tens of thousands of dots popping up within seconds would decide the fate of my self-worth for a few days. Within these dots was the data for a single cell that either did as I wanted or decided to resist my desires to engineer it for a set of new tools. Watching these data points, I realized, no matter what the results showed, I knew something that only one person in the world knew. I was the only person working with these molecules and cells flashing across the screen. In these moments, I was the sole arbiter of this discovery and had to sit with the realities and unknowns—what could these data do to improve the world? Here, I could not rely on the past to guide my curiosity, but an intrinsic motivation—that spark—that kept me going in the messy plots ahead of me. It was moments like these that brought me a sense of wonder, confusion, and joy.

These questions sparked a quiet joy: in glimpsing order within chaos, I felt a satisfaction not of possession but of participation.

Later on in my career, I came to the research of Todd Kashdan and his five-dimensional curiosity scale that starts with joyous exploration: curiosity infused with delight that seeks out knowledge and new experience.[3] Along with four complementary dimensions of curiosity—deprivation sensitivity, stress tolerance, social curiosity, and thrill seeking—Kashdan reveals many curiosity types that he posits can be cultivated. Yet, perhaps we need to really think about the spark in this learning cycle.

MANUFACTURING JOY IN ENGINEERING EDUCATION

When I reflect on my journey through bioengineering as a researcher and an educator, I see just how important cultivating these sparks can be. Combustion engines and design cycles alike are inert without these moments of ignition. Such is the role of innovation in engineering to motivate

new, perhaps wild, ideas and watch them come to fruition. Engineering companies and academic science reward these efforts, so it must be easy to foster in the classroom, right?

Though it can be simple, learning and joy are interrelated; there are also hurdles to counter when making it a reality on a regular basis. When I shifted my work to engineering education, I carried that same drive to understand and communicate this joy and curiosity-driven approach to the next generation of students—but also a harder instinct to break in my past that many times prevailed: if I had to go through challenges during my training, so should you. The impulse was understandable, but it risked confusing endurance for formation. As Erin Cech observed, the culture of disengagement in engineering often teaches students to separate technical work from moral and emotional investment.[4] We reward rigor, not curiosity; efficiency, not awe.

Disengagement is not neutrality; it is a quiet estrangement from purpose. If disengagement is the pathology, joy may be the cure. Joy is not frivolity or comfort; it is the felt recognition that skill and purpose are working in harmony. Samuel Florman called this notion "the existential pleasure of engineering" in his seminal book—the satisfaction of shaping order from complexity and serving human need through craft.[5]

My engineering background gave me a strong foundation in solving tangible problems. I learned how to analyze scientific literature, historical accounts, and think critically about how to make assumptions in the pursuit of answers. I also learned about the injustices and faults of my predecessors, from bridge collapses and programming bugs to ignorance of social concerns in medicine. Many of these case studies impress the critical importance of accuracy, precision, and completeness in designing a product, lest the future of human lives be compromised. Reasonably, it can be difficult to cultivate joy and curiosity in these pedagogical moments. However, we must remember that we are humans seeking flourishing in our future

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careers. While engineering is often viewed as an unemotional and impersonal, it is also human. As the late Henry Petroski reminds us in his book that "*to engineer is human*."[6] And because engineering is intertwined with our humanity, we must remember that joy, curiosity, and wonder make us better at our vocation.

ARE YOU HAVING FUN YET?

Just as I have learned to synthesize a wide body of scientific literature to solve problems in engineering, I now look towards a synthesis of ancient virtue and modern positive psychology that helps me see joy as not just a byproduct of engineering education, but as a guiding principle in forming engineers who flourish in both skill and spirit. In this journey, I have realized that "hoping" for joy in engineering will not occur with passivity—it must be intentional and it must be modeled. For my colleagues who engage regularly with character education, this comes as no shock to them. My engineering training didn't hand me a roadmap to virtue, yet in coming to the work of Aristotle and other neo-Aristotelians, I found new sparks of inspiration to think critically about engineering education. Thinkers like Kashdan, Florman, and Petroski give me a modern language for *eudaimonia*—human flourishing through excellence.

In the landscape of engineering education, cycles are everywhere—just as we talk about the Design-Build-Test-Learn cycle or Otto's engine cycle, we have to consider the reflective cycles that shape our students' learning and engagement. Erin Cech's work shows us that when we strip away the reflective, joyful dimensions of learning, we risk turning education into a mechanical process that lacks soul. Just like the cycles of an internal combustion engine need a spark to keep running, the cycle of learning needs reflection to turn experience into wisdom. In other words, asking "Am I having fun yet?" isn't just a whimsical question, but rather a reflective pause that signals whether we're aligning curiosity, joy, and learning in a meaningful way.

MAKING JOY A REALITY IN THE CLASSROOM

Cultivating joy and curiosity in the engineering classroom starts with a personal reflection of one's own journey. My students first engage with these in my *Modeling Cellular and Molecular Systems* class, where we explore how mathematical and conceptual models shape our understanding of biological systems. From day one, I implore students to explore their own interests and promote their autonomy to "model anything." From the function of enzymes in medicine to a mathematical model of vocal cords singing, students start with their own curiosities instead of a textbook. When students share their discoveries, I hear their excitement and their opportunities open when they realize that they have agency in their education journeys.

Although this is a mathematical modeling–focused class, we also grapple with difficult histories—the Tuskegee syphilis study, the San Antonio contraceptive trials, and the Nuremberg Code—stories that remind us of the ethical weight future scientists and engineers carry. These are somber conversations, yet they clarify the responsibility we have in shaping biomedical technologies that elevate, rather than diminish, our shared humanity. Reflecting on these past harms grounds us, envisioning something better that propels us to this reality. Joy might seem out of place in these moments, but it quietly surfaces when students recognize that ethical awareness is not a burden, but a compass guiding them toward the kind of future they want to build.

This joy and curiosity for a better future can feel nebulous beside such a storied past, yet foresight gives students a way to bring that future into focus. One of my favorite exercises invites them to explore emerging technologies—generative AI for protein design, brain-computer interfaces, human genome editing—and craft a newspaper article or a short story describing a utopian world in 2050. When we place their imagined headlines alongside the dystopian pieces they find online, students begin to interrogate not just what could happen, but what they want to happen, and why. Debate, argument, and occasional fallacies inevitably follow, but so does a sense of wonder: they realize that joy arises when they see themselves not merely as subjects of a future shaped by others, but as designers capable of shaping it themselves.

Speculative fiction may feel playful, even a bit whimsical, yet it reliably rekindles an excitement for learning that is too often missing in engineering education.[7]

I recognize that joy may not be the same as fun. However, fun plays an important role in how we train the engineer. While the engineer has many important responsibilities in service to society and humanity, the true spark—the one that starts the engine—comes from enjoyment, from seeing purpose, and from enacting and working with that sense of meaning. While joy is our compass, a bit of fun and reflection can be the spark that keeps the engine of learning and growth humming. M&M

NOTES

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LAURA DUNHAM

Joy at Work

The Aliveness of Growth and Becoming

Each September, as the first cool notes of autumn enter the air, I am reminded of the joyous fact that those of us who work in higher education get to live by the rhythms of our childhoods. Every fall brings a fresh start—a new academic year, new students, new hopes and possibilities, new opportunities to grow. This annual restart is one of the great privileges of this work, and a fitting metaphor for our mission itself: we are in the business of continual renewal—of fostering the aliveness that comes from expansion, self-discovery, and becoming.

That truth comes vividly to life each fall when we welcome our incoming, undergraduate first-year business majors during "Countdown to Classes" and "Discover Opus." Last year, as part of the "Countdown" program, held a week before school started, students created a word cloud in response to

ARTWORK BY SIMONA VOJTĚŠKOVÁ

the prompt, "How are you feeling?" Their answers appeared in real time on the big screen: *anxious, scared, lost*, but also *excited, jazzed, and optimistic*. Within seconds, two words towered above all others: excited and nervous.

Looking out over that sea of faces—so composed on the outside, so churning with emotion inside—I was struck again by the privileged place we hold in their lives. They put themselves—their futures, along with their excitement and nervousness—into our hands for what they know is a critical milestone in their lives. How can we do anything less than meet them with hearts equally full? To be an educator is to join them in this moment of becoming, to remember our own moments of newness and growth, and to embrace that journey together.

A week and a half later, during a scavenger hunt where one clue was "find the dean," I met dozens of these students again. Their energy was infectious: laughter, camaraderie, eyes bright and curious, students both confident and shy. When I asked what they were enjoying most so far, the answers poured out: "really interesting classes," "meeting new people," "how friendly everyone is," "I'm starting to figure things out." In their words and faces, I recognized that same edge of fear and excitement that marks every new beginning.

That exquisite combination of nerves and anticipation is the vibrancy of learning itself. It is what it means to be fully alive as a person, poised between what we are and what we might become. Working in higher education allows us to inhabit that threshold every day. The college becomes a space for constant renewal, where minds stretch and reshape, and where the joy of our work lies in our shared act of becoming.

PURPOSE, CHALLENGE, AND GROWTH

Joy is often mistaken for a pleasure that comes with ease or comfort, or conflated with happiness, which tends to rise and fall with circumstance. But the joy that sustains a vocation is rarely easy. It is formed, tested, and refined through challenge. It arises when we push against the edges of

what we know and when we face uncertainty and grow because of it. It is at its deepest when it is connected to meaningful purpose. That is as true for institutions as it is for individuals.

As educators, we ask our students to embrace difficulty. We ask them to wrestle with ambiguity, to persevere through failure, to turn discomfort into curiosity in the service of learning. In doing this, we are asking them to cultivate the very conditions of joy: the expansion of self that comes from meaningful challenge. I see that spark of joy every time a student begins to gain confidence in the classroom, to take risks sharing their ideas at a venture competition, to experience their growing mastery. It is the joy of growth, of discovery, of possibility.

And it is not confined to the classroom. As a business school, we also live in a state of challenge and change. The world around us is shifting at a breathtaking pace—technology, markets, work, and society are all being reshaped before our eyes. To remain relevant, we must also continually grow. That can feel daunting, but it also sparks vitality. The ongoing reinvention of our programs, our pedagogy, and our purpose keeps us alive as an institution. It keeps us learning.

When I began as Dean three years ago, I wrote to the college that I was "more optimistic than I have ever been about the contribution business education can make to the common good." That conviction remains my compass. Surely, every story of human flourishing, of societal progress, and cultural advancement is a story grounded in education. Our mission is evergreen: education, and particularly one grounded in the Catholic intellectual tradition, remains a critical force for advancing

To be an educator is to join them in this moment of becoming, to remember our own moments of newness and growth, and to embrace that journey together.

the common good in our world today, and ever and always into the future.

This mission calls us to help students, faculty, staff, and even our institution, to stretch into our fullest potential. That process is not simple or static. It is dynamic, creative, and often demanding. But it is a process shot through with joy: the joy of growth and contribution, the joy of participating in something larger than oneself.

THE JOY OF INSTITUTIONAL BECOMING

As institutions, we mirror our students' journeys. Just as they learn, experiment, and adapt, we too are called to renew our understanding of who we are and what we are becoming. Two years ago, our college began a deep process of strategic revisioning. As part of that work, teams of faculty and staff came together to confront several key challenges, including a fundamental reassessment of teaching excellence in a rapidly changing environment. The members of these teams interviewed students, alumni, and business leaders. They examined research, benchmarked peers, and grappled with hard questions about relevance and impact. Through that collective effort, we began to redefine what excellence in business education means for this era.

It was not easy work. It demanded courage, humility, and imagination. But the conversations themselves were alive. As we shaped what we are calling "The Opus Way," a shared set of teaching and learning principles that reflect our commitments to teaching excellence, there was a sense of collective awakening, a clearer view of what we could be in a changing world. That is one of the quiet joys of change: witnessing a community discover its own creative power. Joy emerges when people take ownership of something meaningful, when they see that their contributions matter, and when they sense their work rippling outward toward purpose.

I often think of strategic leadership as a kind of reweaving: taking the strong threads of our legacy and intertwining them with new fibers that reflect a changing world. In many ways, fleshing out the Opus Way has been its own act of reweaving—drawing on what has always defined us while threading in new practices that make learning more human, more current, and more impactful. Every act of weaving involves tension: stretching and pulling, holding on and letting go, balancing continuity with innovation. But when done well, it creates something stronger and more beautiful than what came before. And the

process itself—messy, creative, alive—is its own quiet form of joy.

JOY IN THE FACE OF UNCERTAINTY

Higher education today stands at an inflection point. Demographics, technology, economics, and culture are reshaping our landscape. It would be easy to focus only on the challenges, and there are plenty—budget pressures, shifting enrollments, rising expectations. But I see, instead, a call to joy: an invitation to create, to experiment, to lead with hope and imagination.

In times like this, the joy of our mission becomes our engine. It reminds us that the heart of that mission is not stability but transformation. It reminds us that the continual unfolding of human potential means our own as well as our students'. It reminds us to double down on that mission to nurture learning, foster discovery, expand, and grow.

Joy emerges when people take ownership of something meaningful, when they see that their contributions matter, and when they sense their work rippling outward toward purpose.

And this gives us the courage to reimagine what education can be and who we can be as educators. When we approach uncertainty this way, not as a threat but as a possibility rooted in mission, we can reanimate that joy, that aliveness, that optimism that always accompanies growth and expansion of the self. Joy becomes the driver and the outcome.

That same aliveness animates our students as they confront the unknowns of their futures. It animates our faculty as they explore new technologies, pedagogies, and forms of scholarship. And it animates our staff as they design ever more creative ways to support student learning and well-being. Each day, I see colleagues who embody this joy, who approach their work not as routine but as a living expression of care, curiosity, and purpose.

CULTIVATING JOY IN COMMUNITY

Joy, I have learned, is not just a private emotion. It flourishes in relationship. The joy of teaching, leading, or learning is inseparable from the communities in which it unfolds. In higher education, we are part of a living ecosystem of thinkers, doers, and dreamers. Our work is collaborative, and so is our joy.

This truth becomes particularly evident during times of strain. When workloads increase, when change feels relentless, when uncertainty tests our patience, joy can waver. Yet those are the moments when community becomes most essential. Supporting one another, celebrating small wins, sharing laughter even amid difficulty, these acts sustain our sense of purpose and rekindle joy.

I see this spirit every day at Opus. Our faculty and staff have weathered extraordinary change, yet they continue to meet it with resilience, humor, and a deep commitment to students and to one another. You can feel it in our monthly faculty and staff meetings and in the rituals we've built to stay connected. Each December, our Joy at Work event takes us off campus—one year to the Minneapolis Institute of Art, another to Open Book—where we use art and storytelling as ways to reflect on our work and on one another. At the end of the spring semester, we come together again to celebrate milestones and honor excellence and community contributions. These moments, large and small, remind me that joy is sustained not alone, but by the strength of the community that carries us through.

A JOYFUL FUTURE

As we look ahead, I am mindful that our mission must continue to evolve. The world our graduates enter demands adaptability, creativity, and courage. Our own sustainability as an institution depends on the same qualities. If we are to secure our future as a vibrant, productive, and successful contributor to our community, we must continue to lead with innovation, efficiency, and a commitment to creating change rather than reacting to it. As we navigate this next chapter for Opus, our faculty and staff will need to continue solving immediate challenges while harvesting the opportunities that are also at hand.

That need—to create, to lead, to imagine—is itself a call to joy. The future will not be simple. But it will be alive with possibility. And that aliveness, that pulse of growth and becoming, is what drew me to this work and what sustains me still.

At its heart, joy at work is not a fleeting feeling. It is the steady recognition that we are participating in something larger than ourselves. We are part of the great unfolding of human potential. And to live and work in that space, to help others become more fully alive, is the deepest joy of all. V&V

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ABRAHAM M. NUSSBAUM

Teaching Medicine for the Joy of Mullah

My first memories are of being taught. I was raised by the kind of reader who installed tilting shelves in her living room to keep past issues of magazines behind the current issues. She married my father, a man whose only woodworking projects in their fifty years of marriage are a set of floor-to-ceiling bookshelves and a crib.

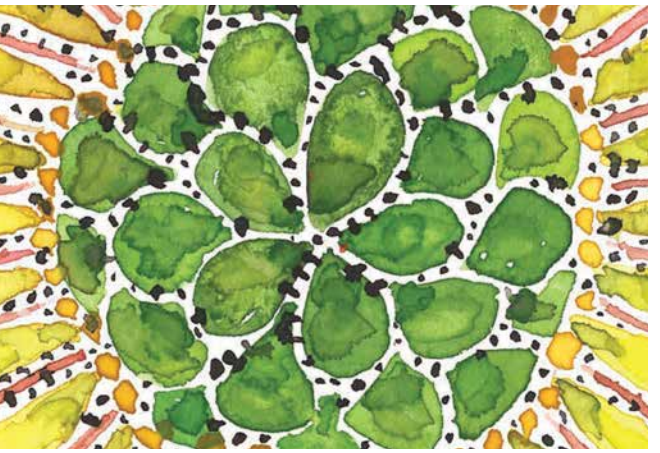
He built the crib in the Dartmouth woodshop when he realized he would be leaving business school at the end of his first semester without a degree. He took my mother and the crib home to Amarillo, where I was born four months later and became the first of five children to sleep in, teethe on, and be read to in the crib he built.

ARTWORK BY LISA LENTZ MANNING

My mother read to me constantly: while I was in the crib, in her lap, and by the side of my siblings. We read so many books that the local public library created a wooden plaque whose engraving declared us Library Family of the Year.

My mother read me to the kind of college where the only breaks from reading were writing assignments. Every week, we wrote single-spaced, ten-page seminar papers, then tacked them to the doors of each other's dorm rooms. The next day, we spent the afternoon debating each other's works as if we knew what we thought or how to think. I imagined I would spend the rest of my life doing the same.

Over spring break, I road-tripped up I-95 with classmates to visit graduate programs. I loved the reading lists which scrolled on and the libraries which towered over quads, but when I sat in on classes, I was disappointed to find my mother's way of reading—her encouraging tones, her smiling gaze, her omnivorous appetite—was discouraged.



I delayed graduate school for what I thought would be a single year of service, accompanying medically ill and injured homeless people to and from hospitals. I saw how they swallowed cornstarch to stay full and alcohol to stave off seizures. I smelled how poverty alienated them from the doctors and nurses who were supposed to care for them.

Confused by the experience, I did as my mother taught me and found books about what ails medicine. I wrote one of the authors a letter. He wrote back with an invitation. I moved halfway across the country to become his research assistant. He kept an office crowded, floor to ceiling, with books. I told him I hoped to follow his path by earning a doctorate in the humanities and becoming a teacher. He told me to consider medicine saying, after all, the root word for doctor means teacher.

For academic physicians like me, seeing patients with medical students and resident physicians is root work. I rarely see a patient alone, so when I examine, say, a patient experiencing an adverse effect of their medication, I am doing so with a trainee at the patient's bedside. I teach the

trainee to hold the patient's forearm, move the elbow, reassure the patient, and dose a new medication which induces no shaking.

I doctor, so I teach.

My own teachers did the same for me. They spent hours correcting my movements, my speech, and my thinking with direct feedback and dashing lines of red ink. When I see them, across campus or across the country, I thank them for making me a doctor. As I walk away, I feel again the joy of medical training is entering a series of relationships which make you capable of attending the sick.

When I thanked one of those doctors, his eyes twinkled as he recalled a favorite Simone Weil quote from memory. "The joy of learning is as indispensable in study as breathing is in running. Where it is lacking there are no real students, but only poor caricatures of apprentices who, at the end of their apprenticeship, will not even have a trade."[1]

Every June, I welcome new resident doctors to our hospital. We badge, vaccinate, drug test, and orient them. They log onto the electronic health record for the first time and learn how to write a note and place orders. It's a logistical challenge for the doctors—they have only three hours—and for my team—we have two days to welcome two hundred and fifty doctors—so we batch the new doctors by their future specialties.

Seeing them in batches, I realize the residents have already sorted themselves out by learning to dress the part of their specialty. I can guess an intern's future specialty from across the room. Emergency medicine interns are the only ones still wearing cargo pants, future pediatricians wear cartoon animals around their stethoscopes, orthopedic trainees wear extra muscle, and psychiatry interns wear stylized eyeglasses.

I sometimes ask interns if they were instructed to dress in a specialty-specific uniform. They look puzzled. The answer is formally no, but I know the informal answer is yes. American resident physicians

are selected and trained for efficiency; they are people who receive messages without waiting for them to be spoken and alter their behavior accordingly. Fitted to the system in clothes that match, they move through the various orientation stations as quickly as they can, on their way to accrue another merit.

Every year, I add one more stop than necessary: a conversation with Mary, an interpreter at a public hospital in Denver where the patients speak two hundred different languages. Even though she is a doctor three times over, the people Mary meets as patients never call her doctor. Mary speaks their two most common languages—English and Spanish—fluently. The root word for interpreter means to understand between, and Mary understands between two languages but also between worlds: doctor and patient, America and Mexico. She completed medical school in Puebla, then a residency, then two fellowships, and entered practice. She saw patients. She took up the root work of doctoring and taught students.

Life intervened. She met an American at her sister's wedding. They danced. He asked to see her again, again. Soon, they married. Mary split her time between her medical practice and her new husband's home in Denver, flying to her practice and then flying home to her husband. She was a doctor in one part of her world but not yet in the other.

One year, Mary motioned me over to her orientation station. She asked, "I am a doctor too. My joy is being a doctor. I want to practice again. What can I do to practice here?"

For the past century, American medicine has tied medical learning to research universities, which are less focused on fostering the joy of learning than they are on sorting candidates. Every year, approximately 140,000 students begin college as premeds, but only half will accumulate the necessary requirements of four years of the research sciences and completion of the MCAT. While 50,000 students apply annually, less than half will enroll. After four years of medical school, about 20,000 of them will apply for residency training, which lasts between three and a dozen years in one of our nation's 182

specialties and subspecialties. Along the way to joining our country's roughly one million licensed physicians, trainees secure standardized exam scores, letters of recommendation, transcripts, and diplomas, each of which functions as a gate guarding entrance to the most technically advanced and financially rewarding version of medicine in the world.[2]

When internationally trained physicians like Mary try to translate their skills into American medicine, they are typically stopped at the first gate and asked to verify their medical education is equivalent to American medical training through an expensive and complicated process, which becomes nigh impossible if their home country is riven by conflict or their medical school is shuttered. If their education cannot be verified, their best recourse is to start over by enrolling in an American medical school. Some do so, but most are discouraged by the prospect of paying for another decade of school at the prices of American research universities and take other employment as clerks, drivers, and teachers. Or interpreters.

I know the pathway to becoming an American doctor. I followed it myself, my wife followed it, and we both experience the indispensable joy of learning with and from our trainees. The joy of teaching is, to paraphrase Walker Percy, the opportunity to know someone and help them a little bit along their journey for good and selfish reasons, just as you were helped.[3]

The root word for interpreter means to understand between, and Mary understands between two languages but also between worlds: doctor and patient, America and Mexico.

When Mary asked her question, I received it as an opportunity to chase joy and agreed to help her apply for the next year's residency match. I knew internationally trained physicians found a match

only two-thirds of the time, but Mary embodied the joy of true learning.[4] She asked questions and never settled for easy answers when we met. She wrote a winning personal statement, assembled letters from current faculty, and prepped for interviews. I called programs on her behalf. Friends read her application, admitted she had the love of medicine, but politely declined to interview her because she lacked clinical experience as a physician in the United States.

Given how poorly medical care in our country is regarded by many of our citizens, I thought it might be a benefit for her to have brought a different set of experiences, for her to be someone who could teach and understand between. Residency program directors regarded her differences as a liability, fearing she would be unable to translate her skills into an American setting. Like many internationally trained physicians, Mary would never be known as a doctor here.

Even after she failed to match as a resident physician, Mary's question nagged at me. She asked only for an opportunity.

The opportunity came six months after Mary failed to match. A local nonprofit which specializes in intercultural learning and refugee education reached out. They were interested in helping international immigrant physicians enter our state's primary care workforce. We looked at national models. We drafted legislation. Three years later, we secured grant funding to open the program we call Colorado Works for International Physicians, or CO-WIP for short.

My first call was to tell Mary about the new program. We would offer trainees a nine-month clinical learning experience in an American teaching hospital so trainees could have translatable experience. We would offer weekly didactics so trainees could learn together from faculty in small groups. We would offer individualized coaching mentorship so trainees could earn detailed letters of reference from American physicians. We would secure trainee licenses from our state's medical board so trainees could participate fully in clinical care. We would take down as many gates as we could to help an international immigrant physician eventually secure a full license to practice in America.

We would even pay a living wage with full benefits.

Mary surprised me again. She said, "I will think about it."

When we talked again, she cried. She raised her hands and counted out the years she spent applying and the years I spent building the program, all while her children grew older. Mary wanted to train, but in the intervening years, she had directed her joy into her children. She still loved her time with patients, but realized she spent more time with patients as an interpreter than most American doctors. She would channel her joy into her family and her work as an interpreter. Mary told me to offer her opportunity to others.

We opened the program later that year, with four local middle-aged women. Hind, Islam, Suhaila, and Sulafa knew each other as members of the local Sudanese refugee community and agreed, together, to entrust their deferred dreams with us.

Every time I saw them, they celebrated something new. The skill of American doctors. The efficacy of American medicines. The availability of imaging and labs. As their hopes grew of being called doctor again, so did the joy on their faces, even as they encountered challenges. They spoke accented English which others struggled to understand. They dressed in ways which did not map onto cultural expectations, wearing hijabs in a town where doctors more commonly wear ski-wear than religious garments. They were unaccustomed to spending so much time documenting in electronic health records. They did not know how to narrate their personal experiences into personal statements and residency interviews.

American trainees are taught to narrate their experiences as struggles surmount. I often have to nudge an American trainee to write admission essays about something other than their own journey, to sound some note of how they will help patients on journeys of their own. When I practice interviews with immigrant physicians, I find them so self-effacing they offer no

account of the remarkable distance they have travelled in pursuit of their dreams. Many have endured personal violence, fled war, and suffered heart-wrenching losses, yet they find speaking of their struggles too personal or beside the point. They are formed to write about patients instead of themselves.

As the hopes of Hind, Islam, Suhaila, and Sulafa grew, they brought in food. For a staff meeting, they filled a conference room with cumin and garlic-infused dishes. For the first time, I ate asida and ful medames, sopped spiced okra with kisra bread, and mullah, a hearty stew of lamb in a spiced broth.

Now, whenever I grow frustrated enough to quit teaching, I remember how Mary asked me one question and how my only way to answer was by teaching for mullah.

Around the time I was learning to eat mullah, a group of American medical students approached me and asked me to be their faculty sponsor for a human flourishing club at the medical school. Doing so meant going through an online training designed to ensure compliance with university policies. One item surprised me: neither I nor a student were allowed to share any homemade food. I thought it some kind of typo and called the university. I was informed homemade food was a liability.

I have a friend who is a dean at another medical school. He has studied what it means to be a wise physician by interviewing physicians across the country. They taught him medical practice is so complex and dynamic that it requires more than technical knowledge. Becoming a physician necessitates practical wisdom. Wise physicians also need the ability to adapt to their circumstances while following a moral compass. And yet my friend found American medical education is too often reduced to a technical practice which turns medical students, trainees, and faculty into Weil's joyless caricatures.[5]

What he never gets to in the paper is how flavorless it can be. We need to taste the new flavors of mullah, to smell cumin and garlic when we doctors undertake our root work as teachers.

The library plaque from my childhood still hangs on the wall, but now in my own living room, surrounded by stacks and stacks of books that I have taught my own children to read. I still teach American medical students, but now I also teach international physicians. With all three, I seek the joy of learning, of forming close relationships, of taking care of each other while doing so, of building out the capacity to adapt and the virtue to practice courageously, which needs to accompany the transmission of technical knowledge and skills. I try to teach like my mother, like the professor who inspired me to attend medical school, and like the wise older physician who quoted Weil. With the scent of joy.

Inside the bookshelf I also keep a series of small gifts the first group of CO-WIP learners gave me after they realized their dreams. They matched in American residencies. I have a leather belt, a hand-tooled wallet, and a spice jar from a group of women who are now called, for the first time in a long time, doctors.

They taught me the joy of teaching is to be entrusted with someone's dream enough to share a homemade meal.

They taught me the joy of teaching is to be entrusted with someone's dream enough to share a homemade meal. When I teach now, I do so for Mary and for mullah.

NOTES

1. Simone Weil, *Waiting for God.* (Putnam, 1951).
2. Patrick Boyle, "What's your specialty? New data show the choices of America's doctors by gender, race, and age," *AAMC*, 1/12/2023, aamc.org/news/what-s-your-specialty-new-data-show-choices-america-s-doctors-gender-race-and-age.
3. Walker Percy, *The Moviegoer*. (Knopf, 1961).
4. A. M. Nussbaum (2024). *Progress notes: one year in the future of medicine.* Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press.
5. Jordan Millhollin, Wei Wei Lee, Nic M Weststrate, Lars Osterberg, and James N Woodruff, "Seeking medical wisdom: Development of a physician-defined practical model of wise competence." *Med Educ* 59, 9 (2025): 938–949.

Abraham Nussbaum, MD, is a physician and writer in Denver, Colorado. His most recent book, *Progress Notes: One Year in the Future of Medicine*, was published with Johns Hopkins University Press in 2024.

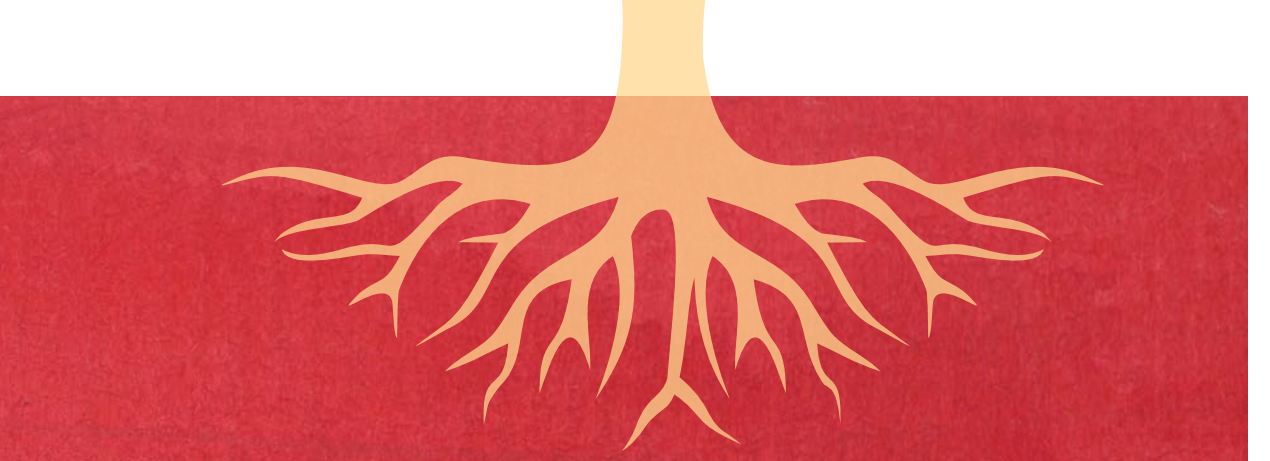
Joy

SOUNDBITE FROM A RECENT EVENT WITH TOM CATENA, MD

Tom Catena *is an American physician who has been practicing in Gidel in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan since 2008. The region has been an area of active conflict since the mid-1980s, and Catena is the only surgeon for the surrounding population of more than 3 million people. During a recent convening hosted by the Institute for Social Concerns at the University of Notre Dame, Suzanne Shanahan asked Dr. Catena about his perspective on happiness and joy.*

"One thing I can say is the 30 or 40 worst days of my life have all been there in my mountains—tragedies, awful days, incredible fear. The worst days have been there, but there's not one time I felt I wanted to be anywhere else in the world but there. [. . .]

Recordings of past convenings and information about future conversations—both virtual and in person—can be found at **virtuesvocations.org**.



I think we often put happiness and joy together. "I'm joyful," "I'm happy"—it's always kind of the same thing. But happiness is an emotion, right? It kind of waxes and wanes. You know, when it's sunny out today, I feel happy. I had a cheeseburger (I haven't had one in 10 years)—I feel happy. And then you're sad because it's raining out, or you had a bad day and you're sad, or something bad happened, or you had a bad outcome with a patient. You feel sad. All those emotions are there. I'm happy today; five minutes later, I'm sad because something bad happened.

Joy is the feeling that you are where you're supposed to be. It's a feeling that doesn't change. You get up in the morning saying, "I am where I'm supposed to be. What I'm doing today has meaning." Joy says, what I'm doing makes my life meaningful. I have a job that is fulfilling. And I think that's a tremendous human need—if you can have a job, or have something which gives you meaning, you can get through anything. [. . .] If you have meaning, you can have joy. I think that's the distinction I try to draw."

GARY HAUGEN

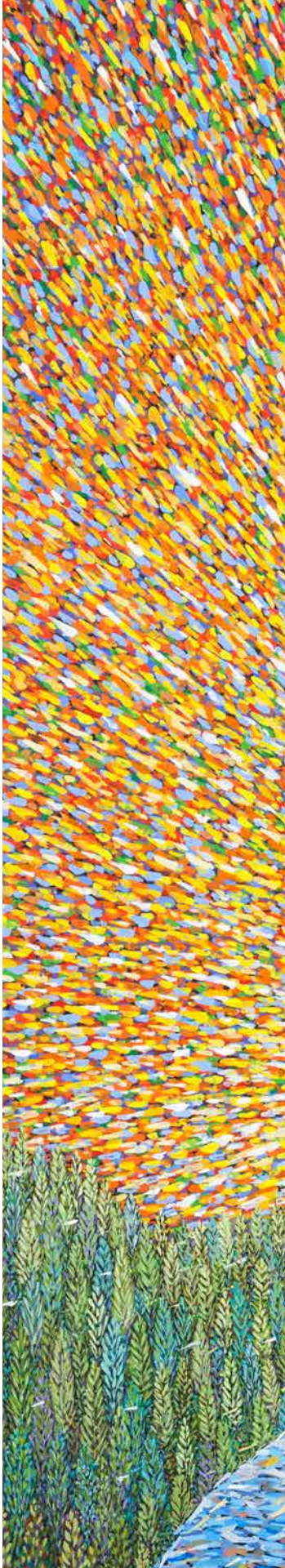
Joy Is the Oxygen for Doing Hard Things

Objectively speaking, humans have never been more materially prosperous or physically secure. And yet, we've never been more anxious. We've never despaired so deeply about the future. We've never felt so alone. How can this be?

Sociologists point out two massive factors.

First, inequality. While much of the world is experiencing unprecedented prosperity, there are still *billions* being devastated by hunger, disease, and violence. And the rest of us can't avoid knowing about this suffering, and we can't avoid inhaling the anxiety of it.

ARTWORK BY ARTHUR POULIN



Second, the utterly unmanageable rate of change. We are experiencing changes in technology, demographics, cultural norms, and data stimuli at a rate that humans have never had to manage before.

With such brutal inequality and chaotic instability, it's no wonder that our world is aching with anxiety and sadness. That's why I am convinced that there is nothing that would shine with more incandescent brilliance and irresistible appeal than if God's people emanated an authentic freedom from fear and life-giving joy. But of course, for this to happen, the experience of joy and freedom must be genuine.

JOY AS THE FRUIT OF FAITHFUL ACTION

The most revolutionary point of clarity I have experienced in 50 years of trying to follow Jesus: The teachings of Jesus are only useful for me—and useful for others through me—when I act as if they are true.

Jesus himself says this about his teachings. In Matthew 7, Jesus says the difference between the wise man who builds his life on a rock and survives the storm, and the foolish man who builds on sand and gets swept away, is that the wise man heard the words of Jesus and acted upon them, and the other man (who also heard the words) did not. In Luke 11, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and do it." The Apostle James makes the same point when he contrasts the foolish person who hears the word of God and does nothing about it, and the doer of the word who "will be blessed in his doing."[1]

The principle here is not about something we earn through belief—it's about understanding what belief is. As Dallas Willard, the philosopher and theologian of spiritual formation, wrote so clearly: "We believe something not when we say we believe it, or even when we believe we believe it. We believe something when we act as if it were true."[2]

Likewise, the teachings of Jesus are only useful for us in rescuing us from fear and finding joy if we are willing to act as if those teachings are true—especially in the most stressful moments.

And when we do—when, by his Spirit, we step out in faith with Jesus in the most dreadful moments, I've found that Jesus is prepared to fortify his people with a supernatural freedom from fear and a joy that defies explanation.

JOY ENABLES PERSEVERANCE

Over nearly 30 years serving alongside those who are suffering brutal violence in

places of deep poverty, my colleagues at International Justice Mission and I have come to find that joy is, indeed, the secret to doing this work over the long haul. We've come to share this truth with each other like a refrain: "Joy is the oxygen of doing hard things."

In the midst of fighting slavery and abuse and confronting some of the most horrific evil in our world today, we know how quickly we can fall prey to a vicious lie—the one that whispers to us that we shouldn't laugh, we shouldn't delight in our lives. That we should wallow in the darkness and the gloom of the suffering we are fighting, 24/7.

But this is, simply, the way to burn out. Imagine watching a candle flame burn in a votive jar and then placing a plate or a lid over that jar. Deprived of oxygen, the flame very quickly dies. This is precisely what happens when we pursue the work of justice and deprive ourselves of joy. If we want to bring justice to a world aching for it, and if we want to do this sustainably over the long haul, we must care for our own souls. And so, as a team at IJM, we pursue daily spiritual disciplines. Every day begins with the gift of thirty minutes of solitude and silence, a practice we refer to as our time of stillness. Then, just as our workday has ramped up with momentum, we stop again, gathering as a community at 11 am for thirty minutes of prayer together. These counterintuitive practices of stopping in the midst of urgent, demanding work keep us from slipping into prayerless striving. Our rhythms of prayer enable us to experience joy and beauty and goodness in life, even as we contend with the brutal reality of injustice.

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Over decades of pursuing these disciplines together, we've learned the power of the Holy Spirit allows us to live in freedom and

joy, and yet we can actively participate with the Holy Spirit's cultivation of these gifts through our own practices. Dallas Willard taught that there are things you can do to "arrange your life so that you are experiencing contentment, joy, and confidence in your daily life with God."[3] The fruit of this intentional arrangement of our lives toward freedom from fear and joy—this will be the most powerful gift we can bring into the world—our authentic experience with God.

JOY IN DARK PLACES

I spent time with Bishop Tutu in South Africa under the apartheid regime, and I had never seen anyone laugh as hard as he did. He had a capacity to come up for air, and he would do it with regularity, so that he could then go back down into the darkness. I think Bishop Tutu knew the truth we have come to find at IJM, and it's this: people who are suffering and hurting in the world do not need our spasms of passion. What they need is our long faithfulness in the same direction, and that faithfulness is sustained only as we live free from fear and pursue disciplines of joy.

After decades of immersion in the ugliest and most brutal realities human beings can do to one another, I have experienced such great joy, love, and laughter. Heartache for sure, but beauty and goodness, too. And it has been found in the hard things.

In Kenya, our IJM teams lead with freedom from fear and incandescent joy amid one of the most terrifying forms of violence—police abuse.

In one of Nairobi's poorest neighborhoods, a brutal police gang was threatening and extorting money from the community, and shot a humble taxi driver named Josephat. Miraculously, Josephat survived and bravely sought IJM's help for the impossible—to try and bring the notorious leader

of the police gang, Inspector Liliman, to justice.

IJM's local Kenya team took the case, and several months later, as we were making progress in the prosecution, Inspector Liliman and his gang abducted the IJM lawyer, Willie Kimani, along with Josephat and our driver named Joseph.

The three were driven out to an abandoned field at night, and one by one they were beaten to death, bundled in plastic bags, and thrown into the river. Their bodies were recovered 10 days later.

I received the news by phone at 3 o'clock in the morning and was soon on a flight to Nairobi. As I arrived, I met in a small room with my IJM Kenyan team leaders. They had just stared into the faces of their disfigured friends at the morgue. They now knew they were facing police who were willing to torture and murder without mercy or shame. Soon, they would have to look into the faces of the widows and their children.

All were wondering what should happen next. And to be honest, what happened next makes me tremble to recall—for the Holy Spirit came and they received power. What came next, to be precise, was the power to do what was already written on the office wall. It was the command of their Lord, in two words, from the prophet Isaiah: "seek justice."

So that's what they did.

A murderous police gang had declared open war against our IJM team—and I watched as every last member of that team decided to act as if what they said they believed was true. They acted as if Jesus would never leave them nor forsake them.

And then, for the next *six years*, they woke up every day, prayed to the God of justice, and then worked for justice. They rallied the local church and the community to demand justice and an end to police abuse. They trained and encouraged government leaders of good will to build a future where Kenyan children do not need to fear their own police.

Finally, after six years of faith, the tide turned and the impossible happened. The once all powerful and terrifying Inspector Liliman and his gang were convicted for murdering our friends and received the severest sentence under law. After decades of virtually zero convictions of police for murder in Kenya, IJM and the authorities have gone on to secure the conviction of more than forty police officers for murder and manslaughter. Moreover, Kenya held its first presidential election with none of the massive police violence that has marred every presidential election in memory.

There is still much work to be done to address police abuse in Kenya—as there is in all of our own countries. But I can testify that Christians in Kenya are finding supernatural freedom from fear and the oxygen of joy as the Holy Spirit gives them power to act as if the things that Jesus taught were true.

We are witnessing God use his people to change a nation—and he is sweeping a culture of police terror into the dustbin of history.

FEAR AND JOY

Twenty-nine years ago, I came very close to not starting IJM—and for one reason: I was afraid. What made the difference for me was not only being honest about my fears—but perhaps more importantly, being honest about what exactly I was afraid of.

In starting IJM, there was a lot to fear. The core work of IJM meant a confrontation with violence, and I could get hurt. I could get other people hurt. I had a wife and four small children. I'd have to leave my career as a federal prosecutor and go work for a non-profit that didn't actually exist, and probably wouldn't exist for long. How would I take care of my family?

Against this, I sensed the clear call of Scripture—to seek justice and serve the poor. And I sensed the promise of Christ that He would go with me.

I wasn't actually so afraid of the violence or the risk to my career or somehow providing for my family. There was something else that terrified me and was actually holding me back. And the worst part was, it was a fear I was ashamed of.

Deep down, I was most afraid of looking like a failure.

Many of our deepest (and frequently unconscious) fears—if we can honestly excavate

them—will show us where we don't actually believe that God is enough—where we think we need something else.

The problem in my case was not that I didn't know what Jesus taught—or that I disagreed with it—or that it was too complicated to implement. The problem was I didn't actually believe what He taught. I didn't believe it in the sense of a willingness to act as if it were true.

But thanks be to God, a gentle and gracious Jesus met me in that honesty. He swept away the shame—and allowed me to pray what is, for me now, the most beautiful prayer in Scripture: "I believe. Help me in my unbelief!"[4] This is the honest, desperate cry of the father in Mark's gospel who aches to see his child rescued from evil. He believes enough to go to Jesus, but is humble and honest enough to admit he doesn't actually believe enough to fully follow. So he cries out—to Jesus—"Help me in my unbelief!" And Jesus responds with decisive power.

We can be free from fear and we can rejoice in all things. We can be anxious for nothing. Indeed, we can be free enough to love others with courageous abandon fed by an inexhaustible joy.

Our story doesn't end with evil and lies and carnage and chaos. Rather, after chapters of faith and perseverance and service and courage—our story ends in salvation and redemption and rejoicing and glory.

In a world aching with anxiety and sadness—God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power and love and a strong mind. With great joy.

Now, we just need to act as if it is true. V&V

NOTES

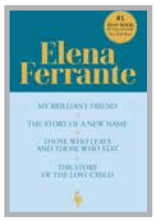
1. *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Crossway Bibles, 2016), James 1:25.
2. Dallas Willard. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ*. NavPress, 2002.
3. Ibid.
4. *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mark 9:24.

Gary Haugen is the CEO and founder of International Justice Mission. Before founding IJM in 1997, Gary was a civil rights attorney for the US Department of Justice, focusing on police misconduct, and in 1994 he served as Director of the United Nations investigation into the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide. Gary received a B.A. in Social Studies from Harvard University and a J.D. from the University of Chicago. He is the author of several books including *Good News About Injustice* and, most recently, *The Locust Effect: Why the End of Poverty Requires the End of Violence*.

Good Reads

We asked our authors to recommend a book they had read over the past couple of years. Here is what they said:

The Neopolitan novels



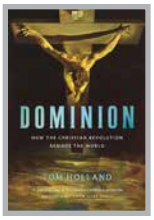
BY ELENA FERRANTE

I have loved the Neopolitan novels by Elena Ferrante because they are powerful stories of resilience, about what it takes to become yourself in the face of poverty, hardship, and social constraint. It is about the role of education in providing new ways of seeing the world and yourself. And woven through it all is a raw, complicated portrait of a lifelong friendship between two women: their loyalties and fractures, their jealousies and tenderness, the ways the friendship both shapes them and tests them. The books stayed with me because they felt real, and because they honored the complicated forces that make us who we are.

—LAURA DUNHAM

Dominion

How the Christian Revolution Remade the World



BY TOM HOLLAND

I appreciated the way Holland brilliantly recovers the two-thousand-year story of how the moral imagination of the Western mind was utterly transformed by the Gospel—a Gospel that embedded within the church the relentless terms of its own critique, renewal, and transformative power.

—GARY HAUGEN

Think Again

BY ADAM GRANT

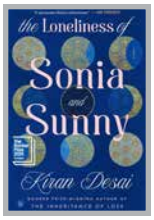
Curiosity and humility are not just important virtues for the human—they are essential to the ethos of science and engineering that is often overlooked in our daily interactions. Adam Grant highlights the elements of forming scientists to recognize the limitations of our knowledge, how to seek answers in the unknown, and communicate these to our peers and families. We must recognize that what we know is fallible, that we have some "un-learning" to do, and that this is critical to our humanity and our ability to serve those around us. Examples from social psychology, education, and sports make this a read for every audience. —CAMERON KIM

Small Rain

BY GARTH GREENWELL

You can fill several shelves with COVID post-mortem books, but in its own fashion, the best one so far is this peculiar novel about illness, desire, and attention. —ABRAHAM NUSSBAUM

The Loneliness of Sunny and Sonia



BY KIRAN DESAI

Kiran Desai's 2025 Booker Prize shortlisted *The Loneliness of Sunny and Sonia* is a character rich and captivating joy to read. It also illustrates how joy itself thrives best in the messiness of daily life.

—SUZANNE SHANAHAN

Art credits

COVER ARTIST: PATRICIA MACDONALD patriciamacdonaldart.com

FRONT/BACK COVER: **Arboreal Rhythm** ©2025, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 9: **Exploring New Landforms** ©2025, acrylic and collage on canvas

PAGE 52: **Letting in the Light** ©2019, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 55: **Layered Landscape** ©2024, acrylic and collage on canvas

PAGE 56: **Far From the Madding Crowd** ©2024, acrylic and collage on canvas

PAGE 67: **What the World Needs Now Is Love** ©2024, acrylic and collage on canvas

Patricia MacDonald is a Canadian artist, focusing primarily on abstracted landscapes. She has been drawing and painting her entire life and graduated from university with degrees in fine art, art history and art education. She has worked in art galleries and museums and art education and since 2009 she has painted full time. Patricia's colourful acrylic and collage mixed media paintings, featuring trees, woods, and lakes are inspired by her surroundings, her experiences travelling and simply living in "a cottage in the woods, on an island" every summer. In these works, natural forms are simplified, stylized, de-constructed, and playfully re-imagined. Her paintings invite the viewer into a layered world of colour, texture, and visual happiness. She exhibits and sells her art in open studios, in juried exhibitions and in commercial galleries. Her work is held in private collections throughout Canada, the United States and the UK.

SUZANNE ALLARD suzanneallard.com

PAGE 10: **Blooming Joy** ©2023, acrylic/mixed media

Suzanne Allard is an artist and teacher based in Charlottesville, Virginia. After working in corporate America and then with her own management consulting business with her husband, and raising two children, she followed her dream and launched an art business. Having been raised in South and Central America, she fell in love with the gorgeous colors, textures, and flowers of that part of the world. Her passion is creating art that exudes joy and encouraging others to express their creative spirit, which she believes we all possess.

JENNIFER CAVAN jennifercavan.com

PAGE 44: **All the Stars to Wish Upon** ©2024, oil pastel on wood panel

Jennifer Cavan spent much of her childhood and teenage years making art, but pursued a liberal arts education. While earning a degree in history from Brown University, she took art classes on the side. After spending the early part of her adult life in the corporate world in Chicago, she decided to follow her love of art when New Mexico's clarity of light, rich feeling of tradition and strong sense of place pulled her "home." She and her husband quit their corporate jobs and moved to the mountains of northern New Mexico. Shortly thereafter, she began working with oil pastels. Combining her love of history and culture with her passion for the New Mexico landscape and simple architecture, she creates art that reflects the timelessness of that subject matter.

HEATHER W. ERNST heatherart.studio

PAGE 4: **Alight** ©2017, acrylic on canvas

Heather W. Ernst, who resides in Denver, Colorado, imagines the elements she paints in her abstract landscapes have intelligence, sentience, and belong to a larger spiritual community just like her own. Her contemporary abstracts read with the language her 25 years as an architect made natural to her when her drafting board was covered with millions of lines and shapes of our built world. Together the organic and built environments, from the resolute to the impish, can be as surprising and varied as the artist herself.

EMMA HIGGINS emmahiggins.ie

PAGE 33: **Pink Path, Herbert Park** ©2025, acrylic on canvas

Born and based in Dublin, Ireland, Emma Higgins is a visual artist and graduate of NCAD, Dublin. Inspired by the colors and textures of the Irish landscape, her work explores the emotional and sensory power of color. Through immersive, intuitive pieces, she invites reflection and connection. In addition to her studio practice, Emma is also a dedicated art educator, sharing her passion for creativity with others.

DANA KOHLMANN danakohlmann.com

PAGE 77: **Life of the Party** ©2024, acrylic gouache on cradled wood panel

Dana Kohlmann, based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, is a visual artist who explores inner landscapes that heal the soul. Using botanicals as spiritual expression, her environments process darkness and radiate light. Kohlmann is moved by the interconnectivity of the universe and utilizes nature as a sanctuary and conduit to infinite realms.

GIULIANA LAZZERINI giulianalazzerini.com | etsy.com/shop/TheBluebirdGallery

PAGE 25: **White Cottage** ©2024, acrylic on canvas

Giuliana Lazzerini was born in Tuscany, Italy, and studied at the Istituto D'Arte Stagio Stagi in Pietrasanta and at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Carrara. Giuliana moved to the U.K. in 1973 and to Yorkshire, England in 1987 where she now lives. The Tuscan landscape and childhood memories still bear a strong influence on her current work. Although, she says, "Time made me more familiar with the English Northern landscape and it finally has left a mark in some of my work, as I become more intrigued by its drama and atmosphere."

LISA LENTZ MANNING Instagram @moonbug24

PAGE 93: **Summer Stars** ©2023, watercolor on paper

Lisa Lentz Manning is an artist who lives and works in her hometown of Aurora, Illinois. She received her BFA from Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, and her MFA from the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho. Lisa works as a prop artisan and a costume painter at the Paramount Theatre in Aurora. She is also a watercolor painter, creates public murals, paints store windows, and upcycles clothing. She is inspired by nature and the magic in everyday life.

ARTHUR POULIN fatherarthurpoulin.com

PAGE 104: **Sunburst Over Ocean** ©2011, acrylic on canvas

Father Arthur Poulin is a Camaldolese monk, priest, and artist living at Incarnation Monastery, Berkeley, California. He holds a degree in fine arts from Loyola University. Father Poulin's paintings have been extensively acquired by people living in his native California as well as throughout the U.S., and internationally. His landscape paintings reflect the stunning beauty, harmony and unity of creation, deep values that need to be celebrated and shared today. His works are widely published as cards, covers of books, magazines, journals, and CDs. He also gives retreats and presentations on the spirituality of creativity and the creative process.

JASON WESAW Instagram @jasonwesaw

PAGE 18: **Gzhiyaské: moken, nawkwé, bgeshmo** ©2020, oil pastel, gold leaf and thread on paper

Jason Wesaw is a multi-disciplinary artist, educator, and peacemaker. His work is firmly rooted in the ancestral teachings of his Potawatomi relatives, stressing the importance of our connection to the rhythms in the natural world as a way of better nurturing healthy relationships to fellow human beings. Jason is Potawatomi (Turtle Clan) and has worked across the Great Lakes as a circle keeper and pipe carrier, while exhibiting his art internationally with works in the permanent collections of the Eiteljorg Museum (IN), Grand Valley State University (MI), the Raclin Murphy Museum of Art at Notre Dame (IN), the Field Museum (IL), the Indiana State Museum, the Block Museum of Art (IL), and many other regional private, Tribal, and corporate collections.

DMITRI WRIGHT dmitriwright.com

PAGE 68: **Mind Meadows** ©2023, oil on canvas

Dmitri Wright is a master impressionist painter based in Greenwich, Connecticut. He is the Master Artist/Instructor for Weir Farm National Historical Park, the only park dedicated to American Impressionism. He says, "To be an Artist is to search for what is good, beautiful, and true in life while consenting to one's natural ability with joy and gratitude in order to share it with others." He has exhibited extensively and his work is housed in many collections. He offers classes, workshops and artist critique through his website.

SIMONA VOJTĚŠKOVÁ simonavojteskova.com

PAGE 84: **Self Care** ©2022, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 86: **Homemade Happiness** ©2024, acrylic on canvas

Simona works out of her studio in Velké Pavlovice, Czech Republic. Her paintings move between abstract expressionism and intuitive, color-driven composition. She is also the founder of SENO atelier, a creative space where she not only presents her own work but regularly curates exhibitions of other contemporary artists.

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