

Joy!

The Art of Creating a Happy Life

52 Stories and Practices that Create Happiness and Break the Addiction to Unhappiness

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To treat life less than a miracle is to give up on it.
Wendell Berry

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Nellie Rankin and Alice Kookan, mother and grandmother, women who nurtured, molded, and loved me into the woman I am today, and I am grateful.

With Special Thanks

To everyone who read the original *The Happiness Book* and told me how much that book helped you create a happier life, I thank you. You inspired me to update and to change 30 days to 52 weeks of practices resulting in *Joy! The Art of Creating a Happy Life*.

Thank you, Phillip, my friend and inner-world companion, my guide and the one who gave me this book so that I may share it with the readers.

And to Clara Schultz, Ph. D. who taught me to not miss any beauty in this life.

Please Note

The information contained in this book is intended to be educational and not for diagnosis, prescription, or treatment of any health disorder. This information should not replace consultation with a competent mental healthcare professional.

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A Word on This Edition

Some of the practices in *Joy! The Art of Living a Happy Life* were originally printed in *The Happiness Book*. All the practices have been updated and 22 added.

Please let us know what you think. We'd love to hear from you. You can write to the author through www.DianaRankin.com.

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Introduction

You know more than you think you know.

Dr. Benjamin Spock

Is happiness all there is? Of course not. We all know that. As humans, there's a whole myriad of emotions churning all the time through our psyche. And some of those emotions are not pleasant.

This book isn't about taking away those less desirable emotions; it's about helping us to not live in them. It's about how to live in joy and be happy by breaking an addiction to unhappiness. Within these pages are stories about happiness and unhappiness, along with 52 practices, one for each week. I've used these practices on my own journey to happiness and deep joy—as have many others—and I know their value and power. They work! The trick is that you have to do them.

Most of the time anymore I'm pretty happy, but it wasn't always so. There was a time when life felt hard with only moments of happiness. Then came a time when I decided being miserable wasn't any fun. I wanted to enjoy life. I decided to be happy as often as I could.

What I learned along the way allowed me to find the joy in the soap bubbles, and I always say if you can see the beauty in the soap bubbles, and that makes you happy, you know what joy is.

It wasn't always an easy journey. In fact, it was hard work some of the time. It wasn't something I did once and declared myself happy. I did these practices over and over. I still do many of the practices when I'm feeling low. Yes, it's work, but it's well worth it. I like being happy.

The original book began over pizza during a conversation with an unhappy friend who asked me to help her move from unhappiness—where she lived in dread of the day—to happiness where she could feel joy in her life. Her state of unhappiness mirrored too many other people I knew, including me at one point.

I wrote this book to share the practices that have worked for me, to help me live a mostly joy-filled life with moments of unhappiness rather than an unhappy life with moments of happiness. When I was at my lowest—

wondering if I could ever turn my life around—something stubborn within me believed that our innate state of being is one of deep contentment and joy and all I had to do was find that too often elusive something we call happiness. Certainly the journey was filled with plenty of tears and frustration, but rare glimpses of deep joy kept me going until one day I realized I was happy, truly, deeply happy, and oh so excited about the sheer joy of being alive in this wondrous world.

As I've grown to accept happiness as my natural state of being, I've come to understand that we have a responsibility to ourselves—and to the world—to discover our happiness so that we can add to the world's growth in joy and not add to its misery.

Certainly there are situations and occurrences in our world that belie happiness, and I do not wish to negate the grief and sadness that come from our depth of emotion when we are part of—or witness to—horrific events and tragedies. I do believe, however, that when we are embedded in happiness, we are able to grieve without destruction of that which lies beneath—a sense of wellbeing, a knowing that we are okay regardless of life's circumstances and that life is unfolding exactly as it is to unfold. If we are grounded in joy, when we witness the horrors of tragedy presented to us every day either by circumstances or by the news media, we are able to take in the terribleness that too often befalls those in our world and move through the despair with grace. We neither turn our back on our neighbors nor deepen the gloom, but instead we are able to step back from the sadness and send a sincere prayer, a blessing, or healing energy. In this way, we add to the world's healing, not to its suffering.

In my research, I also learned how businesses profit by joyful employees. When employees are happy, there is less sick time, more productivity, and better relationships with customers, which results in higher sales for the company. In hospitals and nursing homes, patients seem to heal faster if the health care professions are happy. In education, students respond to teachers and coaches if the atmosphere is a positive learning environment, which is produced by educators and staff who are happy in their work and their lives.

I'm committed to helping others find ways they can leave unhappiness behind and move into a place of joy. I am used to witnessing miracles in people's lives, and yet I was amazed at the responses from people after the original *The Happiness Book* was published. So many people wrote to say that even the simplest practice made a major difference

in their lives and that the stories helped them understand that regardless of what has taken place in our lives, joy is our birthright.

Why are these practices so powerful? Because even the smallest change in our lives can change our individual world, and in turn, change the entire universe. That's pretty exciting when we think about it—each one of us have the power to make a difference in the world, to help create a more humane environment for all beings and for our planet, and all we have to do is to be happy. That's a win-win!

As convinced as I am that if you do these practices, you will transform your life and create joy for yourself, I am also willing to admit that perhaps the practices actually have nothing to do with it; they may merely help you focus on the desire to be happy, and it is your deep intent to be happy that finds its way to the surface and permeates your life. There is no way of knowing, and in the end, does it matter? What does matter is that you find happiness within the treasure chest of yourself.

Each week, read a new story and then try the practice. Some will work for you, others may not. Still try each one at least once and preferably more than once. Feeling uncomfortable with a practice does not mean it's not working. Feeling uncomfortable just might mean that you are resisting happiness, and then you have the opportunity to ask yourself why you are resisting. Some of the practices, such as the first one, you will want to do every day. Others may take more than one day to complete. Still other practices you may complete in a few minutes. Some you may decide to keep for life. Do try a new practice each week, even if you are continuing to keep ones you're already doing. As you go through the weeks, pay attention to how you're doing. You just might find that you've released yourself to happiness to enjoy the rest of your life.

This book is dedicated to happiness and that deep sense of joy that makes our lives beautiful and full. Happiness—and its deeper companion joy—makes our lives worth living.

Although this book is about finding and living in joy, life also brings to us grief, sadness, frustration, anger, fear, heartbreak, pain, and a host of other emotions that seem to be joy's opposite. There are many emotions we feel, and although some of them are less pleasant than others, we want to experience all emotions.

This book is not meant to keep us from experiencing the full spectrum of human emotions, including those emotions we may not like to experience. It is meant, however, to keep us from living in self-destructive

emotions and to help us recognize that regardless of what emotion we are now experiencing, we can move through it and experience true happiness—joy.

The practices are not intended to replace therapy or medication or any other means of healing needed by the seriously or clinically depressed person. The methods described in this book are intended to help those caught in temporary unhappiness. These practices allow you to break an addiction to unhappiness and evolve into joy.

And it's not that once you incorporate the practices in this book into your every-day life, you'll never again experience sadness or grief or any other emotion considered undesirable. What you can expect is that as you use the practices, you'll have the tools you need to create happiness whenever you desire. You'll also have a deep sense of joy knowing that you are the one in charge of how you choose to experience life. To some the practices in *Joy! The Art of Creating a Happy Life* may even seem magical.

The catch: these practices are magical only if you do the work and allow the magic to happen. So here goes.