

Learning to Do Joy

Dawn Brown

A friend recently confessed that she was so good at doing pain and grieving. From childhood she had been aware of the emotional hurts in her life. However she went on to say that her most challenging lessons in life have had to do with joy: “I just don’t do joy well.” Therefore time and time again she has had to ‘work’ to allow the joy that is present in her life to surface. It may seem much easier to keep joy buried and unacknowledged. But there is a price to pay for doing so.

Funny thing is we show a joyful, smiling face to the world but it is often disconnected from our real feelings. It is like the songs about clowns – laughing on the outside while crying on the inside. And the paradox is that we can only experience real joy when we’ve allowed ourselves to acknowledge our pain and move through it. Without that work, we’re just pasting on a happy face.

We are so afraid to trust joy! What if it doesn’t last and then we’re back to more pain? Best stick to the devil (pain) we know. In my first book, *That Perception Thing!* I quote author bell hooks – “We have a history in this nation of believing that to be celebratory is dangerous, that being optimistic is foolhardy, hence our difficulty in celebrating life, in teaching our children and ourselves to love life.” I have found that this isn’t just an American phenomenon but a universal one. In my travels and conversations with people from other countries, I’ve found that most cultures have warnings about the dire consequences of having things too good, of experiencing too much joy.

One of my favourite authors, the late Erma Bombeck ended her book, *If Life Is a Bowl of Cherries, What Am I Doing in the Pits* by panicking over a morning was going right. It seemed all she had received that morning was good news. She started to worry about what would happen when the other shoe fell. She was only able to relax when her son returned home and accidentally drove through the garage door! Finally life was back to normal. Doing joy is indeed stressful!

When Erma found out she was dying she wrote a poignant poem called “If I Had My Life To Live Over” dealing with all the joys she would have allowed in her life if she had known how quickly the time would have passed. We don’t have to reinvent the wheel. We can learn from her, others who have gone before and from what we know in our hearts: it takes more effort to keep joy down than to let it surface in our lives. Enjoy the moment.

Dawn Brown is a psychotherapist, international speaker, and author (*That Perception Thing!* and *Expert Women Who Speak...Speak Out!*). Her new book: ***Been There, Done That... Now What?*** is available in bookstores and at www.perceptionshift.com.