

Joyfulness

Happy Mess!

Minx Boren, MCC

This essay is from my new book, [*Decades of Gratitude, Gusto, Grit & Grace*](#)

*no matter the chaos, the clutter, the fuss
there is joy to be found
in the happy messes of life
if only we allow our hearts
to smile and embrace the wholeness
and holiness of it all*

My husband Mel and I have a favorite toast. Whenever we are having wine with dinner, we raise our glasses and clink them in a toast to “happiness.” When our son Reid was about four years old, we were all out sharing a family meal one evening when he decided to raise his glass (filled with juice) to toast with us. What was so adorable, and revealing, was that the words that came out of his mouth were “*happy mess*.” I was about to correct him when I stopped myself, realizing that his toast was absolutely perfect. If we could learn to accept and live with—maybe even celebrate—all the inevitable *happy messes* along the road of life, we would be well on our way to enjoying a wonderful life. *AHA!* indeed.

What very young children, and those of us who have learned a bit along life’s journey, know is that things do not need to be perfect or pristine for joy to be present. As Martha Washington explained, “I have learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends on our dispositions and not on our circumstances.” Perhaps the whole point of life is simply to seek the happiness and fullness to be found moment by precious moment, no matter what’s going on.

Here’s another lesson learned by living. Life happens...and not always according to our best theories, ideas, and strategies. In fact, it mostly does *not* quite happen according to plan—or at least not according to our carefully laid out agendas, schedules, and lists. What we learn to recognize as we grapple and grow is that the most powerful *happiness strategy* in our human tool box is our capacity to apply thoughtful consideration, perspective, and compassion to whatever is happening when life is not going according to *our* idea of how it *should* be. By doing so, we reframe whatever is taking place in the most positive and inspiring ways possible.

I love Mark Twain’s suggestion to “Give every day the chance to become the most beautiful of your life.” Now there’s an idea capable of creating a profound shift. *What would it*

be like to approach each new day as anything but ho-hum? My cousin-brother Howie and I used to go for hikes in the woods around Chappaqua, New York. He had the delightful capacity to stop mid-step or mid-sentence and absolutely revel at the sun coming through the canopy of leaves and shining on the tree barks...or the bird hidden in the branches singing his heart out. Each experience of beauty would be, in that moment, the most startling and wondrous moment ever because we were fully present in it. I treasured those walks and am forever grateful to him for the *eyes wide open to wonder* perspective he instilled in me. Life didn't have to be perfect for the moment to be *AWEsome*. As a matter of fact, often one or the other or both of us were puzzling our way through some challenge or another, including life-threatening ones. It didn't matter. There are still *happy mess moments* to be found.

These are the joys of the elder years
time to reflect time to connect
time for stillness
time to kick back and relax
and to ease on down the road
and time perhaps to indulge
in grand excursions
and to marvel at the world.

And yet these are the times
when the struggles of the world
become more and more our struggles
when the daunting vista
of all that has been
or might be destroyed
muddies the once clear path
to a better future
that works for everyone.

How devastating to know
that there may no longer be enough
time to right the wrongs
that are piling up
along with the never-ending
garbage and plastic debris
that are polluting our world
and our bodies.

And yet what is mine to do
is to not despair

to not succumb to dismay
to not indulge in grief or anger
to continue to choose joy
and hope at every turn
and bump in the road
to navigate faithfully
toward a future worth passing on
to those who are coming up behind us.

You were right Mother Teresa
in reminding us
that we cannot do great things
but rather only small things
with as much love and courage
and joy as we can muster.

May that be my mantra.
May that be my guiding star and
the drumbeat to which I march
now.

From the heart, mind, and pen of Minx
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