

Colonoscopy Joy

Crazy thing...fasting and prepping for a colonoscopy was one of the happiest days, from start to (almost) finish, that I can remember having in a long time, with the key phrase being start to (almost) finish. There have been many, many happy pieces of days in the past months – and some of those pieces lasted a really long time – but none that started with joy at 4 in the morning and took me clear through 8:30 pm, at which point things colonoscopy prep-wise started getting so uncomfortable that I can't truthfully claim the joy held up. It just took way too much vital energy to summon up joy and hang onto the 64 ounces of fluid in my stomach.

How the happiness came to be: prior to prep day I started panicking about not being able to eat all day long such that my dread must have dredged from the depths of my unconscious a particular scene from *The Shawshank Redemption*. In this scene, all of the prisoners in the prison yard are stilled by the sound of *The Marriage of Figaro*, which the Tim Robbins character is broadcasting out over the public address system after locking the warden in the bathroom. I was watching this in my mind when my alarm went off the day of the prep -- how the prisoners were looking around in confusion as the music first crackled over the loud speakers into the prison yard, and then, as the sound grew and the ethereal voices filled the air, how they came to an utter standstill, instinctively looking skyward, transported on the wings of the soaring soprano notes of the opera. Beauty was freeing them. *

Beauty, I then knew, was going to be my freedom, too. If beauty can release a whole prison yard of prisoners, it could surely get me through a colonoscopy prep day. It should have been so obvious, having dedicated so much head space to joy for the past 3 quarters of the year with The Joy Jar Project. However, I sensed colonoscopy prep joy was probably not going to be joy as usual – this joy might require some engineering given the comprehensive dreadfulness of the day. And to keep any notion of joy in my head, I was going to have to stay on it by the hour.

Hourly joy

The rules were simple: On the hour I would write down all the joy that had taken place over the course of the past hour. It was surprisingly abundant and mostly effortless to call up for most time slots -- a revelation that joy carried on with or without my awareness. It was just one 10:45 am slot that made me think, as I scoured my mind for joy, if something didn't happen quick I might have to venture out of my office and announce to my coworkers they had about 5 minutes to make me happy, so what did they have for me? A funny story? A compliment? A compliment would do it.

Something else I noticed was with happiness front-of-mind as my mission for the day, I caught myself looking at people differently, wondering "Are you my next joy? Are you my next joy?" like the kids' book *Are You My Mother?* This hourly orientation most definitely changed the way I related to everything. For instance, while I was doing yoga with my nose very close to the living room rug, I saw a pink sprinkle from my daughter's gender reveal party cupcakes we'd had two weekends before. Ordinarily when I'm in downward facing dog looking at my dirty rug, I'm just disgusted and reminded of my housekeeperly slackness, but this time I was filled with the wonder of a new little granddaughter on the way. When I am under the gun to see joy, I will see it. But what a curious thing that being under-the-gun is what it takes!

Then, as my energy flagged with only some kombucha and club soda-ed down ginger ale to go on, I realized something else about joy: the more uncomfortable I got as this day went on, the more I was going to have to give some things up -- primarily my expectations for things like having energy, being prime-time productive, and being un-hungry. Expectations are probably a general and primary impediment to joy but here the deal was simple: if I was going to succeed at having a live-able day instead of a dreadful one, it was going to be one or the other. I could have my beautiful expectations or I could have a pretty good day.

As I mentioned before, joy was pretty much all done by 8:30 that night, most definitely by 9:30, but I picked it up again on colonoscopy day after the nausea part was over, and was able to keep it with me throughout the day though being loopy makes joy pretty easy.

But then, unexpectedly the following day when I was back at work, I started feeling overwhelmingly tired and a little ill from the physical assault to my system. Down came my standing desk. I could see so clearly where this might all be heading if my mind got involved in the misery: me on the couch. But then, with the Marriage of Figaro in my head, I brought out my joy journal and wrote down 8 am at the top of the page and started wondering where my next hour of joy was going to come from. Not further undone by an unhappy mind, gradually my system settled and by 9:30 I was listening to the sweet whirring sound of my desk raising back up.

**"I have no idea to this day what those two Italian ladies were singing about. Truth is, I don't want to know. Some things are best left unsaid. I like to think they were singing about something so beautiful it can't be expressed in words, and it makes your heart ache because of it. I tell you those voices soared, higher and farther than anybody in a great place dares to dream. It was like some beautiful bird flapped into our drab little cage and made those walls dissolve away. And for the briefest of moments, every last man at Shawshank felt free."*

- Morgan Freeman's character, Red

[The Marriage of Figaro scene in The Shawshank Redemption](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzuM2XTnpSA)

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