

catching DIANE ATWOOD health

Conversations About Aging Joy Hare July 1, 2019

Diane: When I first contacted Joy Hare about doing an interview, she was in Costa Rica volunteering — with the orchid ladies.

A family therapist for more than 40 years, at 75, Joy now works part time as a life coach and consultant, often weaving in art and poetry to help her clients tap into their own creativity.

Her parents named her Barbara, but several years ago she decided to go by Joy. It was a step toward healing after a difficult time in her life.

I'm Diane Atwood from Catching Health. You're listening to my special series Conversations About Aging. Joy, who lives in Bath, Maine, began our conversation by explaining why she changed her name.

Joy: My, um, my given name was Barbara Ann back in the back in the day to day, but, um, when I moved to Bath or when I got divorced from my children's father of 35 years, the judge asked me if I wanted to change my name and I thought, oh, change my name. And so, um, I had been on a vision quest, study, native American, it's a long answer to your question, sorry, Diane, studied native American spirituality and um, I got a name given to me called Joy Walking Tall. And so when the judge asked me, I said I can change my name? He said yes. So I changed it to Barbara Joy and a lot of my clients that I was seeing in Portland at the time couldn't quite get used to it. But when I moved to Bath I very intentionally said I want to be called joy and just taking that name has, I think it's helped my, you know, my positivity or my, my attitude if you will.

Joy: It kind of lifts your heart. I mean when you, I remember when I was in Spain and somebody yelled to me in Spanish, joy which is Alegria and I looked down this cobblestone street and think, oh my gosh, that's my name. Yeah, they know me as Joy over there.

Diane: Was it a hard transition for you though personally after having been called Barbara for all your life?

Joy: Oh definitely. I mean, cause this wasn't until I was in my late fifties, so Joy's a new name and, and so, you know, this house kind of was a lucky find with a very good realtor and I, I feel very joyful in it and I try to, you know, I've put some of my paintings on the walls and just put things around that give me pleasure, pleasure.

Diane: Your environment is filled with joy.

Joy: It is, it really is. Yeah.

Diane: You were born when?

Joy: 43, 1943. My father was across the globe in the war in the Philippines. And, um, I, my very first childhood memory was him coming home and not knowing who he was and he wanted a kiss and I thought, I'm not going to kiss a stranger, but he's, he's been a big influence on my life. He was an architect and uh, he, he was one of my first art teachers. He taught me perspective. So that was kind of cool.

Diane: Has he been gone a long time?

Joy: Yeah, he died in his late eighties. And, um, I remember being in his office. He was, had his own practice. And I remember asking him, I loved to sit at his drafting board. And I said, Dad, can I ask you a question? And he said, sure. And I said, can girls be architects? And that was back in the 50s and my father was pretty macho and he looked right at me. I remember he made direct eye contact. He said, Barbara, you can do anything you want if you put your mind to it. That's the message I got from, you know, a macho father. And I think that that's, you know, that helped me. I mean I started, I was a guidance counselor in Bucksport for awhile, but I started a private practice out on my own and was very successful, had a really good practice in Portland.

Diane: As a counselor?

Joy: As a counselor, yeah.

Diane: Was your husband a counselor at that time, too? You had said ...

Joy: Yes. Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Diane: Do you mind talking about this? You were telling me about it before, you were married for 35 years, divorced. You had another relationship.

Joy: I was devastated. You can add that if you ...

Diane: You were devastated?

Joy: Yeah, it was like, you know, who am I now? I remember feeling totally devastated and then my high school sweetheart that I had so much unfinished business with, my father would not let me marry him because he was Catholic and Italian. But he, he was the love of my life and actually still is. But we were together for seven years and we realized that we had, we hadn't seen each other in 40 some odd years and we had, you know, grown in different directions and it wasn't going to work.

Diane: But you tied up all those loose ends?

Joy: We tied up most of them, but I still dream about him. I still dream about him.

Joy: The first one was more devastating. I think I would use that word because he was a womanizer and he was a womanizer for great long period of time while we were

together. But I hung in cause I thought, you know, I had this model of my parents stayed married for, I mean, your question, do you think you'd be where you are now when you were younger? I always thought I would, I would, you know, be with the same man, just like my mother was and we would grow old together and live happily ever after.

Diane: And forgive us of all of our sins. Right?

Joy: Right, right. And, and so, I mean, I'm a very deeply spiritual person and I think that's one of the reasons that pushed me. I mean really getting into native American spirituality.

Joy: I love the native American spirituality and their embracing of nature and, you know, grandfather, grandmother, mother, father, mother earth, father sky. I mean, it just all came together for me. And I think that, that really, that, that helped me at that juncture when I was devastated, I was so devastated. I was, I was suicidal and I couldn't believe that I am a therapist. And I can remember saying to my, uh, mentor supervisor in Portland, should I still be meeting with clients? And he leaned forward on his, in his chair and he looked me in the eye and he said, are you still showing up? And I said, yeah. He said, do you have any idea how much that

means? Okay. And I kept showing up and yeah. So then, then John, my high school sweetheart finds out that I got divorced from a sister who lives in Western Mass still and we got together and it was, I felt like I was 15 again. I mean, it was just this, I'd say, 10 year period of my life that I have no regrets about. You know, I, I knew, I mean, he wanted to marry me way back then, you know, and he was very passionate Italian, very romantic. Um, and, you know, we enjoyed that romantic part for a while and then the reality set in.

Diane: So when that marriage ended, mm. What was your frame of mind?

Joy: Very Sad.

Diane: She was living in an isolated part of Maine at the time although says she didn't feel isolated because she loves nature and loved her surroundings. But as she grew older, she knew she wanted to live where she wouldn't need to use her car to go anywhere. She chose Bath. She can ride her bike into town, hang out with friends, make art, write, work in the garden. Joyful things.

She also changed her perspective on her therapy practice and now calls herself a life coach instead of a therapist.

Joy: In the last, I would say five or 10 years of my working as a licensed psychotherapist, um, I got into, uh, becoming very interested in art and in Jung and symbols and, uh, so I, I, I now do when the need arises, I will work with people in my studio who have been told that they, um, in kindergarten that their work is horrible. The teacher holds up their work and says, don't do it like this. And I hear all these kinds of stories, but that's kind of like talking to people and people that are going into retirement saying, oh, I wish I could, I wish I could create. And I would s and so the kind of work I do, I coach them to create, you know, and I, so I tell them a few things in the studio, run them through a few non-threatening exercises and then invite them to play with the paints.

Diane: That's how you do the coaching? You don't just sit across from people or you do both?

Joy: I do both. It depends on whether a person is interested in creativity or person comes and wants to work on a dream or a person comes and wants to, um, be, uh, supported IN a decision and a transition and a choice.

Joy: A big theme I think is, especially if you've been active and I'm a type a personality, I've have a lot of things going

on at once and I've had to accept and adapt that I can't do as much.

Diane:

And how's that make you feel? Do you get frustrated by it?

Joy: Um, at first until I could, um, speak with a friend about it and she said, well, you know, I feel the same way. Um, and, and it's really hard to accept that I'm not, I don't have as much energy as I used to have.

Diane: How do you want people to talk to you or to treat you now that you're older?

Joy: I want them to talk to me.

Diane: Do you find that they don't sometimes.

Joy: Well, in some groups, um, I can see that there's an assumption set up that, you know, she's older so we don't have anything to talk with her about. But I find myself in those kinds of situations talking to them and, and seeing, you know, asking them questions about themselves just to let them know, you know, I may have, um, gray, silver hair, but I, I still am interested in young people.

Diane: And so when you start that kind of a conversation, does it usually work? Do they become engaged?

Joy: It usually does. I do notice that I'm, I'm asking more of the questions. I'm, I'm, um, but on this, this trip to Costa Rica where I was with a young person in her twenties for a month, and then another young person, I, I was thrilled because they were appreciating who, who I was. In fact, the, the person who's going to do my web page, she said, joy, you do so many things. You're fluent in Spanish or did you know you paint, you write, you know, you life coach people. Um, and to have somebody in her thirties, recognizing me, acknowledging me, I can feel the difference in my body. I feel lighter, I feel brighter. I feel younger.

Diane: Do you think it's a cultural thing because you were in another country?

Joy: No, because both of these people, one of the women in her twenties was from England and the other one was from San Diego, which is a very sophisticated area. So that's very affirming,

Diane: So do you ever try to act in ways that will influence how people see you?

Joy: Um, yeah, I think probably riding my bike, I'm sure there are a lot of people who look at me and think, oh my God, I hope she doesn't fall off or you know, but um, and I'm not doing it so much for other people. I'm doing it for my leg muscles cause I don't, once I, I love to walk and once I lose my leg muscles, it's going to be a lot different.

Diane: So it's true what they say about the importance of getting regular exercise.

Joy: Yeah. I walk at least a mile or two every day.

Diane: Do you ever feel lonely?

Joy: Not very much. Not very much. The only time I, I feel lonely is wishing that my sons were more in touch with me. That's the only time really.

Diane: What makes it a good day for you?

Joy: When I wake up in the morning and I realize I can lie in bed for another hour and not have to worry about it because I don't have to work until later in the morning. When I've accomplished something that I've wanted to accomplish. I do find at this age. I, I have to make myself

lists so I don't forget details. Um, a good day is, is to be able to be outside and take in something of nature. Um, walking into town, connecting with people that way, being reminded that I live in a town where I can walk in and people know who I am and call me Joy. Um, it's a good day when it can end with just being a total vegetable.

Diane When I asked Joy if she had any advice to share, she said move and read. She's been reading books about aging since she was in her 50s and says they've been helpful. One that she recommends is *Ageless Soul: The Lifelong Journey Toward Meaning and Joy* by Thomas Moore

Joy: There was one point in this book that I wanted to lift up to you and that is what he has to say about depression in older people because he goes way back to the middle ages when they used to use the word. Um, I'm going to forget it.

Joy: Melancholy! Oh He's, he, he says, is it really? Is it or is it melancholy? And then he says, of course you feel melancholy. Of course you feel sad. You're not as young as you used to be. And, and that's, that's something that's been going on since time began. And I dunno, just reading that it jumped off the page at me. Like, cause I was having

some moments when I got back from Costa Rica where I was just feeling sad and I felt like, oh, I'm getting depressed. What's wrong with me? And then I took this book out again and started reading it and read that again. And it just helps.

Diane: Is there anything I haven't asked you yet?

Joy: Oh No, but I love your questions.

Diane: Oh, I'm glad.

Diane: My last question is, is, is there something that you'd like people to know about you?

Joy: Wow, that's a huge question. Oh, last stanza of my poem.

Joy: Over the hill. I'm going to give you this. I'm going to sign it. It's called Heartbreak Hill. When I ran six k races in my younger years I always made it to the top, although it became more of a challenge. Uh, the sweet relief of heart breaking free, chest relaxing down the hill, coasting towards the finish line. The earlier decades kept me pushing toward that uphill like a developmental must, a midlife thrust. Then along came a different kind of

heartbreak, the realization that gradually, without wanting to notice, walking instead of running became the mode up that same hill. No more running for me, but hey, at least I'm walking. I'm still walking up Heartbreak Hill.

Diane: You've been listening to Conversations About Aging, a Catching Health podcast. I'm Diane Atwood and I've been talking with Joy Hare, who is 75 and lives in Bath, Maine. To see pictures and learn more about Joy's recent trip to Costa Rica and her work with the orchid ladies, visit CatchingHealth.com. While you're there, you'll find other conversations about aging and lots of blog posts about health and wellness.

This podcast was made possible by our sponsors Avita of Stroudwater, a memory care facility, and Stroudwater Lodge, an assisted living community, both in Westbrook, Maine. You'll find out more about them at northbridgecos.com.

Many thanks to Smith Atwood Video Services for editing the podcast. See what else they have to offer at SmithAtwood.com.

And a thank you to Tom Meuser for his support. He's Director of the Center for Excellence in Aging and Health at the University of New England.