

MAKE ME

Joyful

I'm not a natural revolutionist. I've never been to a rally or on a march. I struggle to choose who to vote for (give me something to believe in please) and the only reason I'm interested in Guy Fawkes' plot to blow up parliament is because it means I get to watch fireworks every November. Anarchist I am not. However, this is where it changes. I may not have placards and a tent in front of Big Ben but I'm a woman with a cause and, as those of us who have watched Erin Brockovich know, you should never doubt a woman with a cause.

This isn't a rally against tax without representation or a revolt against a monarch who would 'let them eat cake'; this is about joy. I want to make you joyful, I want you to make me joyful and I want us all to make each other joyful. Oh yes, it's time for the Joyful Revolution.

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Far too many of us are frittering away our days living half-lives. We tell ourselves that our dreams are for other people, that this is the best that we can hope for and that next year will be our year. We stay in relationships that are fine, jobs that are less than fine and we wait for the elusive gold star for doing the right thing. We rush, rush, rush with no time to cherish ourselves let alone anyone else and our Sunday night blues start on Saturday morning because what's the point in a weekend when feeling flat lasts seven days a week? The people that are happy we resent. The problems we don't yet have we fear. We hoard our pleasure because pleasure is scarce and we postpone feeling good until we have One. More. Thing.

This makes me sad. In fact it breaks my heart.

Life shouldn't be some tedious slog where we're only rewarded with happiness when we've met the right person, found the right job or reached the right dress size. It shouldn't be something that we just get through. Life is this very second. It's now, now, now. And with every breath that we take, we have the choice of whether we feel good or whether we feel bad. Irrespective of what we fear is holding us back, we all have the capacity to live rich, passionate, joyful lives. We can all decide that life should be more than so-so.

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I can't be the only one who has nodded sagely at a motivational quote about living life to the full, 'liked' it on Facebook and then distractedly continued to browse the holiday pictures of friends of friends of friends. Or the only person who has uttered the words 'No one looks back on their life and wished they had spent more time in the office' and then returned to the same office that makes me want to staple documents to my eyeballs. We tell ourselves that we will change our lives but then we decide that it's all too hard and we go back to Googling pictures of kittens.¹ Days become weeks, weeks become months and months become lying, shrunken, on the cusp of death, another regretful cliché like the ones we promised we'd never become.

Is this enough? It's not for me and I'd wager that it's not enough for you either. It shouldn't be enough for anyone. No matter where we start from, we all have the capacity to live joyful lives and to create a world that is full of pleasure and beauty.

¹ In the interest of full and frank disclosure, I too Google pictures of kittens. And Jake Gyllenhaal. Sometimes together.

And so who am I to be so damn joyful? A beaming idealist, riding a pink unicorn and sprinkling pixie dust to the tune of 'It's A Small World After All'? Alas no. I mainly travel by bike and if I did have a theme song it would be 'I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing'. Not really.

Yes, I'm smiley but for a long time I had the whole smiling on the outside dying on the inside thing going on. I operated under a system of pretense: beamingly enthusiastic about a career, relationship and life that my body knew was wrong, even if my head didn't know what was right. Supposedly intelligent, I was ignorant on the subject of what would make me happy and when asked how I was doing, the slightly manic refrain of: "I'm fine. I'm fine" was the only thing I could articulate.

I'd somehow landed a dream job as a corporate lawyer. Well, I'm sure someone somewhere touted it as a dream job, but I've yet to meet anyone who wished they may, wished they might, stay up scanning through the night.² In fact I would go to work hoping to get knocked over by a bus on the way in. Not fatally, of course, just bad enough to have a few weeks in traction. Similarly I ignored the opportunity to have the free flu vaccination. Because really, what person in her right mind would vaccinate against the chance to be off sick for a week?

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I'm not sure how many more years I would have wasted had my quiet desperation not attracted life's attention. In the space

² If that person is, in fact, you, please get in touch.

³ Embarrassing, but you typically end up with a seat.

of a few months my boyfriend of eight years proposed, my law firm started making redundancies and my step-father was diagnosed with inoperable cancer. Forced into consciousness, I noted the irony that I was frittering away my life whilst someone I loved was fighting desperately for an extra day to live his. Not good.

So, to the surprise of my colleagues I volunteered for redundancy and to the surprise of everyone else, my boyfriend and I ended our relationship. A few self-help books later and: Ta da! Life sorted. Not so much.

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It took a couple more years, a lot of introspection and more than a few mornings faced down on the kitchen floor sobbing before I worked out how to be happy. And, believe me, nothing makes you feel more depressed than seeing exactly what accumulates under the oven.

Even now, feeling happy is a choice I make on a daily basis. Sometimes I feel as far removed from joy as ever and there are still the same doubts, fears and inexplicable tears on the tube moments.³ I didn't start the Joyful Revolution because I'm so sorted; I started it because I need it as much as everyone else.

Being joyful isn't always about ending a career, finishing a relationship or buying a kitten just so that you have a reason to get up in the morning (although it may involve all of these things). It's a mindset. And like any mindset, it can be changed.

The best place to start is with the understanding that:

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If we're honest, this is the fundamental driver behind everything that we do. Whether it's making more money, finding a new relationship or getting a different job, everything comes back to the fact that we think the action will make us happier.

So if it's happiness that we seek, why wait? Why not choose to feel that way now? If we let ourselves feel joyful before all the being, doing or having then we've already won the game, hit the jackpot and found the Holy Grail. We have it all. Typically the tangible things after which we've lusted tend to arrive at this point (life's charming like that) but by then we're free to enjoy them for what they are without being enslaved by the fear that they'll slip away from us once more.

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We're so conditioned to believe that happiness is outside us. A separate entity that we need to lean grasping towards. If we keep going, keep stretching and can just get past all the day to day dramas then we'll get our hands on it. Or not.

The whole 'happiness comes from the inside' thing can seem a little trite. We read the articles in the glossy magazines and then decide that nice though it sounds, it's 'impossible' to feel good when we're the only one of our friends who is still single or we're stuck in the office until midnight doing a job that makes us cry blood or when we feel low, low, low without knowing why or when we're scared that this is it or when we're in a crowd of people but still feel like the loneliest person on earth or when we simply have no clue what will make us happy. But trite or not it may just be the answer.

It can be difficult to take responsibility for how we're feeling, especially when outside events give us so many excuses to feel bad, but the choice is ours. We don't have to martyr ourselves. By viewing happiness as something outside of ourselves we're always going to be at the mercy of life's whims. If we postpone feeling good until we have everything that we think we want or people start behaving in the way that we think they should, we're giving away our power. By putting our eggs in other people's baskets then we're never going to be able to make our own omlette. Or something.

It's easy to dismiss feeling good as fluff. To decide that life is hard and that bad things happen and that money is scarce and the economy is screwed and that people get sick and that depression is unbeatable and that no one has manners and that work isn't supposed to be fun and that it's all too much. But it's when we feel like this that we need joy the most. When we're sick, lonely, scared, uncertain, down, jaded or battling with any other negative emotion, that's when we need to connect to something bigger than us.

We may not know what we're passionate about or where we're headed or how to make the big changes, but we do know that we want to feel good. Working out how to make ourselves happy is the most important thing. When we're joyful we're invincible. Our energy and lust for life is infectious and we leave the world with more than we take. By giving to ourselves we are able to give to others and we all benefit from this positive upswing. With joy comes the kind of radiance that can't be achieved from a bottle and we attract new people, new opportunities and new excitement into our lives. We have the strength and the vitality to work out the big decisions. We take back control and stop postponing our lives until we have it all figured out. We feel good now.

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Us Joyful Revolutionists need to decide that we want life to be good. For it to be beautiful, pleasurable and BIG. We can't be cowed by the naysayers who tell us that it's impossible, that

the world is full of misery and that nothing will change. Rubbish! We will make things change.

So how are we going to change the world? Do we need guns? A petition to take to Downing Street? A million and one followers on Twitter? I don't think so. The beauty of the Joyful Revolution is that change comes through pleasure. There are five rules, but I promise none of them involve tanks or tents outside Westminster.

1. Delight in the details

When we're trying to be happy then it's all too easy to get caught up in the big issues: What's my passion? What if I don't have a passion? Is this the right person for me? Am I foolish to leave? How can I get through this? When will things improve? What if they never improve? How can I know what I want? And more. The huge questions can be overwhelming and when we're overwhelmed we tend to stay stuck, worried and down.

Instead of this, we can leverage the little things.

A joyful life is in the details. It's about noticing, appreciating and creating moments of beauty, fun and pleasure. By delighting in these details we stop postponing happiness until the big things fall into place and we feel good now. As we've already discussed, being happy is at the root of everything we want to achieve, so by feeling good in the moment we've already achieved the biggest success.

Every day is filled with opportunities to cherish ourselves and yet we let them pass us by. This isn't about choosing a different shampoo because some advertising agency has decided that we're 'worth it', it's about finding the details that matter to us and cramming our day full of them.

We can:

Stop to appreciate the garden we pass on the way to work. Buy the bunch of flowers rather than ruing the fact that no one else is around to do so. Set the table beautifully instead of

eating in front of the fridge. Pick up the junk mail that we step over every time we walk through the hall. Change the blown lightbulb that we notice every time we try to turn on the lamp. Use the beautiful stationery rather than the leaky Biro and the boring black files. Drink our tea out of the china cup rather than the polystyrene one (saucer optional). Spritz the favourite perfume rather than let it turn to vinegar on the shelf. Go for a walk at lunch rather than stay at our desk and check Facebook, sorry, work. Plant the window boxes even though it's only a temporary flat. Laugh with a friend rather than re-telling the same stories of woe. Hang the photos that have been waiting for so long. Go and see the play even if we're going alone. Turn off the Blackberry and trust that the world won't end.

It goes on and on.

Life is a collection of moments and we get to choose whether we'll make those moments joyful. It may seem pointless to buy flowers for our desks and use the heart shaped Post-its when we hate the job we're in or to take time to create a cosy retreat in the rented flat because we're disappointed we haven't yet bought our own place, but by living in limbo we're not really living at all.

Let's choose what standards we want to live by and then adhere to them. If you want to be the type of girl who wakes up to fresh coffee and a bedroom full of blooms. Buy a cafetière, go to the flower market and be that girl.

2. Do good feel good

The Joyful Revolution is not just about making ourselves happy, it's about making as many other people as we can happy too. Changing the world can seem like an overwhelming prospect but, again, it's all about focusing on the details.

We can either have a positive effect on someone's day or a negative one and, as ever, the choice is ours. Yes, other people

are annoying. Miss Joyful I may be, but I have very bad thoughts about my fellow citizens too (typically on public transport: for the love of God people, let passengers off the train before boarding). However, when we meet others with charm and grace we get a natural high that is greater than anything achieved with crack, coffee or cake. No longer are strangers a clammy mess of irritation, they are individuals, potential new friends and real people.

Just as we're learning to consider the ramifications of our carbon footprint, it's time to consider the effects of our positivity footprint. If we consistently remember our manners and try to be more thoughtful then little by little we raise the standards of loveliness for everyone around us and beyond. That's not to say that we don't stand up for ourselves or we let others treat us badly then send them off with a bunch of flowers and a homemade cake for doing so, but it's about finding ways to treat people the best that we can.

We can:

Hold the door open for someone (and thank the person who does so for us). Give up our bus seat to the person who needs it more (whether they're pregnant, older or they've clearly just had an awful day). Bring a few bunches of daffodils into the office so that everyone has something cheery on their desks. Smile and ask the person who serves you how they are. Let the person with one item go in front of you and your trolley at the shop. Tell the person whose outfit that you admire that they look fabulous. Help the person with the pushchair up the steps. Treat the homeless chap to a cup of coffee on a rainy day. Send a postcard to a friend just because she's so darn wonderful. Say good morning to the person you pass in the street. Take the extra cake you made to your neighbours (and learn their names while you're at it). Email someone's boss when they give you excellent service. It goes on and on.

It is too easy to lament the current lack of manners and decide that this is just the way that the modern world works, but it doesn't have to. Let's raise our expectations. Every time we

make a positive impact on someone then it inspires them to do the same. Like trails of dominoes we can impact more and more people by starting with one Random Act of Joy.

3. Happiness is Handwritten

This is where the Joyful Revolution started. With the notion that a handwritten envelope peeping out of a pile of bills had the capacity to lift the spirits of anyone who saw it. Even now, when electric communication is so effective and so prevalent we still have a visceral response when we hold the words of someone we care about in our hands. Handwriting is as individual as a fingerprint and so it's no wonder that finding a forgotten letter or scrappy note is a real link to the past.

Not only do the recipients of letters feel cherished when they receive them, they're also a real indulgence for the writer. In the space of that notelet or postcard it's all about you. You may warm up in the opening paragraph with a "How are you?" or a "Hope things are well?", but the rest of the page is a chance for you to share your news, thoughts and dreams. It's uninterrupted and it's therapeutic. By writing rather than typing, the words come from a different part of ourselves. We are less able to self-edit and once the letter is sent, we never see it again. Liberation indeed.

Most people will share how much they love receiving real letters and notes and they'll say how sad it is that no one sends them anymore. We all know that giving is a great way to receive, so if your postmat has been feeling neglected, put pen to paper yourself first. It can be a few words on a post card or a doodle on a scrappy leaf, but whatever it is, it has a profound effect.

4. When you feel you can't act is precisely when you must

Being thoughtful, kind, generous, open, warm or joyful can often be something we intend to be once everything else is fixed. When we're down or busy or broke we don't feel that we

have the capacity to think of joy either for ourselves or others but this is exactly when we need it the most.

When we're stuck in a mood that's not serving us it's tempting to stay there. Perversely there is a certain pleasure in feeling pain and we can often exacerbate negative feelings by reaching for more 'evidence' to make us feel bad. We feel jealous and then look for more photos on Facebook to fuel that jealousy or we feel down and listen to the sad song one more time on repeat just so we're truly miserable.⁴

If we want to get out of a funk or lift a good mood to an excellent one then we need to find a better feeling thought. One of the easiest ways to do this is to shift our focus onto something that gives us pleasure or do something joyful for someone else. It may be that someone's grateful smile when you offer them a seat is just enough to nudge you into a better headspace. Similarly when we don't feel affluent, the fastest way to feel rich is by giving something away. It may be putting a penny in a charity box or buying a hot chocolate for someone who needs it more, but in that little action we tell the world that we're doing well and that we want more to follow.

5. Celebrate. Appreciate.

It's true that there are certain limited resources on this planet, but good luck isn't one of them. There was a time, however, when my deluded ego believed that someone else's success was directly proportional to my failure. You got a pay rise? Fabulous, now I feel poorer. You've lost weight? Awesome, now I feel fatter. You have a lovely new boyfriend? Wonderful, now I feel lonelier. I would smile and say the right things but rather than bask in the shared glow of someone else doing well, I cowered from the light lest it shine on my perceived lack.

This twisted logic comes from the belief that people achieve things at the expense of others. It's a mindset mired in scarcity.

Consciously we understand that someone landing their dream job or whatever else doesn't preclude us from doing so too, but when we're feeling doubtful and insecure it's easy to forget.

The scarcity mindset limits us. If we believe that there's not enough good fortune to go around then we can legitimately stop trying. It's easier to be jealous of someone else's success than take action to achieve our own. And this is where many of us stay: bitterly swallowing the bile of resentment as we tell ourselves: "It's ok for them. They have family connections/better training/more luck." No. What they have is the belief that anything is possible and the gumption to make it so. The right attitude is the only thing we lack.

So how do we go from teeth-gritted congratulations to genuine pleasure? How do we take inspiration from the success of others?

- Use the wisdom of envy. When we feel jealous it's a clear sign that we want what the person in front of us has. Sometimes it's entirely superficial, but often it's valuable information to help us ascertain what we want from life.
- Remember that there is plenty for everyone. There is enough of everything to go around. Money, love and success are unlimited and your share is always waiting for you. Just because someone else is doing well, it doesn't mean that you're not going to do so too.
- Truly celebrating other people's good news. Not in a fake way, but in a relishing it, delighting in it and loving it sort of way. If you scoff at and mock other people's good fortune then you're closing yourself off from receiving the same. If you're feeling lonely and you see a couple kissing, smile and trust that it will soon be you. Unless of course they're being inappropriate, in which case tell them to get a room.

⁴ Recently I listened to The Cure's 'Pictures Of You' 16 times in a row just because it made me feel sadder. Why? WHY?

- Learn from others. If someone has accomplished something that you want, ask them how they did it and value the gift of their expertise.
- Take action. Don't let yourself be paralysed by the fear that you've missed an opportunity just because you didn't do it first. There is room for you and your unique perspective, but you'll never reach your full potential if you don't start.

As well as celebrating the good fortune of others, it's vital to appreciate our own successes. Let's not save the excitement for the big things; there are a hundred little victories to cheer about throughout the day. When we notice these things then the world suddenly seems like a more generous place. We feel luckier, more abundant and more positive.

Someone pays you a compliment? Thank them. You spot a coin on the pavement? You're richer than you were a minute ago. Someone waves at you across the street? You're on fire! It's not about being glib; it's about realising that the more you appreciate, the more positive you will feel and the more you will notice all the other fab things that life showers you with. It's the best kind of up-cycling.

If you're a fellow notebook enthusiast you can write all your daily gratitudes down so that you have a tangible reminder that life ain't all that bad. Or note them on your phone or just commit them to memory. Never miss an opportunity to celebrate and appreciate.

Five steps to bring more joy into your life and the lives of others. Five steps to start changing the world. It seems too easy and perhaps it is, but how would your daily life change if everyone you interacted with played by these rules? How would your mood improve if you started the day with a letter from a friend, a smile from the shop assistant and a cup of tea made by your colleague?

It's easy to dismiss the little things as irrelevant and to decide that change can only come from huge initiatives or the decisions of people more powerful than us. Rubbish! We all have the power to make life beautiful. Every single one of us.

There is no downside.

The beauty is that there's no downside. There are no negative side effects from acting more positively; no grave risks from doing a Random Act of Joy for another; no danger in choosing to feel good rather than bad. Sometimes it's easier to be cynical rather than risk something working and sometimes we'd rather be proved right than have something succeed. What a waste.

Let's celebrate the fact that we have nothing to lose. Let's celebrate the fact that any change in this direction is a good change. Let's celebrate the fact that with a little leverage one joyful act can change the world.

With a little leverage one joyful act can change the world.

And so over to you my fellow revolutionaries. I am excited to see how you bring joy to your own lives and the lives of others.

www.makemejoyful.com

Perhaps one of your handwritten notes will make me smile in the most unexpected venue, or perhaps we'll meet at a supermarket stand-off as we each try and let the other go first.

If we both make living joyfully our aim that we cannot fail to have an impact on one another.

Whether we meet in person or not, I know that if we both make living joyfully our aim we cannot fail to have an impact on one another and that somewhere between us, the falling dominoes of Random Acts of Joy will cause us to unite.

So, what Random Act of Joy will you do for yourself or someone else after reading this manifesto? Come and tell me at:

www.makemejoyful.com

or write to me at:

hello@makemejoyful.com

or Happiness is Handwritten style at:

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And if you've been inspired to join the Joyful Revolution, please share this manifesto with someone else who might be too.

Vive la Revolution!

Cheryl Joy Adamson