

A Trace of Light

Joy has never been quiet for me. It feels like music playing in a kitchen late at night, like laughing so hard you can't breathe, like being around people who make you feel at home without even trying. One of my clearest memories of joy is the night "Flex," by Cupid, was pulsing through our kitchen speakers. The harsh lights were still on even though it was late, and none of us wanted the night to end. My family and I were dancing in a messy circle, stepping on each other's feet, laughing until our stomachs hurt. From the outside, it was just a normal night. No holiday, no big reason to celebrate. But in that moment, the room felt full in a way I can't really explain, like happiness was just sitting there with us, always warm and impossible to forget.

Another kind of joy in my life has been a lot quieter. I felt it in the time I spent with my grandpa. Now and then, he would ask me, almost casually, if I would take care of him if he ever got sick. Back then, I didn't think much about it. I would just smile or nod. Now, I wish I had slowed down and stayed in those moments longer, listened more, and held onto those conversations. The joy I felt with him wasn't loud or exciting. It was soft. It was feeling safe and loved and knowing someone cared enough to picture me in his future. As I've gotten older, I've found that same kind of joy again in my friendships. At the skating rink, on nights when there was no drama and everyone was just laughing and being themselves, everything felt light. I remember one time my best friend and I got dressed up just to go to Walmart and somehow turned something completely ordinary into one of my favorite memories. Another night, we dressed up for a photoshoot. We ended it by painting something messy and colorful that felt like it belonged to us. In those moments, joy felt like freedom. Like I could be loud, creative, and completely myself without thinking twice.

I think about these memories the most when I'm not feeling okay, when everything feels heavy or worlds away from me. They remind me that joy doesn't just disappear when life gets hard. It's something you carry with you, something you can go back to even when you're at your lowest. Now, when I think about joy, I don't think about something big or perfect. I think about music playing in a dimly lit kitchen, my grandpa's voice, and laughing with people who feel like home. Joy is the moments and the memories that I carry close to my heart. I've learned something important: joy isn't something you have to chase endlessly. It's something you grow to recognize, something you choose to hold onto when the storms are strong. It's the quiet reminder that even in the darkest moments, light still exists.