

Hayaa Shoaib

Scott Poe

Personal Essay Category

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Finding Joy

Chilling sweats and extreme weakness settled into my body as typhoid fever struck me like a storm. The days blurred together - long and exhausting. Yet even in one of my lowest moments, I never felt completely hopeless. There were always the little reminders that kept me going: get-well soon cards from my classmates and fresh food from neighbors, followed by my mother's bedside encouragement to fight against the fever. It was not loud or overwhelming, but it was there. It was joy - a word I expect to define easily, yet its meaning is truly subjective.

For a long time, I thought joy was something that would eventually arrive into my life. When everything felt right, I would finally "find" it. But, I began to understand that joy is not a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow, waiting to be found. It exists quietly in the middle of things, waiting to be noticed. I see it flicker through the small routines of my life. It is when I spot my best friend waiting for me in school, mirroring each other's smile. It lives in the way my mom always asks about my day. It lives in the warmth of the sun on my face after many gray skies, realizing it is *finally* Friday. These moments are easy to overlook, but they are where joy quietly lives.

As humans, we never consider how joy coexists with pain. When my grandfather, who was like my second father, passed away, the world lost its color. For months, joy felt unreachable. Yet even in grief, moments of comfort and connection with family reminded me of life, and its enduring beauty. When my parents left for Hajj, I cried at the thought of being far from them, but that sadness existed alongside a sense of peace, knowing they were part of something deeply meaningful. Even moving out of my childhood home brought uncertainty, but also excitement for a fresh chapter. These experiences revealed that joy does not need the absence of pain; it can bloom amid the shadows.

I have learned that I cannot simply wait for happiness to appear: it is a state of mind - an optimistic one. For me, it looks like practicing gratitude and contentment. It is pausing to appreciate what I have rather than focusing on what I lack. Whether it is through weekly reflections or self-talk, being grateful for the life I was born into helps me practice joy. In Islam - my faith - this idea is even deeper. Choosing joy means trusting in God's wisdom, practicing patience, and embracing certainty that everything unfolds for the best, even when I can't believe in it.

Joy, then, is less about feeling and more about seeing. It is a lens through which I view the world. It allows me to be present, to appreciate the ordinary and extraordinary alike. I have come to understand that life is not only about surviving storms, but also noticing the sparks of light within them.