

EPISODE 214

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:02.6] PF: Welcome to Episode 214 of Live Happy Now. I'm your host, Paula Felps, thanking you for joining us today. Every one of us gets in a funk from time to time, but some funks are much worse than others. After the death of her childhood best friend, Janine Bernstein fell into a deep funk that she had trouble getting out of. That led her to explore her own grief and look for ways to overcome it. As part of that process, she created a new radio show called Get the Funk Out and now has written a book by the same name. She joins us to talk about grief, resilience and getting the funk out.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:38.3] PF: Janine, welcome to the show.

[0:00:40.3] JB: Thanks for having me.

[0:00:42.3] PF: I'm excited to talk to you today because first of all, this is a surprisingly fun read. I did not expect it to be this entertaining. I mean, honestly, by the third page, I was like, "Where was she during my childhood?" We could have gotten into stuff together.

[0:00:59.3] JB: I know. I was swinging from those kitchen cabinets.

[0:01:03.3] PF: That's that was the clips. I'm like —

[0:01:05.3] JB: Is that funny?

[0:01:06.3] PF: Yeah, that's terrific. So now everyone has to pick up the book just to find out what that story was about. Yeah, This is a terrific book that you've written, and we wouldn't expect it to be as as lively as it is when we're talking about being in a funk and we all get in a funk from time to time. But the one the big funk inspired this book was not your run of the mill bad day kind of funk. So you tell us — Can you tell us what started you on this journey?

[0:01:34.3] JB: Okay, so I have I had a friend in high school, we were inseparable. It's the kind of friend where she gets a perm, you get a perm. She does this, you did this. You know, inseparable. In 2010 December, I get a phone call that she had passed away. I thought I couldn't breathe. Like time stopped and I couldn't get my brain around losing her and I got into this terrible funk. I could not shake it. I could not comprehend losing my friend from childhood.

Because I have a research background and it's in qualitative research, so I was so fascinated. Like, "Why am I in a funk and what types of funks are there and what people go through?" And I would carry a notebook and wherever I went, I would draw things down and I decided to create a radio show called Get the Funk Out because of my own grief and also, everybody else goes through stuff.

[0:02:29.3] PF: Yeah, and what I really love is you approached this like a detective on a mission. You know?

[0:02:34.3] JB: Oh, did I ever.

[0:02:36.3] PF: Were you really like, "Okay, what is this feeling? What is where is it coming from? Why?" You know, it's it's interesting to me, normally when we have that much grief and that much pain we're not able to deal with that analytically. Where did that come from? And how did that shape the journey, do you think?

[0:02:56.3] JB: You know, I've always been an analytical person and I just had this detective side of my brain. So when my friend passed away, I wanted to know who is in her inner circle? You know, who were her past relationships? Did people know exactly what was going on with her mental health? What was going on with her? Because I hadn't seen her in a long time. You know, we would exchange emails and things, and I knew she was engaged for the fourth time.

There were a lot of red flags, and so obviously I knew I'm never going to know the whole story of this. What am I gonna do with my grief? So I started exercising, which wasn't the answer, because I end up like, hurting myself and overdoing it and I said, "I got to do something." So the radio was such a great outlet. I was already on the air. But having a show called Get The Funk Out is cathartic. Not just for me, but other people.

[0:03:52.3] PF: Yeah, can you kind of tell us what you do on that show?

[0:03:54.3] JB: Sure. So I feature a lot of guests authors, comedians, filmmakers, directors, anybody, and, you know, they talk about their projects. But I'm really fascinated with, "How did that project come about? What's your back story?" And a lot of times, it's amazing. People have, I call them like chapter two or second stages in her life where they might start out in one thing in Corporate America and now they're a filmmaker or they're an actor and there might be an author, and they didn't write much. But then somebody passed away or they had their heart broken and now there are New York Times best selling author, and these were the stories I kept hearing.

[0:04:34.3] PF: And to be able to share those with people is is really a gift, because many of us aren't in a position to be able to get to sit down and share that story with someone else and to have the skill to draw that story out of them. That's also a gift to be able to do that and so how did you start finding your audience both in terms of guests and in terms of who is listening to you?

[0:04:55.3] JB: Well, it was already originally I was doing a music show. It was called Mom's Rock The House. It was women and music, and then when my friend passed away, I took a year off and I started — if I picked up the newspaper, here's my detective again, and I saw somebody wrote a book about surviving XYZ, I would contact them and say, "Would you care to share that? I won't pry and make you feel uncomfortable on air, but whatever level you want to share." And it was always a very intriguing backstory behind a project and then I contacted, you know, publicists and people directly and all of a sudden I went from maybe featuring one or two people on my show to featuring four a week and then doing pre recorded and everybody has a story.

[0:05:44.3] PF: And we can learn so much from listening to other people's stories. It's a such a powerful tool. You know, one thing is we have different kinds of funk that we're into. So can you really talk about what it means to be in a funk and what your book is talking about when you say, "Get the Funk Out"?

[0:06:01.3] JB: Sure. So when you're in a funk, it could be a personal funk because of someone or something has impacted you mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually. You might be in a

professional funk, you know, and there's so many things that go into it. Like you don't think this job is fulfilling. You don't get along with your coworkers. You dread going into work, you think, "Is this the end of the line for me, this is sitting in this cubicle doing whatever?" I mean, I've been there. I was in corporate training and development and I used to sit and space out and look out the window and go, "Really? Is this it?"

[0:06:38.3] PF: This is not what I dreamed of when I was a child.

[0:06:41.3] JB: No, I don't think so. So and that feeling of you don't really feel like you want to leave your house maybe at the end of the day and maybe you're drinking too much wine. Maybe you're having too much Ben and Jerry's. You know, you're imploding, you're going inside yourself, you're closing people out, and maybe you're not even like showering regularly, and you're not yourself.

[0:07:06.3] PF: And when you're in that state, it's really difficult to pull yourself out by yourself.

[0:07:12.3] JB: Correct.

[0:07:13.3] PF: And you're great at giving some tools on how, then — really, that's what this book is about. These tools for, you know, being the tow truck to get them out of that funk.

[0:07:22.3] JB: You bet, because you know that's what really fascinated me is why is it that my friend was in this funk and couldn't get out? And how can how come you read about these stories of somebody lost a leg and now they're a motivational speaker? You know, or anybody at any age, it's mind blowing how people our resilience and they have grit and they just keep going and that's the thing that really intrigued me and I wanted to share that. Because, you know, as we get older, we lose that creative side to ourselves. When we were little, maybe we had an outlet, and I talk about that in the book. But it's really important to not let the monotony of life drag you down and not make time to do something fulfilling.

[0:08:10.3] PF: Yeah, and that's one thing that is really easy for us to push aside. To say, "Well, I'm too busy to take time to draw or to paint or to dance or whatever it is that brings me pleasure." And it's and it's so bad for our soul when wait when we don't nurture that

[0:08:29.3] JB: Exactly, it really is.

[0:08:31.3] PF: And so really, what you're talking about it in the very candidate way is resilience, and you talk about some of the ways that we can turn grief into a new beginning. Can you talk about that for us?

[0:08:41.3] JB: I'll give a good example of myself a little bit. My dad had stage four colon cancer and passed away in 2015. I have always loved to write, and I really wasn't doing much with it. I'd start something, I'd put it on my desk, you know, it would get buried under something. And when he was sick, I would fly and see him and on the plane, I would write and write and write how I was feeling. It was very cathartic, and I wrote his eulogy on the plane. I submitted it to The New York Times. They have it online now. It's in the *Lives We Loved* section. It's so special.

So my point is, you will find a side to yourself if you're aware of your interests, your past interests and you keep yourself open and you can be open to people you have conversations with or open to different things, to new things. Because when you expose yourself to new things or things you loved or used to love to do, you will slowly pull yourself out of that funk.

[0:09:46.3] PF: And you said the key word, "slowly". It's not, an easy fix, ever. grief, it doesn't matter what the grief is, it's not an easy fix.

[0:09:57.3] JB: Not at all. And you know, one of the taglines of the book is, "What if the worst thing that happened to you turned out to be the best thing that happened to you?" Well, losing my dad wasn't the best thing that happened to me, but I found the upside was that I did something with my grief, which was I turned to writing, and I listened to other people's stories of grief to get out of my own funk.

[0:10:21.3] PF: It is amazing. Time and time again we see it is those difficult times in our lives that have the greatest benefit. You know, I make a joke about how come we can't have this kind of growth while sitting on the couch eating ice cream? Because, you know, it's like you get these tremendous benefits, but you have to go through so much to get that.

[0:10:38.3]: And you know, excuse me, I want to just add to that is that when we go through that storm because you can't avoid the pain and all the stuff you're going to. When you get

through that storm, that rocky time you really learned that you are more resilient than you imagine.

[0:10:56.3] Yeah, people say all the time, “I could never go through that. I couldn’t face that.” And then when that time comes and something really tragic and dramatic happens to them, they do.

[0:11:08.3] JB: Exactly.

[0:11:09.3] PF: So we're much more resilient than we realize and again, we don't — It's a skill set we don't want to discover we have. But when we do discover it's, it is fantastic.

Now you're a firm believer in using creativity to help buffer the ups and downs of life and you — That's one thing I love about this book. I mean, I cannot say great things about this book because your creativity really comes through and how you use it. Can you talk about why it's so important and tapping in our creativity and really using that?

[0:11:41.3] Because I don't think you can really remain in a bad mood if you are, you know, throwing clay on a pottery wheel, if you're painting, if you're with your girlfriends or your whoever, your boyfriend and you're doing something to use another side of your brain, and it's just it does something to you. I play guitar and I'm not a fantastic guitar player. But when I get into that zone, that creative zone, something happens to my brain where I just feel like I just went on a vacation.

[0:12:12.3] PF: Yeah, it's a respite that we can't get from watch TV or just doing anything.

[0:12:19.3] JB: Not at all.

[0:12:20.3] PF: And as you said, it can be, you know, we find these parts of ourselves. I know what I'm going through a difficult time. I like to write songs and no other time in my life — if things were going good right now, I could not write a song to say my life. It's a very interesting thing, but when I'm going through difficult times, any other writing doesn't cut it for me. I've got to sit down and write music

[0:12:43.3] JB: And you know what's interesting, don't you said sometimes feel that there's a pull in you? Like you know when you need to do that. Whereas other times you don't feel like you have the creative energy.

[0:12:56.3] PF: Yeah, and that's a really good point, so people need to listen to that Because what it does for you when you listen to that and you follow that is pretty astounding and even looking at it in retrospect, you can be pretty amazed that you created that.

[0:13:12.3] JB: You know, I talk about in the book how I went to Montessori school when I was younger, and the simplest thing of being allowed to go off and create and be messy and finger paint and whatever and, you know, I wasn't fantastic with some of my creations, but big deal. Because I think I just allowed myself the freedom to just see where my mind was gonna go.

[0:13:37.3] PF: And now what do you tell people who say, "Well, I'm not creative"?

[0:13:40.3] JB: Well, there's a lot of different things. I mean, maybe you like to cook. Maybe you like to draw. I mean, there's there's so many different things that can encompass creativity, and I wouldn't negate that is a category that "I just don't have it in me". Because there are so many outlets. I mean, for instance, I got into voice acting and it was more like therapy, you know, and it's I feel like you can take different experiences, and then you end up applying it to wherever you go, wherever life takes you.

[0:14:18.3] PF: And as you apply that, obviously humor and comedy play — really play into your approach. You're very playful in your approach, and as I mentioned, very dependent on this creative process. How did you watch your grief change as you followed all of that?

[0:14:36.3] JB: He was funny because I had so many epiphanies. Like, for instance, my father had a very corny sense of humor. And I don't know if you have any relatives that recycle their jokes and and you kind of go, "Oh, here we go. Here's this joke again"? And cringe. And then I find myself saying those jokes to my kids and like, "Mommy, that's Grandpa," and it's funny you you find — I believe in life when you go to these things, you lose people, to find the thing that you can remember them by that's positive. Like my grandmother loved chocolate. She loved snickers. So on her birthday, I require that everybody have snickers.

[0:15:22.3] PF: Oh, that's fabulous.

[0:15:23.3] JB: You know what I mean? Like, she did silly creative things, and I just mention them. And so I think it's important for your own well being to remember the positive to and to continue that tradition.

[0:15:37.3]: Absolutely. That's that's great, because so often times we try to find a place for our grief and we try to put it aside and, you know, maybe at first, sometimes it's too raw to keep some of those things alive. But when you go back to it and you start, like you said, doing the Snickers on your grandmother's birthday, it has such a warmth to it and such a feeling of comfort when you do those kinds of traditions.

So you were doing these interviews for your talk show. How did you — what was the process that made you say, “Alright, this I've got to do a book. This is going to become a book.”

[0:16:13.3] JB: There were too many amazing stories and amazing people, all different ages that I was talking to when I thought, "I want to share this with the world." These are people that were, you know, going through 911, that were facing all kinds of given things. There's just one woman. I love her Jackie Krischer. She's in the book. She's 86. She's training to hike Mount Kilimanjaro. She —

[0:16:37.3] PF: I love that.

[0:16:39.3] JB: Okay. In her 70s! She was told, I guess in her past relationship, that, “You can't do that. You can't do this.” And unfortunately, the relationship, I think he passed away, and she went on to train to become a triathlete. She was featured in a beautiful film, and she's an amazing woman and when we're going through her own stuff, if you shift gears and focus on someone else's story, you can't really stay in a bad mood.

[0:17:07.3] PF: That's true and that is such a gift that, from picking up this book, that it does help shift that perspective in a big way. And so what is it you really hope that readers take away most from reading your book?

[0:17:20.3] JB: I feel like I want them to have a resource to know that there's a whole bunch of things they can do to focus on self care, to focus on their physical, mental, emotional health and to tap into who they are as a person. To listen to, you know, what their interests are, their goals and to try to really need to make themselves number one, you know? Because if we're not happy than everybody in our inner circle is gonna feel it, and we're not going to be our best Selves. Whether that means going to therapy, because I think there's a combination formula. You go to therapy if you need to, and you do other things and things will begin to change.

[0:18:09.3] PF: Yeah, that's the biggest lesson. I think that's the greatest lesson I've been able to learn over time is being able to recognize everything is temporary, you know? Whether it's good or whether it's bad, it's — this is going to pass and it's just finding that way to weather it and the weather it in a way that is most pleasing to you,

[0:18:32.3] JB: Right and I don't, you know when people say, "You'll get over it," or, you know, they feel like maybe you're dwelling on something too long, as we said earlier, it's a personal thing. It's your own timeframe. Whatever works for you.

[0:18:44.3] PF: Yeah, and we can't frame somebody else's story, and we can't determine what kind of path their grief should take or how long it should take.

So what have you learned about yourself through this process?

[0:18:55.3] JB: There are some incredible surprises when you face up to, you know, going through different funks in life. Like for instance, you know, here I lost my friend, which is why I came up with the radio show. And then I lost my dad, which was really hard, and I became really close to my stepmother as a result. We are both — we just laugh like we never laughed before and we talked almost every day. It's been amazing. So through grief, there are some real surprises in life.

[0:19:33.3] PF: Yeah, there's some tremendous gifts. It's like, it's not the way you want to get a present. But now there is always if you hang in there and you you look and you wait, then yeah, there are presents and gifts that come with it.

[0:19:47.3] JB: Yeah, I want to add something. I mention this in the book, I do not really love public speaking. Like if I have to get on a podium, you know, I think because in the past, I used to be very nervous. So when I had to speak at my dad's funeral, I thought, "I am not going to get up there and be nervous and I'm not going to make this boring and have people bawling." So I, because he was so funny, I made it kind of funny. It made me relax, and it made everybody feel like that I had captured who he was and people are smiling.

[0:20:25.3] PF: You know, that's the best. So of people out there, I'm sure there's one or two people out there who are in a funk right now. What are three things they can start doing today that they can help turn that around?

[0:20:35.3] JB: I would make a list of all of your interests, you know, things you really you've always wanted to do. Maybe they're reaches. Okay, maybe it's, "I want to sky dive, but I really shouldn't." You know, you're concerned because you have kids and you don't want to put yourself at risk. But make make a list of, "I really want to do these things. I used to do these things and they made me so happy," and start reaching for those goals and finding some time. I mean I know we're all busy, but for instance, I used to take one night a week and go to a writing class or I was playing in a band on point and just trying to carve out time for yourself is such a mood boost. It's huge.

[0:21:19.3] PF: Yes, and it will pay off. It

[0:21:22.3] JB: It does. It does pay off.

[0:21:24.3] PF: I really appreciate you coming on the show and and for imparting this folk free wisdom on us.

[0:21:31.3] JB: Excellent. Thanks for having me.

[0:21:32.3] PF: Alright, have a wonderful day.

[0:21:34.3] JB: Thank you, you too.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:21:39.3] PF: That was Janine Bernstein, host of the radio show Get the Funk Out and author of the new book by the same name. If you'd like to learn more about Janine, her radio show or her book, please visit us at LiveHappyNow.com. We hope you're already a subscriber to Live Happy Now, but if you're not, you can find us on the Pandora Podcast network, Spotify, Soundcloud, Stitcher, iTunes, and Google Play. Just look for us on your favorite platform, hit subscribe, and you'll never miss an episode.

That's all we have time for this week. We'll meet you back here again next week for an all new episode and until then, this is Paula Felps reminding you to make every day a happy one.

[END]