



Raising 13 Children. Yes 13!

Joy Vandeurтин
Author, Mother of 13

EPISODE 42

[Quote]

“If you take away your differences and look at what you have that’s the same, you can work together and you can make things right.”

[Description]

Joy and her husband Rod made it their life's mission in adopting harder-to-place children. With three sons, they adopted ten abandoned and abused kids of various ethnic backgrounds.



Joy, through her book, *Gizelle's Silly, Soggy Day*, tries to get across, that all types of people, no matter their skin color, or where they live, or how they look, can work together for a common cause.

In this episode, we talk to Joy about raising 13 children, her experiences bringing people and animals together from different walks of life, and how we can achieve greater good from all of this.

[Intro]

Jaison Dolvane: Joy and her husband Rod made it their life's mission in adopting harder-to-place children. With three biological sons, they adopted ten abandoned and abused babies and toddlers of various ethnic backgrounds from two weeks to four years old.

Joy VanDertuin is the author of a children's book, *Gizelle's Silly, Soggy Day*. The message she tries to get across, is that all types of people, no matter their skin color, or where they live, or how they look, can work together for a common cause. The story is based on a real incident that happened to Gizelle, a sheep that lived on Joy's farm that fell through a bridge into a rushing creek during a rain storm.

She believes that people can put their differences aside, and turn them into strengths to help each other, a lesson played out by animals in her book. Unable to drive or bus her 12 kids around for a year, after a grand mal seizure in 1996, Joy suffered from severe depression. Though, even in this time of despair, she found strength in helping a stray injured bunny recover that led her to become a licensed animal rehabber to help wild, abandoned, and injured animals.

In this episode, we talk to Joy about raising 13 children, her experiences bringing people and animals together from different walks of life, and how we can achieve greater good from all of this.

[Episode Transcript]

JAISON DOLVANE: Okay. Welcome joy.

JOY VANDERUTIN: Hi, thank you. Thank you so much for having me.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah, my pleasure. So joy, tell us a little bit about you know, how you sort of got to doing what you're doing now and how you got to sort of write that book.

JOY VANDERUTIN: Well, the way that it all started was with the book is that our sheep Giselle, she got out into the rainstorm and we didn't, it was very typical of her to do that because she, all the time would come and go and walk out in the rain with the horses and all that. And then my son came in and said, you know, Giselle's not getting up. I can't get her to eat. And I don't know what her problem is. And I said, okay, well, you know, she played down. It's not a big deal. So it's okay. You know, they lay down, it's not a problem. The

next night, he told me the same thing and I thought, well, you know, something's up here. So I went and went on outside to check and see what the issue was. And I thought, no, this is really weird how she's at. She acts like she's hungry. And I don't know what the problem is.

So I put some food in my hand and she started eating right out of my hand. I thought, no, she's not hungry. So, no, I don't get this. So I called my husband Rob and he said, no, go ahead and call the vet out and see. So we had the vet come out and he came and he looked at her and he says, you know, the only thing wrong with her is that she got out in this rain and she is so big and so fluffy anyway, she laid down and she can't get back up. And the only way that you're going to save her is by cutting all this fleece off. So we tried calling the vets and schools to have somebody come out and shear her.

And we couldn't get anybody to come out and shear her. So we knew that if we didn't get her up, that she was going to die. So my kids and myself, and at the time Rob was at work, he came and we all came together and we worked together to get all this fleece off of Giselle. We didn't know what to do. So we used scissors and we use knives, anything we can to cut it off. And it was a project and it was thick and it's very, fleece is very oily and it's got like [03:01 inaudible] in it. And so it's very, very hard to cut. And so, as we were cutting, you'd only get like maybe this much at a time off of her. And it literally, it was a cold day and it literally, and it was rainy and it took us into the nighttime to where Rob had to go get flashlights and big old lights and put them in the barn and shine them in there. And we continue cutting her and getting the stuff up. And then the whole thing was to get her up on her side. And we got her up on her side and the whole thing, no, we had to get her on her feet. So the vet said, leave her like that. In the morning try to get her up.

So as we were cutting in, I thought, no one is going to believe this. Like, how's this happen? Like, how does this happen? And I thought this would be the best book. So I just took and filed that back of my brain o, who knows a children's something I always want to do my whole life. And I thought, well, I'm not a writer at all. So I'd have to have somebody help me with that. And time went on and I end up drawing like a little picture of her and all this, and I just took it and put it away. And I was talking to my cousin, Michelle, we grew up together our entire lives and she is a writer. And I said, would you ever be interested in doing a children's book at all? Because she said, now I need to make some changes in my career a little bit. I'm not sure what I'm

going to do. And I said, how about a children's book? And she's like, sure. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I go, really? She goes, yeah.

So we ended up doing that and it was like so much fun. And it's like, you know what? I want to make a difference somehow, like, with this book let's make a difference. So that's how we try to gear our book into, you know, making a difference to show children that you can work together as a team and together like that, Cause Michelle and I are so different, like I'm country ma, she's city ma, like she likes fine dining. I like go get a hamburger. We are so different in so many ways. And we're in different states in the country. We're in different states, I'm in Texas, she is in North Carolina. And we did it all through mostly texting, tons of Marco poloing back and forth, back, and forth. But the thing is, we worked together as a team and it was so much fun and it was like, we're kind of like Giselle and her whole little gang there. They all work together. So that's kind of the point of doing it.

JAISON DOLVANE: I mean, obviously the story was really about your sheep being too heavy, I guess, from the water. Right. And you had to sort of dry her off or Shear and stuff like that. But really when you wrote the book, seems like you took a different angle where you actually got all the animals to help kind of save her?

JOY VANDERUTIN: Right. Because we wanted, it's like, you know, the book was, the real story was, yes, She filled up with water and could not get up. We couldn't get her up. She would've died. So we had to get her up and, you know, we did get her up the next day and she lived for three more years. And then we had to take a turn. We thought, you know, we need to make this book be a purpose and have a reason for it. And be able to gear to children that they understand at a young age, because everything starts at a very young age to start.

JAISON DOLVANE: What is the core message that you were really trying to get across?

JOY VANDERUTIN: The core message is friendship to that you can get along together to help each other are out, to come together as a unit that when people work together or in this case, animals, cause children love animals. But when you work together, you can get the job done. Like you could do it if people just set aside their differences and focus on what they have in common, not what they don't have in common.

JAISON DOLVANE: Got it. So have you, so let's talk about sort of your family. So you've got a family of 13, which is just like a big number. So tell me about how that came about.

JOY VANDERUTIN: Oh my goodness. Okay. So my husband and I have known each other since junior high, so we've been married 47 years and known each other 52. And so right out of high school, we got married. And then about two years later, so we had our first son and then we had two more boys. And then we decided that we would have a, you know, chances of having a little girl like whatever. And I saw a magazine at a friend's house and it was about adoption. I knew very, very, very little about adoption, but I got very, very interested and very curious about it. And there were, at that time, it was adopting children from Korea was a really big thing. And that was like 36 years ago. A lot of children were getting adopted out of South Korea. And so we just kind of fell into that and doing that and really interested in, so our first daughter was from South Korea. Then we decided she needed a sister. And our second daughter from South Korea, my husband went there to go get her and escort her home. He wanted to know about the country she came from and wanted to see with his own eyes. And it was quite an experience. I stayed home with the kids.

And then after that, see, it was, these were children that were harder to place because of medical reasons or some of them have emotional issues. Some are drug babies. I mean, there's a lot of different things that spectrum of special needs that all is so huge. It go from having literally birthmarks to not having the center of their brain. So there's a very large spectrum of that. And it's like, we got these children very quick just because we were willing to open up and listen to what the situation was. And you find out that sometimes, you know, you don't think you could handle something and it's not that much. Well, once that word gets out into the adoption world, now I'm talking about years ago. I really don't know how it is now. It kind of feels like wildfire and it spreads and you start getting agencies who are calling us and asking us if we would adopt a particular child.

And so it just kind of grew, so it was three boys, three girls then three more boys and then another girl. And then three more boys.

JAISON DOLVANE: So, I mean, why did you continue doing it? I mean, why not just stop at the two that you adopted at the first place?

JOY VANDERUTIN: The only, people have asked us that. And no, some people say, Hey well, would you just don't turn down anybody? Well, that's not true. We have, because if the fit's not right and it's not something you're able to handle or fit into, you're not going to just say yes. So it's something you really have to no put your heart into and really think about. So the only, the only thing either one Rob or I could ever come up with is that it was our mission, that this was the mission that God has given us to do. Cause it was, it wasn't like people thought and they verbalized it to me that, you know, you just want babies all the time. Well, that was not the case whatsoever. Babies grow up. So that was not the case. It was a desire, it was in the heart desire that was there. And after our last child, after we got him, he was four. We adopted him, the desire just left, like it was just gone.

JAISON DOLVANE: After number 13.

JOY VANDERUTIN: Yes. It was just like that desire was just got it gone. It just went away.

JAISON DOLVANE: So tell me about, you know, what were some of the sort of challenges or, you know, like some of the positives of like assimilating this kind of family?

JOY VANDERUTIN: Well, they, when we adopted our first daughter, they actually had a seminar and the seminar was to let you know, you're going to run, you are going to run into circumstances that people are going to be happy that you have a different race child. Our kids are all different races. They're African American, they're biracial, Hispanic, Korean, Italian.

JAISON DOLVANE: It's amazing.

JOY VANDERUTIN: So you absolutely run into circumstances that people have a hard time with this. And along with that, you learn to become strong. Because you're defending your family and you're teaching your children the right way or trying to teach your children the right way of handling these type of circumstances that you are going to have throughout your entire life. Cause I would always say to them, people don't have families like ours and they had a really hard time understanding that.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah. And you know, obviously the complexity of having an interracial set of siblings right, Is going to be fairly confusing. I would think for

children, especially, I guess, growing up in Texas, that's where you guys are. So I mean, how did you deal with some of that? And I mean, were there any instances where it just got really difficult?

JOY VANDERUTIN: There were some instances and one of our kids, he's now all grown up and has a child on his own. When he was in elementary school, he kept on getting kicked and our children were at the time, the only minority children in the school district. So it was different for teachers and kids and everything else. And our son was getting bullied in the bathroom. He was getting pushed and he was getting kicked and he was getting to know all this different stuff happening to him. And when the child, when the teacher came in, she saw our child push the other one and he automatically got in trouble. So I tried to explain this in the art meeting. And they said, well, you know, he shouldn't have been heating back. And I said, no, no, no, no, you know, you didn't see the full story here.

So there's a lot of things like that. There lots of racial slurs that you have to teach your kids that you're going to come across this. And the best thing for you to do is really try to walk away from it. Like really just let it roll off your back and just keep on going, cause you're the bigger person in this situation. But they have to know that they're going to face this. When our boys start dating, they would date white girls and the girls' parents were not happy about it. And they just cannot understand why. And one of our son said, you know, it took me like three times that no, I'd like to meet the parents after at least the third date. And she wouldn't like meet her parents. And he said, I kind of picked up on that after a little while. And he said, you know, I said, you know, this isn't going to work if I can't meet your parents and they can't be okay with me. So there's a lot of different situations like that, that you deal with.

JAISON DOLVANE: I can imagine. And how was the relationship between the children themselves?

JOY VANDERUTIN: Oh, they kind of piled up. Like sometimes there are two or three piled together. Our youngest daughter, two of her older brothers at like at nighttime, they would go in her room and they'd have this little powwow going on, you know, like when they're in their mid, later teens and they'd go out and eat and all this kind of stuff. So they seemed to kind of pop up like two together or three together, something like that. And they did very, very well. You got a lot of different personalities. They do not have the same DNA. You know, you have a lot of conflicting things that, you know, they

managed to work through. A lot of different situations with themselves, or they just fought, you know, kids fight and they fight and they get over it and they'd be best buddies again.

JAISON DOLVANE: Yeah. And so what are they all doing now? I'm assuming they're all fairly grown up at this point.

JOY VANDERUTIN: Oh yeah. They're all grown up. I mean, our oldest son is 45 and they're UPS drivers and FedEx and like they all have families and they've done really wonderful. So we're very, very proud of their success.

JAISON DOLVANE: You had a desire for all these children to help them out and you kept going until 13. Do you need to take a break?

JOY VANDERUTIN: No.

JAISON DOLVANE: So, you know, having 13 children, I mean a financial consideration to this also. I mean, you know, it's not cheap raising even one child let alone 13. So how did you manage that?

JOY VANDERUTIN: Well, we had a one family income because in our opinion, that's how you do it. Like someone has to stay home with the kids. And it took a lot of sacrificing. We didn't go out to dinner. We didn't go on vacations. We didn't, as far as Rob and I ourselves, we didn't do, honestly, didn't do anything. The first time we spent the night somewhere like over just one night, overnight, his brother came and stayed with the kids and we had been married 22 years. So it was the first time in 22 years that we went someplace like one night overnight. It's sacrificing is what it is. Meals were ridiculous. You know, it big pots of stoop. And now, I'll be real honest with you. There were times when we'd sit at the table and I'd look at the table and I'd think, Ugh, I don't know if we're going to stretch. No, that there's quite enough. And I would honestly just say no, I'm not very hungry today. And no, I'm just going to have something to drink or something like that because we didn't want them to ever feel like there was enough food. There was a lot of food. There's absolutely a lot of food. I made, one of my kids say, I hate the word casserole to this day because everything came in casserole form, soup form. I mean, you're talking, you know, eight pound meatloaf, just huge amounts of food. And they just ate a lot. There was, you know, nine boys, there's nine boys and they ate a lot and you just try to accommodate.

And it was just like, there were times when we'd have to tell them, as far as food wise, this is it for the week. So when you [19:37 inaudible] pantry, that's Gone, that's it. But the bottom line of it, it is sacrificing. It's sacrificing. I had some people ask me, [19:48 inaudible] are you kidding? And so, no, no and they said, well, how about cooking or help with the kids? I said, no, no, that's my job. And my whole thing was, I kind of got a wind of what people think of people with large families. They think that they're, I got to say this, but that they're messy and you know, house is messy and that they don't keep themselves up and all this kind of stuff. So my goal was, I am never going to let anyone even think that of me because, so I worked really, really hard as far as no 10 loads of laundry day, but it became normal. It was a normal to me. And not normal to other people, but it was a normal, it's kind of like, I really didn't know any difference.

JAISON DOLVANE: It's amazing. I am proud of you.

JOY VANDERUTIN: Thank you. Thank you. Again, it's at teamwork. You got to work together as a team, whether it's husband and wife, or the entire family, and many, many, many times it is the entire family has to come together. And we are all very, very different. Now, as of course, as they grow up in adulthood you see that even more.

JAISON DOLVANE: Right. No, absolutely. And I saw your husband helping you with the zoom call. So you guys are still getting along?

JOY VANDERUTIN: Oh, yeah absolutely.

JAISON DOLVANE: That's great. That's great. Okay. Joy, so, you know the other part of your story really is, that you know, you went through kind of a seizure, you lost your driver's license. And obviously when you know, you can't bus your kids around, which, you know, becomes kind of a mandatory thing to really get our kids from one place to the other. You went through a little bit of depression there, and then that led you to sort of do for injured animals and then take care and assimilate various different animals. So tell me about sort of that experience.

JOY VANDERUTIN: That was a very, very difficult time, very difficult because I was used to up and going and doing things to get things done. Well, I had a grand mal seizure and boy that knocked me out and it was extremely difficult. I honestly could not even think how to make a bowl of cereal. It was very difficult. And it took the doctor, he said, the hard part's going to be the

medication. And that was, it was a very hard part to adjust to and get used to. And during that time, yes, depression did set in, I didn't even realize it. Like, I didn't know at that time, I know all about it now, through our kids and everything else, a lot of different people. But at that time, I didn't even know I was depressed. You know, I just thought whatever. I was not allowed to drive for a year and I had no vehicle to drive. Couldn't take the kids in anywhere. The schools were very accommodating. They brought the [22:53 inaudible] the step to our home, but still with that, I had no connection to the outside world, which was very, very difficult.

And I had found a little baby bunny, I mean, maybe three days old maybe. And I try I to nurse it back to health didn't know what to do. I contacted a rehabber and I was very, very interested. I love animals, love them. And she started talking to me and she says, no, you'd really good at that. Are you kidding me? I can't do this. She goes sure you can. [23:30 inaudible] Like two at a time. Well, I started getting into that and it was like a lifesaver because I was able to talk to people on the phone. People came and dropped animals off and it was great. And I did anything from little baby cotton tail bunnies and squirrels. I did fond, like little Fonds and a beaver, raccoons just so many different animals. My very, very favorite is a Skunks. I love the skunks. They were great.

JAISON DOLVANE: Oh really?

JOY VANDERUTIN: Yes. They're awesome little animals. I got them when they're about this big. And I started them on cat food and kitten milk, and they thought I was their mom and they tapped their feet. They just go tap, tap like that when they see you. And that was like, they're happy to see you kind of, and I had three of them and they would, in time they got nice and plum and I called the rehabber, I said, Hey, you know, I don't want to let these little guys go. They follow me all around the yard and everything. Cause we put them back into the wildlife and she goes, well, no and they're like the size of an orange. Oh my gosh. They were like a size of a big grapefruit. I thought, okay, well, time to go. So took them out into the forest and we live in a rural area. So it was easy to go ahead and let them go. I love doing that.

JAISON DOLVANE: So you helped all these kids. You've helped all these animals. How is, you know, how is all this, Like if you look back in your life, how has all this kind of transformed you? Has it changed you in any way?

JOY VANDERUTIN: I think, well, I think I've always kind of been like this to be real honest with you. It's just that like, as a child, I loved animals. I love taking care of them. I always like kids. You know, I always, my girls, even back in my day were getting Barbie dolls. I wanted baby dolls, you know, all this kind of stuff. So I think it's always been in me. But I think it's, I think it's made me be a stronger person. The kids have taught me so much cause the backgrounds where some of them have come from are where they've been, where they would, I get a little choked out where they would be today, if they didn't have a home to go to. And that is something that you just can't even put any kind of price on whatsoever. It's just like, it just makes you strong that yeah, there's been some difficult times. We've had some hard, hard times, but through those hard times you learn lessons. And one thing that I learned that when a child does, when they do something, let's say something that's not a good something you take that not good something, whatever it may be, you let it turn into a learning experience to where they learn from that. It doesn't necessarily have to turn bad. Good. But learn from that experience, learn that this is a lesson. So everything turns into a lesson. And sometimes we had occasions where there was like 24 hour lessons. Like it was a 24 hour type thing, like all the time.

JAISON DOLVANE: So Joy, is there one feeling that you have as a mom that you would rather not feel?

JOY VANDERUTIN: Why do you ask me this? Sometimes believe it or not, I feel lonely. There's times I feel lonely because sometimes you get in you're in situations with your kids, that other people don't understand and they don't get and so they kind of cast you out and even though you have people all around you, there's still a sense of loneliness. And so it's kind of like for me, my best friends are my family, that's who my best friends are. There's, I'd say that's probably a very difficult thing. Like I don't like feeling that at all. And it's just on occasions.

JAISON DOLVANE: And is it just loneliness because you feel like no one really can understand your situation?

JOY VANDERUTIN: It's not so much anymore, except for sometimes situations hang on, you know, like people can't drop stuff. It tags to you. So during particular times for many, many, many years yeah, they just, they don't understand and you try to explain, or you try to explain and then you sit there and you go, why am I explaining this to this person that they aren't even trying

to understand? Like they don't get it. And there are situations that are very, very difficult to get. I mean, you've got abandoned, abused, neglect. I mean, things that kids act out and people don't understand that.

JAISON DOLVANE: You've got kind of a unique situation. Ad I'm sure that people look at it and say you know, you've kind of brought this all to yourself in a way.

JOY VANDERUTIN: Exactly. And it's kind of like, yeah, but no, like, you don't know, it's just like birth children. With a birth child, you don't know our oldest son, He was born deaf in one ear. And then when he was 27, he was diagnosed with cancer, which is a cancer he'll have his whole entire life. And it's like one and one and a half million. And you know, so you go through all kinds of different situations, just so many different things.

JAISON DOLVANE: So Joy you've this book Giselle, what's kind of your hope for the people who pick this book up and read it?

JOY VANDERUTIN: Michelle and I have the hope that when people pick up Giselle, we want Giselle to be a happy, colorful, funny. We wanted kids to laugh and giggle. And one of our main things was I want a three year old to be able to pick up, or we want a three year old to pick up the book, look at the pictures and kind of figure out what's going on here kind of thing. And we hope that people will get from this, Or children will get this, that you can work together, have friends. They don't have to be just like you. They could be different. But if you take away your differences and look what you have that's the same, You can work together and you can make things right. And you could no come up with a solution and, you know, hopefully Giselle brings happiness and laughter and silliness to whoever may read it. Cause it is based, it isn't a true story, but it is based on true events.

JAISON DOLVANE: Got it. Awesome. And where can they get the book?

JOY VANDERUTIN: Excuse me?

JAISON DOLVANE: Where can they get the book?

JOY VANDERUTIN: Oh, you can purchase a book through Amazon.

JAISON DOLVANE: Okay. Got it. And we'll put a link to the book in our show notes when we publish this also.

JOY VANDERUTIN: Okay, great. Thank you.

JAISON DOLVANE: Great. Well, thank you so much Joy. I appreciate your time today and you being here.

JOY VANDERUTIN: Thank you so much, Jaison for having me, I really appreciate. It's been a lot of fun and it's been great. Thank you.

[Outro]

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