

EPISODE 207

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:02.6] PF: Welcome to episode 207 of Live Happy Now. I'm your host, Paula Felps, thanking you for joining us today. Mother's Day is right around the corner and that's a great time to visit the idea of family traditions and today's guest is all about making memories and creating traditions with your family.

Jessica Smartt is the author of *Memory Making Mom - Building Traditions that Breathe Life Into your Home*. Her book looks at how you can put aside the daily distractions and create personal traditions to bring more meaning and balance to your family's lives.

She sat down with me to explain what creating family traditions does for us and how you can fit them into your busy life.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:41.0] PF: Jessica, welcome so much to Live Happy Now and we are delighted to get you on the show today.

[0:00:46.5] JS: Thank you so much for having me.

[0:00:48.4] PF: Well, I wanted to know, this is a great time of the year to do something for moms because there is a holiday coming up and I think we have all heard of it, mother's day. People, if you haven't bought your cards and flowers yet, you better get on it but this made it a perfect time to talk about your book, *Memory Making Mom*.

I think the first thing that struck me is a book about traditions. Why would you want to do a book about creating traditions, what started this thought in your head?

[0:01:14.6] JS: I think for a long time, I sort of felt angsty and guilty that I wasn't fun enough and our house was kind of lame and we just still have the same things. I didn't quite know how to fix it and it just kind of dawned on me one day and talking to an older gentleman who is on the

other side of parenting, how powerful traditions are and that they're kind of to go a little bit deep for a second. They're like the missing link between what we care about and how to make it actually happen.

The cool thing is, it's different for every family. If you love sports, if you love serving people, if you love food, if you love games, you know, whatever it is, you can choose your values and then think of a way throughout your days and your weeks and your seasons and your years to make those things happen year after year and what I've discovered after writing this book is like, it is so fun to talk to people.

Everybody has a tradition from their childhood that they remembered. They're always different and you know, sometimes they're the funniest things that stick out to people but it's really powerful for kids and for parents too, I think.

Kids and parents today are so run ragged and super busy and lots on your plate and overwhelmed and so this is a concrete way of handling that mom guilt that we feel of we're not doing enough, are we investing in what matters? This is kind of like the fix that I found.

[0:02:31.5] PF: Well, it does seem like in today's world, we're getting away from traditions in pretty much every area, we just do not have those same kind of traditions that say, had growing up and it's a lot of work. It falls on the mom typically, to uphold that and implement them so I think when someone says, "I'm going to start doing traditions," they're like shoot me now, I don't need one more thing to do.

You kind of addressed that. Women all feel that way but you make it very easy for us to start implementing this. Can you talk about one, I guess, why is it so important for us to be able to do that?

[0:03:10.9] JS: Yeah. Well, you know, I'd be lying if I said that it was always easy because it's not but I think what I've realized is the times when I – you know what's easy is to sit on your phone and scroll it. That's easy. But at the end of the day, no one lays their head on their pillow and thinks like, "That was a great 20 minutes I spent scrolling Instagram. I'm so glad I did that."

But you do say, and I know this from experience. "I'm glad I played that game of candy land for the 20th time." You know, when my daughter asked me. "I'm glad I played catch with my son in the front yard." While it's not easy, it's so satisfying. I say that because I know, I've been on both sides, I still am, I live on both sides, there are some days where you're like well I did all that wrong.

While this is hard, it's so satisfying and so I think it is difficult but putting these things into action is a way of choosing the intentional but putting these things into action is a way of choosing the intentional life that really gives us satisfaction and peace. That's step one, step two is, I think I have kind of made it a little bit easy with my book.

I googled this idea like probably five years ago, I thought, "I want a book on like all the different possibilities of traditions," and there wasn't really something exactly like this. I mean, we certainly have Pinterest but this sort of like just puts everything together of here's a ton of different ideas. You take what works for you, don't do all of them, don't feel like you have to do all of them but here's some ideas.

I always say if you're starting out, pick a couple of things that matter to your family. With your kids, you know, if they're old enough, come up with a way to implement that. What's a fun tradition you know, we love being outside together, what's a summer tradition that we can do? Every year, we could all go on a bike ride at this park that we all love. Okay, we're going to do that, every June, we go on a bike ride.

This is a thing and you just kind of – the amazing thing is kids really remember and so they will actually never forget and remind you forever for the rest of your life if that helps.

[0:05:09.5] PF: They're never going away. I guess the moral of that story is don't implement a tradition that you don't really like. Because you're going to be –

[0:05:18.1] JS: Exactly, yeah.

[0:05:19.4] PF: What does it do for us as a family when we start. I love how you talk about it in terms of memories and memory making and tradition being kind of the same thing and what does it do for us as a family when we consciously intentionally set about making memories?

[0:05:34.7] JS: Well that is a wonderful question and one thing I mention in the book is I feel like it's like this analogy of packing their suitcase full of things they're going to need. You'd never send your kid off to college without like – what do kids need today. Like computer charger. Some sort of crunchy food. It's a way of those kind of figurative things that they are going to need with their values and knowing that they're loved.

It's a way of – I mean, childhood under our roof is so short and so quick. Number one is, you're giving them things they need with these memories, don't need them later on. It supports us, it bolsters us up, it gives us confidence, it gives us a sense of stability, it tells us who we are.

It does so many things that we don't even realize it does. Even little silly ones, you know? Donuts every Saturday with dad. That's doing something on a level that I think we don't always give it enough credit and then part two is, it tells your family members that they matter.

For parents today who are so overworked and so over busy, you know, this is a way of saying I choose us. You matter. It's amazing, it really works to say, we're all going to hop in the car right now and go to the zoo, their faces light up like – I'm not saying I do this every week or something but you can tell like we do this together, we matter. Mom and dad actually like us. They're not just dragging us around because they have to.

[0:07:02.0] PF: It does change the way that they see the adult world I'm sure because they're used to seeing us work and come home and we're tired and we're on our phones, we're on our laptops and this can kind of change the way we are seen by them.

[0:07:15.2] JS: Exactly. That's powerful for me to think you know, talk about technology in a couple of years, my kids are going to have phones and they're learning right now by watching me how to act with technology, you know? They're seeing if I have hobbies outside. They're seeing what I do at dinner.

They're seeing if I look people in the eye and you know, they learn much more from what we're doing than what we're saying and so this is a concrete way of saying, here's what matters to us as a family. We're important and making memories is important and here's our values.

I always fail, I'm not the perfect memory making mom but at least now, I have the goal. I know what I'm shooting towards.

[0:07:56.0] PF: And having the intention is just a big part of that because if you can at least see it in your mind, or shooting towards something.

[0:08:03.2] JS: Exactly.

[0:08:04.2] PF: Instead of saying maybe some traditional popup.

[0:08:07.8] JS: Right, probably not going to happen. Yeah, obviously it benefits to kids greatly but what has it done for you as the parent to implement traditions. Well, a big part of it for me as I said was just kind of making me feel more confident that I am doing this thing, certainly not perfectly but a little closer in that direction.

That's a really good, powerful feeling. That you kind of have like you just said, your goal that you're shooting towards. You know, it's been enjoyable. We've made some really fun memories and it's fun as a grown up to do all these stuff that gives us life like hiking mountains and going on vacation and some of it is just little like here's a really down to earth example.

We went strawberry picking today, the season has started and last year, we made strawberry shortcake that night for dessert and so the kids all remember that's our tradition. Today we go strawberry picking, we make strawberry shortcake and honestly, it's going to take me I don't know, 20 minutes of extra work like it's not going to be this huge big thing but it means a lot to all of us, we're all going to enjoy it, we're going to go out on the front yard like we did last year and eat it, you know?

Just a real simple thing can be really powerful.

[0:09:24.0] PF: I'm glad you brought that up because you have a good blend of things that are more complex and things that are very easy to do and I think when we hear tradition, as such a big traditional word. We think of something like my gosh, this means I'm going to have to have a place setting for 12 and I'm going to do these big, elaborate things. But that's not what traditions and making memories are really about.

[0:09:47.5] JS: Exactly. I mean, it can be, there are some of those but nine times out of 10 you're right, it's not. We have one and my husband started to – this is totally up his alley but if somebody in our family does something like a big deal, we give them the slow clap. You know, at the end, we're like yeah, you know what the slow clap is, you start slow and then you go faster.

I don't think the audio would work on here if I try to –

[0:10:13.2] PF: Turn down, right?

[0:10:13.9] JS: Yeah, exactly. It's kind of like you all clap together on this rhythm, it takes three seconds and then at the end we'd say, yay mom or whoever did the thing. Okay, again, costing us like zero effort but that's our thing that defines us, it's just a little thing. Some traditions can be like what you call each other, even phrases, you know? It's just stuff like that that you don't – you can ask your kids, they always know too.

What do you love that we do? They might say the most random things that you already have. Just keep that up.

[0:10:46.4] PF: That's awesome. You do a great job in this book of giving us ideas and when someone's looking at this, how does someone start deciding what's right for their family, can you kind of guide us through that jumping of point of you say, all right, this is good for me, this is going to be great for our family to do something but now I have to figure out what it is. How do they come up with that?

[0:11:09.9] JS: Right. There are a ton of ideas in the back. I'm going to be launching this summer, I've got a freebie running and I can give you the links if you have shown notes or some way to communicate it with your listeners but I'm putting out like a bullet journal where you can kind of jot down in different categories what your particular goals are. But you could do that you know, on your own, certainly.

I would say, just – in the book, you can actually skip around like pick the topic that really interest you and I would just pick one of those ideas. I like to think of it as maybe picking something

daily if it fits. Something seasonal, something maybe weekly. If you pick one of each of those in some area. You know, for moms that – if you have anybody listening right now that's got like a toddler and a baby.

The idea of doing of doing – even making strawberry shortcake may make them just want to cry because you know, I can hardly make this frozen pizza without clawing at my legs. So even just picking two things a year to do is a great start because you get it under your belt, you feel good about it. You are excited. So I would just say start very slowly but start.

Pick some that you are excited about preferably your spouse is excited about and your kids are excited about and just do it and whoever is the most organized person in your family or the one that knows what time it is and knows what day it is and all, give that person the job of making sure it happens. We all have one of those.

[0:12:31.1] PF: Yeah, that is important to have. I think my parents kept having kids until they got one that knew how to keep them under.

[0:12:38.2] JS: That's funny.

[0:12:39.0] PF: But another thing about this book is that you have different categories because some of these traditions are about holidays. Some are about food, some are about the relationships. So there are several different areas of making memories and creating tradition that maybe we haven't thought about that you approach in this book.

[0:12:57.4] JS: Yeah, work is one that a lot of times people say, "Huh I never thought about that having work traditions," but that is part of life you know? And as adults we are most excited about the things that we've put a lot of effort into that gets us excited. So letting our kids have those chances until I invest in a hobby and get onboard with making a family garden that is a tradition too, you know? So I felt that was important and the rest is in there taking a day a week to just recharge.

And have that good look for your family that is something that culture today does not do well I think. Sickness is in there too again, that is a time that we often just rush through but I totally

think you could have sickness traditions, things and ways that we care for our family when they're sick. So yeah.

[0:13:44.5] PF: Yeah and that is so thoughtful. This book covers so many different areas of how we can implement memory making that it is such a handy guidebook. It made me wonder, what are some of your favorite traditions that you have implemented?

[0:13:59.3] JS: Well I always say this because it really is one of my favorites but we always have a – and my last name is Smartt. So we have a Smartt family day once a year and I copied this idea from a friend. So the rules are that you have to do an activity you have never done before that everybody wants to do and it is just your family and then you can make it as little or much as you want but I try to make the whole day like special and fun and just for us.

So we will make a special breakfast, something we all love for dinner. Special desert, you could go out to eat if that was your thing and then we do print off a little award for the kids off of – I mean something down like best at learning how to ride your bike this year, you know that kind of thing but they love it and their faces light up and they save those for a long time. So I love that tradition that we have of a family day and I think that is so versatile.

Anybody can do it whenever it works for you, however it works, it could look totally different but that is a really easy yearly kind of like an anchor in your year that you could implement.

[0:15:02.6] PF: And what if you have teenagers? Because based on that you don't get on board with things.

[0:15:09.4] JS: Yes, I have heard, I actually don't have teenagers. So I hope my future self doesn't laugh at this interview but what I've heard from taking to people is twofold. A, they are going to roll their eyes and say they don't like it 90% of the time because that is how teenagers are but deep down they might like it, so there is that and then also just learning to tweak things. So somebody was telling me they always took their kids for example around Christmas to go see Christmas lights.

And as the kids got older, it was like, "Okay that is not super fun anymore," but they would go to Starbucks, look at Christmas lights and then stop at Barnes & Noble and everybody get a book

to read over Christmas break. So suddenly that is kind of altered a little bit but it is still the important things of celebrating Christmas and being together are still there.

So I would say don't give up on those goals. So that is hard as a mom to let go of stuff. It is going to be super sad for me when my kids don't want to go look at Christmas lights but that is part of being the memory making mom. It is not being a memory making monster.

[0:16:17.3] PF: That's great. Yeah, one of the things that you're doing and you mentioned your bullet journal. We are providing a link on our webpage so that people can download that. So they can go find that but another thing that you are doing that I think is super exciting is you got a summer book club.

[0:16:34.5] JS: Right, yes.

[0:16:36.0] PF: Tell us about that.

[0:16:36.7] JS: Thanks, yeah. It is just a way to – you know we've all been there where you read a book and then you're like, "Oh my goodness I want to implement so much of this but you lose momentum". And so I think being going through with it with a group can be awesome. So what we are going to do is for you know midsummer. I think it will start the second week of June. We are going through it and I will discuss it with everyone in a Facebook group.

And we will brain storm together and so it will just be a way of like enjoying it with other people. I am hoping people bring their friends along, their Bible study group or mom group of whatever it is and read it along together and I'll be there to help share funny stories or whatever but yeah, I think that will be fun. So I will give you that link as well.

[0:17:20.7] PF: So is it done through Skype or how do you communicate.

[0:17:25.1] JS: It will be a private Facebook group for the both of it.

[0:17:27.6] PF: Okay, oh great okay.

[0:17:29.2] JS: Yes so and thanks for appearing.

[0:17:33.2] PF: Oh yeah, I think that will be a lot of fun for people and you are right that sense of community and then the ideas that you get from one another and then the support that when your teenager does roll their eyes and say, "Mom this is stupid idea," you have other mothers that can say here is how I got around that too so.

[0:17:48.8] JS: Exactly. That is what I am most excited about because I am just a messenger here. I am not the expert at the memory making thing but I am amazed at some of the ideas out there. People rock this like so many times I am like so humble that I am the one that wrote this book because everybody else has way better ideas than I do.

[0:18:09.2] PF: So we have mother's day coming up on Sunday and what are some things that a mother can do to make sure that well, we can start implementing a mother's day tradition, something with that. What can they do to start making that day different other than just, "Oh mom, I got you a card."

[0:18:29.5] JS: Yeah, I have two things to say about that. You know we have a little tradition in our family where my husband and husbands are so different like one husband I know took the whole family on a hike for mother's day and I think the wife really appreciated that.

To me that sounds like a lot of work and that's not a vacation at all and that really stresses me out because we have little kids.

[0:18:51.9] PF: Yeah, I know I'm like, "What's next? Camping? Do I get to sleep in the woods?" is that -

[0:18:56.1] JS: Right, exactly but you know letting the dad if he is in the picture take the reigns there but in our family, my husband is a landscaper. So our tradition is that they repot all my plants and ring the doorbell and run out of sight and every year I get so surprised. "Oh my goodness you put flowers in my pots," so that is our little thing.

So the second thing I would say is that I think as a mom, a lot of times there can be a lot of expectation about mother's day like, "Finally this is my day. I deserve this, you guys better cook up something good," and typically I don't feel like that is a satisfying way to look at it because it

never is going to be quite good enough when you are dealing with children. So I think for me having a little bit of a perspective shift and shifting outward and saying, “All right who can I love here like my mom, my mother in law, women around who may have lost children or who’s children aren’t nearby.”

Just to shift because I think mother’s day can become complicated for people for a variety of reasons whether it is infertility issues or adoptive moms I think it can be a very complicated time whether you have lost a parent or whatever it is but by focusing outward and thinking, “How can I show love to someone on this day?”

Versus, “I hope I am going to have a really great day,” it really is amazing how that can just shift your mindset and then you feel grateful for whatever you have received. So that is another thing I might add, you know?

[0:20:28.7] PF: That is terrific and as we wrap this up a little bit and come to the end of our time, what is something, the one thing that you really hope people take away from this not just from this podcast but from the book and from this whole experience of delving in to becoming a memory making mom?

[0:20:46.7] JS: Yes, well you know I printed the first edition of this. Not edition, the draft that you edit. There is a correct word here that my editor would cringe that I can’t remember but anyway, the first, the advance reader copy came out and I texted my editor and said, “I want to change it back and say it is never too late to be a memory making mom.” Because I think what I would want to say is, it is never too late and you can always do this.

It doesn’t matter if you feel like you’ve missed the boat. It doesn’t matter if you feel behind. It doesn’t matter what things are lacking in your life or your home, which we all have them, what stressors there are, we can do this and it is not going to be perfect. It is just not because life isn’t, kids aren’t, we’re not but you can do it.

You can take a small step, get up again tomorrow, try again but it is never too late. So I would just hope that everyone would feel motivated and not discouraged to make little baby steps to make their home a more intentional place.

[0:21:42.7] PF: That is terrific. Jessica, I appreciate you being on the show with us today. We're going to give readers a link to your journal. We're going to tell them how they can enroll in the book club and where they can get a copy of the book and we'll also tell them how to find you online and follow your blog and all the other great stuff that you are doing.

[0:22:01.0] JS: Thank you. Thanks for having me.

[0:22:02.6] PF: All right, you have a wonderful day.

[0:22:04.1] JS: Thank you.

[0:22:05.4] PF: Oh and Happy Mother's Day.

[0:22:06.6] JS: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:22:13.5] PF: That was Jessica Smartt, author of *Memory Making Mom - Building Traditions that Breathe Life into your Home*. Visit us at livehappynow.com to learn more about Jessica's book, download a copy of her *Memory Making Mom Journal* or sign up for her summer book club.

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

[END]