

EPISODE 218**[INTRODUCTION]**

[0:00:02.6] PF: Welcome to Episode 218 of Live Happy Now. I'm your host Paula Felps, thanking you for joining us today. What do you think would happen if an extremely shy introvert committed to living as an extrovert for one full year? Well, thanks to Jessica Pan, you're about to find out.

Jessica is a freelance writer and author of the book *Sorry I'm Late — I Didn't Want to Come. One Introvert's Year of Saying Yes*. She sat down with me to talk about how with the help of extrovert mentors, she took on a year of non-introvert friendly challenges and learned some important life changing lessons.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:38.7] PF: Jessica, welcome to Live Happy Now.

[0:00:41.3] JP: Hi, thanks for having me.

[0:00:43.1] PF: Well, first off, great title. I mean, the title of this book immediately makes you want to pick it up. That was a great way to start this whole process off I think.

[0:00:53.8] JP: Thank you, yeah, I love the saying except I am always a little bit late and now I can't say sorry I'm late because people assume I'll be saying —

[0:01:04.4] PF: Back to you.

[0:01:04.1] JP: Yeah, I know.

[0:01:05.8] PF: You just didn't want to be here.

[0:01:07.7] JP: But I did, yeah.

[0:01:10.7] PF: What I found so interesting, there's a lot of things I loved about this. First of all, the read on this, it really reminded me of a *Nanny Diaries* or the *Devil Wears Prada*, that's how fun of a read this book is. I think when you hear how it's an introvert and living as an extrovert, I don't think I was prepared for it to be that fun, actually.

[0:01:32.0] JP: Yeah, I read lots of books about introverts and I felt like they were all very serious and very – yeah, it's a little bit serious and I decided to kind of want to write something that was more accessible and more about kind of the ridiculousness of putting yourself out there and the people you meet and the awkwardness.

I kind of wanted to make it more fun and not too research heavy.

[0:01:52.0] PF: Yeah, that really came through but what was impressive too at the end, you actually include the research to show chapter by chapter where this all came from. So it's like hey you folks, I didn't just make it up. It's a real thing.

[0:02:04.9] JP: I wanted to sort of spoon feed the research. You know, not shove it down people's throats. But I definitely, everything I do and write about, I wanted it to be based in research in psychology studies. Yeah.

[0:02:15.1] PF: Now, you're actually such an introvert that you even coined the word 'shintrovert'. Can you explain, I just stopped reading and laughed when I read that. Can you explain what that means?

[0:02:27.3] JP: A 'shintrovert' is a shy introvert because I think we sometimes think that all introverts are shy when actually, some introverts, you know, just need to recharge alone but they're not shy at all but I am both. I'm shy and an introvert as opposed to an outgoing introvert. I just thought, I'm going to shorten this to shintrovert. That is the phrase I use throughout the book.

[0:02:49.2] PF: I like that and because you are so shy and you're introverted, can you talk about what made you decide that you would live as an extrovert for a year. Because honestly, for most introverts

and particularly a shy introvert, that is just like hell week, for 52 weeks. What made you decide to do that?

[0:03:09.6] JP: I reach this point in my life when things went wrong as in I became a freelancer and I was working from home and I realized that I was feeling more lonely. A lot of my friends in London where I lived had moved out of the city or they started having kids and I felt in my career was stagnating.

So all these things happened at the same time and I just realized that nothing was going to change unless I changed. I wasn't going to meet new people or get better career opportunities or overcome my anxieties if I didn't do something drastic. And so I thought, what if I did live like someone else for just one year. What could I learn from that, what could I gain from that?

[0:03:47.5] PF: Did you have anything in particular that you hoped to get out of it or was it just like, let's see where this goes.

[0:03:54.1] JP: I think I was tired of being really terrified of public speaking and then also have this phobia talking to strangers and some social anxiety and I just wanted to see what would happen if – could I overcome this things by doing things like standup comedy or speaking in front of 900 people or talking to strangers on public transport.

I really didn't know if I could change or not. That was kind of why I wanted to do this mass experiment.

[0:04:21.3] PF: Well, and the thing about this experiment is you jumped in the deep end of the pool. It's not like you said hey, I'm going to go put my feet in the water and see how it feels. You just like, went all in because to go do – you did things that people who aren't introverts would be scared to do.

Like standup comedy, as you said, throw on a dinner party, doing a solo full on travel. What made you just do the go big or go home mentality on this?

[0:04:47.2] JP: Well, I figured if I was going to do it, I might as well commit to it and I wanted to be able to do these things and then come back to other introverts or other people like you said, other extroverts who might not want to do this things and report back like from the front lines.

What I learned, what happened, I didn't want this to be a boring year, I didn't want this to be an easy year. Like you said, I definitely did this really big scary things like you know, getting on a plane, not knowing where it was going to land and doing the standup comedy multiple times. Because I thought it would be useful for other people to learn about.

[0:05:22.8] PF: As you started, it was – there any one thing that you were most afraid of or were they all equally terrifying or –

[0:05:30.1] JP: Well, I made this list of like the things that I had been scared of and that I should do like talking to strangers, the comedy, going on friend dates and honestly, they were all terrifying because if they were easy, none of them would have been on the list. Whatever I was in the middle of doing was the scariest one for me.

Though I think that when I first tried to tackle my fear of public speaking in front of this massive audience that was being recorded, that was one of the hardest challenges because it was the first public speaking event that I'd done and I had to go make a speech therapist and it was this massive thing. I think that was the scariest one for me.

[0:06:05.8] PF: There's some statistic that says people are more afraid of death than they are of public speaking. To me, it was always kind of odd but I can see being afraid of public speaking but not more so than death but you know – for you to go ahead and do it and do it on such a grand scale. That's a huge accomplishment.

[0:06:29.4] JP: Thank you. It was definitely scary but I feel like I learned a lot. Especially that – I still have thought if I prepared enough and I met the speech therapist enough that all my anxiety would melt away and I'd be confident I could do it. What I've since realized is that I can have that anxiety and still succeed at it and then that confidence comes later after finishing it, which was a really great lesson to learn.

[0:06:53.4] PF: Then the standup comedy because that's like public speaking except you're really opening yourself up and comedy is such a subjective thing. Now, you're kind of being judged by — and

engaged by the amount of laughter that you can draw. What was it about standup comedy that made you want to go ahead and do that.

[0:07:16.0] JP: I just thought that if I was going to do this this year, if I was going to go hard or go home, standup comedy was my Everest and I think it's most people's Everest. It's very scary, you're on stage, you are like you said, inviting judgment, you have to make people laugh, you have to sort of interact with them. It felt like my whole year culminated in that.

I just think it was just total curiosity as well as wanting to overcome this fear because we do only live once, I kind of wanted to know what it was going to be like, what would happen and there was something really empowering about doing something that I never ever thought would be possible for me.

I never thought I'd be ever be able to do that and when I survived it, although sometimes I failed which is in the book, I failed pretty big a few times and then a few times I succeeded. I felt so amazing that you know, my self-definition had expanded. Because I had done this thing that I never thought I could do. But other people also think that they can't do and I found that really just kind of inspiring that we can change we can face these fears.

[0:08:20.7] PF: That, I think, is one of the things that's so endearing about this book is that you're so honest, it's not like I'm going to go do this and look, I killed it. You're very honest about how nervous you were a lot of the times when you goofed up. It's like we get to go every step of that journey with you. How did you do such a great job of documenting everything that was happening on your journey?

[0:08:43.7] JP: I just took lots of notes and I wanted to just be really honest about how I felt and how it was scary and things weren't easy. Yeah, I just wanted to be, I feel like a book like this, there's no value in it if you're not going to be honest, it's like I just wanted to be able to help other people like me.

[0:08:59.6] PF: I think that's what comes through is people – you read this book and you kind of get the idea like okay, I could try that, maybe not as big as she did but I can go try this one thing, you know? It really is like man, if she could do it, I could probably try this as well.

[0:09:17.2] JP: Exactly, yeah.

[0:09:18.9] PF: Now, did you have an overall plan going in like I'm going to do this first and then this, really planned out or was it like, here's this list of things and then I'll kind of willy-nilly choose what I'm going to do next.

[0:09:32.0] JP: I knew the first thing I wanted to do was try to talk to strangers. Because I live in London where that's really not a thing. I know in America, people are much chattier. But here, nobody talks to each other on public transport. People do not chat that much and because of that, I had this massive fear of doing it and so I thought, I'm going to tackle this first, you know, I got in touch with colleges, I interviewed them and they gave me such amazing device that I was finally able to face my fears even though that was also horribly embarrassing.

Along the way, it was on this first challenge of talking to strangers that I realized, I'm going to need professional help to do these things because I don't know what I'm doing and that's when I decided to enlist these, what I call, extrovert mentors. Professionals who will help me along the way and that's why I got the psychologist or had a stand up comedian help me and just various people in every challenge guide me.

[0:10:25.5] PF: And how did they respond when you went to them and said, "Hey this is what I am doing and I need help." How did you respond to you?

[0:10:34.3] JP: They were all really happy to help because everyone I contacted was an expert in this field. So the psychologist that I contacted, they studied people talking to strangers. They had research saying that it makes everyone happier when they talk to strangers including introverts and extroverts.

I talked to other psychologists who specializes in social anxiety. So they were like really ready to help me and coach me. The woman I contacted for my standup comedy chapter, she was really great. They were the experts, they knew what to do and they were all really helpful along the way.

[0:11:06.5] PF: That's super cool and I know that you learned so much about yourself from this. You learned about other people. What do you think was the biggest thing that you learned about yourself that you didn't expect to learn?

[0:11:18.2] JP: About myself? I think that I could do these things that I never thought was possible and I think what really helped achieve them was when – so when I talk about standup comedy, which was one of the hardest things I did, I took this intro course with other beginner comedians and because we were all doing this really scary daunting task we all had to bond because we are all terrified and we all encourage each other.

We workshop each other's work. We were so supportive and I found that I can do this terrifying thing because I all of a sudden have this social network who were all helping each other and I think that was really a valuable lesson to learn that we can do these scary things. But we usually do need other people to help us along the way and another thing I learned that I really loved this year is in the very beginning of the book I talk about how I am scared to approach strangers or even just like if you meet someone new and you are both chatting.

I am scared to be the first one to say, "Hey, we should grab coffee or we should hang out sometime." And I was discussing this with a psychologist, Nicholas Epley and I was saying, "Well I don't know if they want me to invite to do these things," and he said, "You know nobody waves but everybody waves back." We are all scared to make the first move but as soon as somebody does everybody responds.

You know when you smile at somebody they smile back. When you wave at somebody, they wave back but oftentimes we need to be the first one to make that move and so I carry that sort of thought with me throughout the year when I was scared of rejection that nobody waves but everybody waves back.

[0:12:47.3] PF: Your travel thing was interesting and let's do full disclosure, this is how I found out about your book and what you had done was through a cousin named Charles Nolton, who was our travel mentor.

[0:12:58.7] JP: Yes, Charles is good friends with my husband and he, as you know, he works for a travel company. He takes people all over the world on this big tours. He is super friendly and charming and

extroverted and outgoing and I was going to go travel alone and meet people on the road and I knew that Charles had to be my mentor. He is an expert in this.

[0:13:20.0] PF: He had you do something pretty big, I mean even I was like man, I don't know if I could have done that. I have done a lot travel but I don't know if I could have done that. Can you talk about what you did in terms of travel?

[0:13:31.2] JP: Well, I booked a flight using these company called surprise me where you don't know where you don't know where you're going to go. So they take care of your accommodation and your flight and they just say be at the airport at 6AM and they tell you what weather to pack for but when you arrive that's when you find out where you're going. So you could end up anywhere in Europe. I got to the airport, I unlocked the code and they told me I was going to Budapest, Hungary and I didn't know anybody there.

I don't speak the language, didn't have the currency and I texted Charles, "What am I going to do? How can I meet new people?" And he basically told me to just go out there and be outgoing and he said this thing called – he says, "Make your own weather," because Charles is this really lucky person and it never seems to rain on him and all of these good things happen to him when he travels because he is so positive and he always believes the best in people.

Whereas I am always negative or cynical or think the people are out to murder me. And he told me I need to change my perspective and just be more open and so I flew to Budapest and I was having dinner alone and there is a woman next to me having dinner alone and I figured we could just stare at our phones or we could have a conversation and have a connection in this foreign country and we did. We had a great dinner together.

[0:14:50.0] PF: Well that was amazing because you ended up turning it into this really rich experience.

[0:14:55.0] JP: Well I think that what's interesting about this book is that or this challenges is everybody reacts differently to every challenge. I love to ask the question of what will be the hardest thing for you. People are like, "Oh I don't mind public speaking or talking to strangers but I would never do improv."

Which I spent a month doing or I would never do comedy and yours is the solo travel, which is so fascinating.

[0:15:15.8] PF: Yeah because I have done a lot of travel but yeah, I am not doing it alone. So that was great. I think another thing about this books is you give people ideas like there is all these things, there is a menu of things that they could choose from like, "Man if I want to step outside of my comfort zone here is a great way to do it." And you've basically written a blue print for how to go about doing this.

[0:15:39.2] JP: Oh that is so nice to hear. Yeah, I wanted people to realize that they didn't have to be brave or they can become brave by doing one of these things. I am not a particularly brave person. I am shy, I am introverted but I have managed to do these things. So I have managed to do these things so if I can do them then I do think that other people definitely can at least choose one of these things to attend.

[0:16:00.6] PF: Well one thing is it seems to have changed your perception about the world and how safe it is. Because as you said and I laugh in the book when you said like, "Well I always think people are going to murder me." Because I have that same thing going on like, "That person is looking at me. I bet they have a knife in their pocket." But you know it does seem like throughout the book that perception changed, is that correct?

[0:16:23.3] JP: Yes. So I think that obviously I will always be very attuned to if I feel like I am in a dangerous situation. I am not going to talk to strangers in a dark alley at night or anything like that. At the same point, I always felt like say I am on the underground in London and everybody is really stony faced and nobody is talking and everybody seemed really hostile. I've now realized that is completely in my head. We're all in our own heads.

People are going through their own things, they are tired, they're listening to a podcast. They are doing whatever. It doesn't mean that they're hostile and if you start chatting with someone they usually smile back. They are friendly as soon as you break that ice and so throughout the entire year I just realized that people I met were so much kinder and more understanding and just nicer than I ever thought they could be.

And that was such a wonderful lesson about humanity to learn when I walk around thinking everybody is hostile and yeah, it's like somebody is out to murder me.

[0:17:18.2] PF: And as it came to an end, were you sad? Were you relieved? Were you exhausted? I mean how did you feel after 12 months of doing this?

[0:17:28.4] JP: I think I felt all of those things but you know I made some amazing friends, which was really great because the impetus of this is, a big one was that I wanted to make new friends and I didn't know if that was possible after the age of 30 like if you can make new connections, if people would be open to it and I met some amazing new people, which was really wonderful and they're still in my life and I was a little bit sad when things like my improv course ended.

I thought improve was going to be really cringy and awkward and I thought I was going to hate it and I was so shocked to realize that actually loved it and it was amazing and so creative and I met the coolest people there. So I was a little bit sad on those things ended but I feel excited to just sort of go around the world and know more about myself and know more about other people.

[0:18:15.8] PF: And are there anything that you are still doing like are you going to continue doing standup or you know are there any extensions, any left overs that you are going to keep going with?

[0:18:24.5] JP: I think that when we're in a situations like say we're in the airport and there's a really long line or delay, I would start talking to people around me because it just makes them more enjoyable to all be in that together or, you know, if I see someone they're reading a book that I like, I will talk to them. I think I am more open to that. I am a much, much less fear of talking to strangers. That's social anxiety aspect has really evaporated and yeah, I want to pursue taking more improv classes, that was really fun.

I don't know about the standup comedy. I have said yes to a few speaking engagements because I just want to — I guess before this I was limiting my own career. I was limiting who I could be by saying no to all these kinds of things like speaking engagements and now I am saying yes to them and it feels like my world is bigger now.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:19:14.9] PF: That was Jessica Pan talking to us about what she learned from her year of living as an extrovert. If you'd like to learn more about Jessica and her book, *Sorry I'm Late, I Didn't Want to Come: One Introvert's Year of Saying Yes*, please visit us at livehappynow.com and we'll tell you where you can learn more about Jessica, what she's doing now and where to buy her book.

We hope that you are already a subscriber to Live Happy Now but if you are not, you can find us on the Pandora Podcast Network, Spotify, SoundCloud, Stitcher and iTunes and on Google Play. Just look for us on your favorite platform, hit subscribe and then you will never miss an episode.

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, reminding you to make every day a happy one.

[END]