Outward And Upward

The author of the bestselling An Unquiet Mind—and internationally renowned authority on mood disorders—now gives us something wonderfully different: an exploration of exuberance and how it fuels our most important creative and scientific achievements.

John Muir’s lifelong passion to save America’s wild places, Wilson Bentley’s legendary obsession to record for posterity the beauty of individual snowflakes, the boundless scientific curiosity behind Watson and Crick’s discovery of DNA, sea lions that surf and porcupines that dance—Kay Redfield Jamison shows how these and many more examples both human and animal define the nature of exuberance, and how this exuberance relates to intellectual searching, risk-taking, creativity, and survival itself. She examines the hereditary predisposition to exuberance; the role of the brain chemical dopamine; the connection between positive moods and psychological resilience; and the differences between exuberance and mania. She delves into some of the phenomena of exuberance—the contagiousness of laughter, the giddiness of new love, the intoxicating effects of music and of religious ecstasy—while also addressing the dangerous desire to simulate exuberance by using drugs or alcohol. In a fascinating and intimate coda to the rest of the book, renowned scientists, writers, and politicians share their thoughts on the forms and role of exuberance in their own lives.

Original, inspiring, authoritative, Exuberance brims with the very energy and passion that it celebrates.
From the Hardcover edition.

Jamison writes near the opening of this work, "Exuberance is an abounding, ebullient, effervescent emotion. It is kinetic and unrestrained, joyful, irrepressible." She tells us Exuberance "lures us from common places and quieter moods." It "carries us to places we would not otherwise go".

Here she studies examples of Exuberance from a wide variety of areas of life. There are politicians like T.R. F.D.R. and Winston Churchill. There are scientists like James Watson and Richard Feynmann. She looks at legendary characters like 'Snowflake' Bentley whose enthusiasm and passion for a wonder of nature led him to become the world's great expert and student of it. Perhaps because she has written of Literary figures and creativity in another work she does not focus on Literary figures here. She does however repeatedly show us how 'exuberance' moves towards greater creativity and towards real expansion of self and world. Jamison is an excellent, and learned writer with an ability to study both the natural and human worlds and make them come alive for the reader. I learned a great deal from this work, and I believe all interested in human life and character have much to learn from it.

I have a certain reservation about the book which may say more about me than the book itself. Though the book is about 'Exuberance' and gives wonderful examples of how exuberance has moved others in life - the feeling in reading the work for me was not 'exuberance'. Some times one reads and one feels one is on a great adventure and opening up new worlds. Here I no doubt was learning new things, but I did not feel the great joy of exuberance. I did feel that when reading Jamison's most well known work her great memoir 'An Unquiet Mind'. But this is perhaps because that book treated a subject, 'Manic-Depression', which meant so much to me personally, and I felt was being illuminated in remarkably new and yet familiar way.

In any case this is a book which hopefully will inspire many to better feeling about themselves and their own personal adventures. While reading it I kept thinking of this verse from Emily Dickenson.

"Exulation is the going
Of an inland soul to sea
Past the houses, Past the headlands
Into Deep Eternity.

Bred as we among the mountains
Can the sailor understand
The Divine Intoxication
Of the First Leagues out from Land?"