

Finding Joy

Director's Statement

Billie Dean

If you've ever been anxious, had a bad hair day, fallen in love with a dog, or been too scared to follow your dreams or your heart, you'll journey right along with Joy Brown in my first feature film, *Finding Joy*. This is a film of our times, and reflects my personal feelings that we need good, uplifting, heart and soul films which present new vision and solutions.

The inspiration and drive behind *Finding Joy* was threefold. As a professional animal communicator I wanted to begin to express the truth about animal companions as I understand it. In *Finding Joy*, Raffi the dog is subtly suggested to have an angelic intelligence which helps people turn their lives around. His presence isn't always on screen - but he is the core of the movie and touches the lives of all the main characters. It's my hope that audiences come away from *Finding Joy* feeling good about themselves, and feeling good about their dogs.

I'm also deeply saddened by the number of innocent animals who are killed each year - just because they are homeless. I'd like to think I could change things by helping people become more aware of the gifts that animal companions truly are - regardless of the type of journey they take you on. Animals are souls who need to be treated with dignity and respect, and they are far, far more than the 'dumb pets' many like to think they are. At home I'm blessed with seven rescued dogs - all of whom have taught me many spiritual lessons - and all of whom make an appearance in the film.

Secondly, I'd read astounding figures of the number of people who were depressed and taking anti-depressants. Depression is at epidemic levels, but what we need today is the emotion of joy to enter the new age or new dimension. A state of joy is the key to "walking in beauty". So I called my film *Finding Joy* because that's what it's about - finding self-love and joy through the unconditional love of a dog. Self-love is the key to a healthy self-esteem, which is what our character Joy lacks by the bucket-load, because low self-esteem is another Western epidemic.

I wanted to make people laugh at themselves, through Joy, and give them a different perspective on their problems. So I made a film which is like a big cup of hot cocoa, with great music, some laughs, some tears and a story about a woman who's like you or someone you know. I wanted it to look naturally beautiful, and be inspirational and life affirming. I feel we've achieved that.

Finally, I was inspired by the very natural and warm-hearted storytelling that is so often found in English and Irish films. I love their lush landscapes, gentle humour, and realism. I wanted to capture that feeling on an Australian canvas. I cast the town and countryside of Braidwood in NSW, as a character who shapes the identities of the people who live there and the emotional intensity of the incidents which happen. This is life in a small, arty, Australian country town peopled by city folk making a go of their dreams. I could have shot this story in the centre of the city but backgrounds talk and Braidwood has a lot to say. I wanted to share that with my audience.

Music added to the heart of *Finding Joy* in post-production. We found almost all the music locally, unearthing huge talents in the process, and reflecting our love of traditional Irish, up-beat, soul-filled folk, and world music. With the soundtrack album we've been able to give more generous helpings of this music and compliment our vision for the film.

Finding Joy works on different levels - as a romantic romp, or as something more mystical. It's the first of the kind of films I like to make; visually beautiful, quite esoteric, and funny.

I hope you enjoy, *Finding Joy*.

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