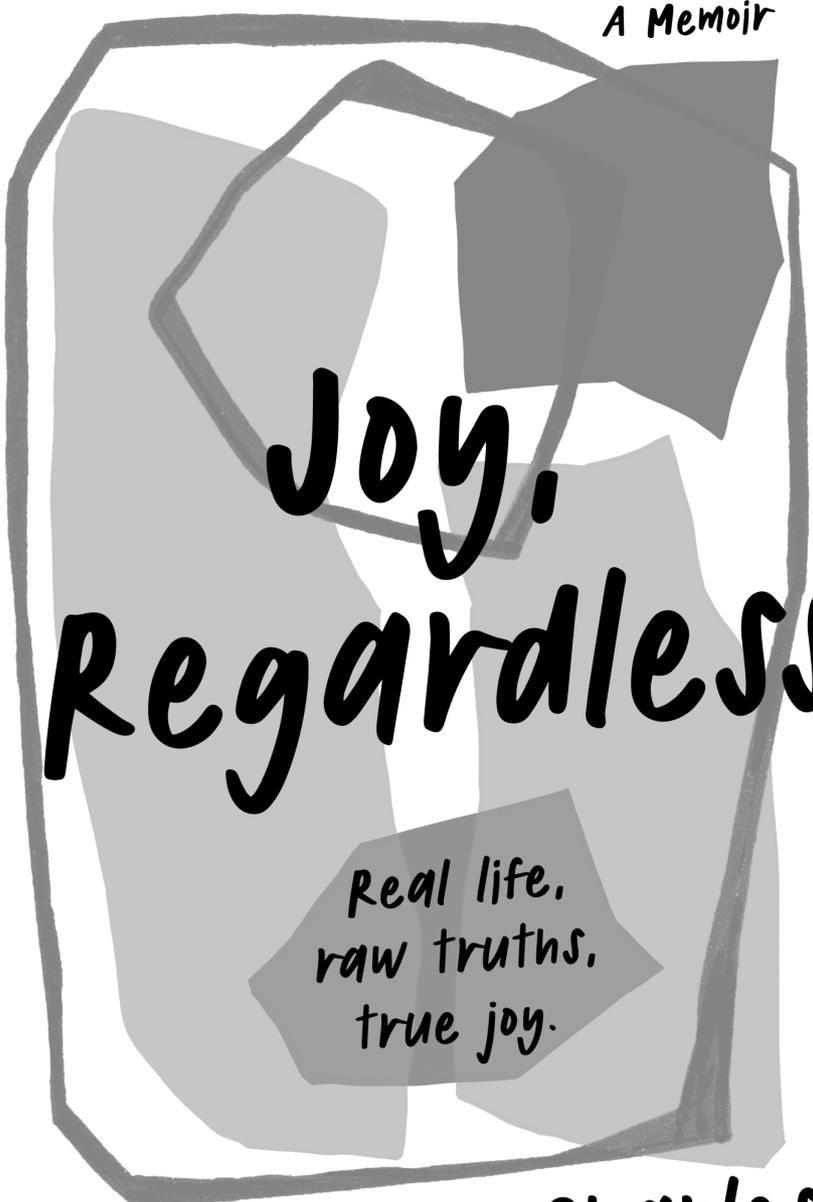


A Memoir



Joy,
Regardless

Real life,
raw truths,
true joy.

Lara Charles



Published by Lara Charles in collaboration with Dragonfly
Publishing, May 2025

© All rights reserved by Lara Charles, 2025.

This book is copyrighted. Apart from any fair dealing for private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission from the author. Additionally, no part of this book may be used or reproduced by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, without the written permission of the author except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Some names and narrative details have been changed to respect the privacy of those who may not have wished to be written about or want to remain anonymous.

Because of the dynamic nature of the Internet, any web addresses or links contained in this book may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid.

No AI Training: Without in any way limiting the author's and publisher's exclusive rights under copyright, any use of this publication to "train" generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to generate text (or artwork) is expressly prohibited. The author reserves all rights to license uses of this work for generative AI training and development of machine learning language models.

ISBN (sc): 978-1-7638143-1-8



A catalogue record for this
work is available from the
National Library of Australia

Cover design by: Christa Moffitt, Christabella Designs

Printed by: Pegasus Media & Logistics

FSC
Logo
Here?

For our children

‘What is the joy that even death cannot destroy and how do we discover it?’

- Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Meister Eckhart*

Introduction

This is the story of my life. Well, a chapter of my life, my thirties. They weren't dirty, like the expression says, but they were messy. They were beautiful.

Our home sat among the bushy hills of Wellington, New Zealand, in a part of the city where houses cling to the hillsides and every journey to the front door requires a trek along steep, winding paths. Along our zig-zagging walkway, tucked into the sloping garden, thrived a daphne shrub with its delicate pink and white flowers.

In the summer of 2009, a year before this story began, Wellington sweltered under an intense and rare heatwave. As an Australian, I was no stranger to droughts and blazing summers, but after marrying a Kiwi and relocating to Aotearoa New Zealand, I quickly adapted to the city's trademark chill and gusts.

During that particular summer, the norm shifted dramatically. Days stretched endlessly without a hint of rain, transforming the city's once-green lawns into tinder.

Each scorching day, I trudged past that blooming daphne shrub, mostly in a hurry, shoulders sagging, head bowed. I barely looked at it, lost in the burden of 'to-dos'. My husband and I were exhausted, juggling office work with late nights renovating our new home. Our days blurred, and our newly married life became a series of brief exchanges beside paint-splattered windows.

But I began to notice my plant was slowly withering, desperately needing water.

Yet, I never watered it. My mind convinced me that I was too busy with clients, too exhausted from chores, too overwhelmed to spare a moment. And so, the plant wilted, its leaves curling and its vibrant green transforming to dusty brown.

During one of his visits, my green-thumbed dad noticed the poor plant.

‘It’s looking pretty sad, mate,’ he said.

‘I know. It’s dead. I just didn’t have time to water it,’ I confessed, ashamed.

But Dad refused to give up on it. He pruned the shrub ruthlessly, reducing it to a mere stump protruding from the earth. He gave it water; he nourished the soil.

As seasons passed, life returned. The stump grew limbs, and those limbs sprouted shoots, bearing bright, young green leaves. The dwarfed stump blossomed into a proud shrub again. The clusters of flowers returned. Dad had saved it.

‘Dad, that plant you cut back for me ages ago, it flowered again!’ I exclaimed over Skype one morning, my voice brimming with excitement.

‘You see, mate, we needed to cut it right back so it can thrive,’ he replied.

The story of that plant is also the story of the voice of my soul – ignored, thirsty for expression, stripped bare, exposed, infused with love, and reborn with deeper roots and greater strength.



Part 1: Head

‘Is it possible for the mind to empty itself
totally of fear? Fear of any kind breeds
illusion...’

- Jiddu Krishnamurti, *The Book of Life*

Chapter 1

Wake Up

My husband, Phil, rolled his eyes whenever the word ‘lotus flower’ was spoken. He had wanted to go to the ‘normal’ pre-birth classes, but I insisted we go to a more holistic class that would teach us how to give birth naturally and joyfully. Who wouldn’t want to give birth calmly, even orgasmically?

My pen was poised, capturing every piece of information from our instructor; her untamed mane of curls, the earth-toned dress draped around her and the scent of incense that lingered in the air was surely a sign of someone who had birthed like this before. These sacred notes would become the basis for my ‘birth plan’, but I summed it up for my obstetrician in one line: I want to give birth naturally, and naturally only.

My gaze momentarily drifted from the instructor to her yard, which peeked behind her in an arched window. It was the kind of place where spinach grew wildly and barefoot children chased chickens, a refuge from the nine-to-five. My mind wandered to the alternative life I, too, might have led had I not failed my UN job interview. Instead of finding my calling in Nairobi, here I was, in New Zealand, learning the subtle art of cervix-opening. Who was I, really? An ambitious do-gooder marketer? A soon-to-be mother? Could I possibly be both? For years, I’d thrown myself into

non-profits, convinced that my purpose was intricately intertwined with my career. Yet, as my belly swelled with anticipation, I grappled with the notion that perhaps my purpose lay in the boundless love I already felt for my unborn child.

My focus returned to the room and the other couples sitting around us on purple cushions. Everyone looked like you'd expect them to look in a mindfulness-based birthing class. And while I tried my best to look the part, I knew we were the odd ones out – the straighty one-eighties. My life felt so far removed from what I imagined the lives of my fellow classmates to be; I was a marketer living in the burbs with my newly wedded husband in our newly purchased house. *I'd love to be a hippie*, my mind wandered again. I loved nature, travelling and music. I read spirituality books. But they were hobbies, not a way of life. I had deliberately chosen the well-trodden path of approved societal expectations – school, university, career, marriage and now a baby. Check, check, check, check, check. I felt bound to doing things the 'right' way. That's why my pen was poised. That's why I was the annoying one asking all the questions. I now wanted to birth 'right'. The other women didn't seem to carry this same doubt, at least not on the surface. They absorbed the instructor's words with quiet confidence, nodding softly, as if they had always known their bodies were made for this. Their ease felt like a kind of freedom my body and mind had yet to experience. Yes, freedom, that was what I yearned for most.

'Just like a flower bud opens when it's ready, so will your cervix. Your body is designed to give birth naturally. Trust in its wisdom. Visualise your cervix opening,' the

About the Author

Lara Charles is an Australian writer who explores life's deeper threads through her thought-provoking work, published in respected publications both nationally and internationally. She is the creator of the [Deeper Threads](#) Substack newsletter and a teacher on the global cancer platform [Thrivers Ark](#). *Joy, Regardless* is her debut memoir. Discover more at laracharles.com.



Photo by Michelle Jacobson Photography

Resources and Deeper Conversations

Lara takes a deep dive into the key themes of this book through her Substack newsletter, *Deeper Threads*. If you want to go deeper, have questions to ask, are looking for more resources, want engaging conversations with inspiring minds, or are keen to join a global community of curious souls, Lara would love to connect with you.

Scan the QR code or sign up for *Deeper Threads* here: <https://laracharles.substack.com/>

