

# **Alyssa Milano: Sorry Not Sorry**

## **Ep: 110 – Dr. Janice Johnson Dias**

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[00:00:00] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:00:00] Hi, I'm Alyssa Milano and this is sorry, not sorry.

[00:00:34] I am so excited for this week's episode, raising girls in a way that empowers them, changes the world. And it's one of the most important things we can do as parents this week. I am joined by Dr. Janice Johnson Dias author of the new book parent. Like it matters how to raise joyful change-making girls.

[00:01:01] [00:01:00] **Selected Clips:** [00:01:01] Parents and caregivers and educators can see that she's not some miracle. My friends were not bad parents. They were just doing what most parents do, which is cautioning their daughters much more than they cautioned their sons. Why is it that raising our children is associated with so much anguish and so much confusion. Why is it that we are at sixes and sevens about the one thing human beings have been doing successfully for millennia to raise a happy, healthy and hopeful child. It takes a family. It takes teachers. It takes clergy, it takes business people. It takes community leaders. It takes those who protect our health and safety. It takes all of us.

[00:02:00] [00:02:00] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:02:00] Hi, I'm Dr. Janice Johnson Dias . And I strongly believe that if you want to change the world, you have to cultivate joy in yourself and parent like it matters. Sorry, Not sorry.

[00:02:13] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:02:13] Janice I am so excited to have you here, and I want to dive into the book, but first I'd love for my listeners to just get a sense of who you are. So can you tell us a little bit about your background and your work as a sociologist, as a professor?

[00:02:29] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:02:29] So, so I am a kid from Jamaica. I was born in St. Ann's bay, Jamaica, and I grew up in a small town of 400 and some odd people called retreat St. Mary. And I lived there mostly with my grandmother and my cousins, because my mother was a nanny of sorts in Canada. And I did not know my dad and I came to the United States to Boston in 1984. And since then I went to [00:03:00] college at Brandeis. I was a high school teacher for a couple of years, and then I went to temple.

[00:03:05] Got my master's. Left went across the country to help mothers and institutions, mothers who were facing substance abuse issues and also had children and trying to negotiate that space. I would go back to college and get a PhD in sociology and then have my own child 11 days before I became a doctor.

[00:03:24] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:03:24] Oh, that's so amazing.

[00:03:26] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:03:26] And then I did my post-doc work on public policy in Michigan. And since 2007, I've been a college professor at the city university of New York, John Jay college of criminal justice. And in 2010, after doing a lot of community work across the country, I formed my own organization called the grassroots community foundation.

[00:03:47] And that has been. Life-changing so it took everything that I done and everywhere that I've lived with my grandmother, my mother, my brothers, things that I studied and brought them all in one [00:04:00] place. And we have this bold mission, which is to create a world where all girls grow up to be healthy women. So now today I trained women and girls and institutions, how we can become better at public health and how we can make social justice, our norm in our lives.

[00:04:18] So that's really, what's led me to this place.

[00:04:21] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:04:21] It's amazing. What was it that sparked you to write this book? I mean, you identify it as your life's work.

[00:04:28] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:04:28] It's my daughter, of course. Isn't it always our kids.

[00:04:32] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:04:32] Oh, it's our kids.

[00:04:33] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:04:33] So I never wanted to write a book, even though I've written a dissertation, some 300 pages.

[00:04:38] I just never thought I'd write a book. And my daughter, her name is Marley Dias. She's the founder of the 1000 black girl books campaign. So she founded a campaign where she wanted to collect 1000 books where black girls were the main characters you founded the thousand black girl books campaign.

[00:04:55] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:04:55] Tell us why you started that.

[00:04:57] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:04:57] So I originally really started it because I [00:05:00] really love to read and I always wanted to see myself reflected and my parents did a great job. You know, it's making sure that the little black girls and little brown girls are able to be in my library. When I went to school, I only read about white boys and their dogs.

[00:05:12] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:05:12] Wait, that's your daughter.

[00:05:13] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:05:13] That's my daughter.

[00:05:15] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:05:15] Oh my gosh. I am such a huge fan of your daughters. She does incredible work.

[00:05:20] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:05:20] That's my daughter.

[00:05:22] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:05:22] That is so, so wild because I once pitched a reality show on youth activists. And I actually included your daughter in the pitch. As an example of people, we should be highlighting.

[00:05:33] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:05:33] Well, she is the reason, right? So she is this fierce advocate for social justice because she's grown up in this house and been a part of this organization. And as she's gone out there in the world, she's had a lot of opportunity to engage with caregivers and they often come up to her and talk to her about how special she is.

[00:05:54] And. I think they mean well, but that idea that she [00:06:00] special suggested to her, that people kept seeing her as exceptional and different and not understood. Like she was a part of a cadre of girls that have been a part of grassroots for so long. And that this thing that she is, is a part of having been raised that way.

[00:06:15] So she would say to me and caregivers would come up to me. How can I get a daughter like Marley? And it would just be like really out having your child eat broccoli and go to sleep because I too rejected this idea. It's not that I don't think my baby is special. I think she is wonderful and unique, but I wanted it.

[00:06:35] To emphasize to caregivers that she is this way because of the framework of her life and the way in which she's raised and what she's been trained. So Marley over time, really adores caregivers talking to her, but she really felt like they needed to understand. And so she gathered a posse of people along with others who had been saying it for years.

[00:06:59] I need to [00:07:00] create a book and I need to put into it. Stuff I do with her as my daughter, but stuff I do with all the girls that I've worked with a part of grassroots and the caregivers over the years, plus all the sociology stuff in one place that if people had essentially a toolkit, then they could better understand that Marley is special.

[00:07:18] But then these things that we have been doing with her is something that they too could do with themselves and their children. And so it's that product. And she would say that she's encouraged me. Not bullied me, but she has strongly encouraged me to put the set of actions into one place and thus the book.

[00:07:38] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:07:38] And why is it so important to focus this work specifically on daughters?

[00:07:44] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:07:44] I think a lot of reasons one is women and girls in general, across the entire globe are often cast as second class citizens, no matter where. You can go to the farthest corner of the globe to [00:08:00] developed societies always second place.

[00:08:04] And then when you complicate it with any intersections, race, gender, Other sexualities ability, we get further and further down. And there is an absence of a global investment in girls yet across the globe. We know that 90% of every dollar, every girl grows up to be a woman earns. She will use it to better her family and her community.

[00:08:33] Despite the low investment. Girls come back to say, even if I'm not a mom, if I'm an auntie, if I'm a teacher, if I'm a caregiver, we carry the care of the entire globe. And yet we don't have a global investment in them. So my work, my life's charge is precisely that, which is to say, look good people. I really understand. [00:09:00] I understand that you think

that the other sex or the other gender is really the priority, but if you really want the best bang for your buck, if you want a global, healthy community, if you want people to not be so hostile and violent, You need to start by investing in girls because we are the linchpins for change and harmony

[00:09:26] **Selected Clips:** [00:09:26] one study that was really fascinating was about 10 years ago, it was called the multi-institutional study of leadership. And that study was designed to figure out how best to develop the leadership capacity of college students. And it went out to thousands of students across the country asking them how often do you do different leadership skills? Like collaborate. Communicate through conflict, et cetera. And I remember getting the reports back and I was intrigued to see that the women said that they were participating in these literate leadership [00:10:00] skills and activities at much higher rate than the male students.

[00:10:05] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:10:05] What you're saying is making my heart so happy. Not only just the recognition of this, but also what's going on in our country. We're fighting to get girls put into our constitution. Women are not protected under the United States constitution. And it surprises everyone because everyone thinks the 14th amendment covers women, which it does, but that's because we've manipulated that the 19th amendment.

[00:10:30] The right to vote is our only guarantee in the constitution. And to me, what that sends out is just a signal of. Less than on top of the fact that we're already discriminated against for being women or treated differently, or as second class citizens, I took a feminism class not too long ago in the quarantine first happened.

[00:10:54] And it was amazing to me to learn in such a small, [00:11:00] compact time frame of all of the injustices and all of the hurt that women have gone through throughout the world. And you're right. As soon as you add any of the intersectionalities too. That then it's made even harder, but also just to learn that like history books, we didn't start talking about feminism until the sixties.

[00:11:22] So what does that mean for sexual assault? What does it mean for violence against women? If we were always treated as a property and didn't have our own inalienable, right?

[00:11:34] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:11:34] One of the facts that keeps eluding people is every life on this planet, human life. Exists because of a girl. I think sometimes it just like miss people, even one of the work that we do with the foundation is this work around periods and end in period poverty.

[00:11:52] The idea that we have this thing that we treat as gross and we don't provide supplies for. And I was like, [00:12:00] without a period, there is no human life, just no human life. And so the idea that girls and women are ancillary and optional, It's to me just so preposterous. And so the book, like everything else is a charge to all of us to invest.

[00:12:19] Re-invest commit to the investment of women and girls, and start in that process very early and making sure that we're consistent with it across the life course of a girl. But this book is the first of the step that says much like a garden is that you need to have good

soil. That's a home and you need to be able to nurture it, such that a girl can grow up strong, confident, and connected that she doesn't see herself as singularly exceptional in a way, but rather herself is connected.

[00:12:54] To other members and it's in that experience to, she can grow up being committed to justice in the [00:13:00] world. Cause she sees herself in the world, but also being joyful rather than laden so much of social activism is like, oh my God, I'm so tired. Oh my God, I'm so sad.

[00:13:09] And it is so important to find our joy in this work.

[00:13:14] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:13:14] You mentioned period of poverty before. And I do want to just mention to the listeners that New Zealand right now has passed a law to hand out period products in all schools to try to end an eradicate period, poverty. If New Zealand and Scotland is doing it. So all of these other nation states can do it. And in the United States, we know that girls will miss one month. Out of their school year because they don't have access to these resources. Forget about the stigma and the embarrassment. It's really unbelievable.

[00:13:46] You mentioned joy and you say something right off the bat in your introduction. It resonated, it warmed my heart. It put a little fire in my belly. You wrote as parents or caregivers or first task is to lay down the burdens of [00:14:00] our past to make space for joy in raising our girls,

[00:14:04] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:14:04] joy matters. It matters in ways that people don't think about.

[00:14:08] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:14:08] I also took it to mean as we are coming to this next phase of our lives, what do we have to heal within ourselves to find joy in this moment? After I had Milo my first, I had really bad postpartum anxiety, really bad. And I think that a lot of it was about generational issues that I had not dealt with. Not only with my own mother, but like with my grandmothers who I'm lucky enough to have a grandmother who's still alive, but to really kind of dive into what would cause me heartache and how I could heal that in order to find joy and parenting, it took me a while to figure out,.

[00:14:55] But let's talk a little bit about why that's so important because anyone with the brain [00:15:00] capacity, they can know what we are supposed to do. We can read a million books about what we are supposed to do in order to raise a functional human being.

[00:15:09] But in practice and in theory, those are two totally different things.

[00:15:14] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:15:14] They are totally different. And actually right at the beginning of the book, I make this distinction between happiness and joy, which is really critical to me. So I really think about a lot of people are really interested in being happy right? And in the book and in my life, I talk about happiness as being temporary, almost performative, right? People say, well, how are you doing today? Oh, girl, I'm happy.

[00:15:38] **Selected Clips:** [00:15:38] I'm an economics teacher and economics as a discipline has tried to weigh in on the happiness debate. How many surveys have you seen lately of

the happiest people from the happiest places they are everywhere yet? Any student in the first week of class will find out that economics. [00:16:00] Studies how we have unlimited desires for things and how we're in competition with the limited resources of our planet. So how can we have unlimited desires for things and still be bored at the same time?

[00:16:18] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:16:18] That happiness is not a state of internal peace.

[00:16:22] That joy is a state of internal peace and optimism, and that if we are in charge of the life of young people, we need to find that peacefulness in ourselves. So I write about coming to terms with our ACEs, which is our adverse childhood experiences as the core work of parenting. Even if you're doing it right now, you're already a parent.

[00:16:46] And somehow you're engaging with the book. A part of it is much of the work is parenting yourself and attending to yourself. So for those of us, who've had bad childhoods like mine, right. [00:17:00] Or even worse. It is about going back to the past and extracting. The good, that was in that hard moment. And that extraction, that excavation is what you bring forward and you leave those things that are not useful, where they are. Back there. And so it is in doing that, that we begin to cultivate a space for joy to happen. But if you are not engaged in the process of working with yourself, trying to understand and know yourself, and what you knew is you project and say, I'm doing this for my kids. I just have to take this job. I have to do this thing.

[00:17:40] I have to stay up late. I have to do this. I can't attend to me because I have to attend to the kid. So the children. Become the external way of dealing with things rather than dealing with yourself. So in the book I give a series of exercises and I ask people to go and take their ACEs. So they have an accounting of the adverse childhood [00:18:00] experiences that they've had.

[00:18:01] So they know that one it's not in my head. It's not in my head, this was developed by scientists and then I can start to begin the work and the process of cultivating my own space for me to be joyful. And it is in model. Enjoy not saying and tell him, Hey, you'll be happy. It's in modeling joy and being connected that we also are able to be better caregivers and parents to our children.

[00:18:27] It isn't the talent. It's the delay.

[00:18:30] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:18:30] I love it so much. You also mentioned like it matters. What does that mean?

[00:18:35] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:18:35] Couple of things. We're in this horrific historical moment, post traumatic moment in so many ways. For those of us who have been around these past four years, and we have to deal with polarizing society, a society that is deeply sexist, homophobic, classist in every way, and we want change to happen.

[00:18:57] We want the next generation [00:19:00] to not have to deal with this. And I argue that our locus of control to make that possible begins in our homes, what we do in our homes, the messages, the ideologies that we are teaching our children, those leaders or non

leaders that are marshaling against. Hope who are leading insurrections, who are violently killing members of our community.

[00:19:27] They were children. And they learned these ideas very early. We know moral development starts as early as five watching people and the way people treat people. And so for us who are on the other side, who want children who value human life care for others, right? Interested in forms of justice, then what matters most is that we start showing them in small, important ways, how that matters, why that matters.

[00:20:00] [00:20:00] So it can be a part of who they are. Not some class they have to take, not some. Experienced, they have to go through, we want it to be in the very fabric of who they are. And so we need to parent, like it matters because it does, if we want to have a safe and just world going forward.

[00:20:18] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:20:18] It's interesting. All of the books like you get pregnant and it seems like there are a million different books about your pregnancy and how big the baby is. And it's a great, now it's up to... and it conditions you to believe that labor is like the end goal. Okay. Once I get there, I'm good to go. And then. You realize after labor, that was like the end of that. Wasn't the beginning of something. Like now the work begins. What I tell people is that for me, at least you get out of parenting what you put into it.

[00:20:57] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:20:57] That is a critical part [00:21:00] of what I believe. I think that you get out of parenting, not only what you put in, but the context that you create. Parenting when you have a baby in your belly, you're like, it's me and this baby. And in many respects by the ninth month, even though people don't tell you, it's 10, you're ready for this child to leave you once the child leaves you that's the work, right?

[00:21:21] Because now it's no longer one. It's more than one. You begin to immediately not have control when that was in your belly, you had so much control.

[00:21:32] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:21:32] So safe. That baby was the safest. It will ever be an entire life when it was in my belly.

[00:21:38] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:21:38] And so much of the way we think about parent is as a singular experience of you.

[00:21:45] And I argue that's just not it. That as soon as that baby's out, the whole world is influenced in your baby.

[00:21:53] **Selected Clips:** [00:21:53] Was that an, a thing that your parents said or did during your childhood [00:22:00] that you wish they hadn't, was there anything that hurt you that left a scar? You can still feel it. Bye you've come to forgive your parents for those moments of weakness, because you know, they love you and did their best. Or perhaps you're not sure about their love for you and you have to live with that. Uncertainty. Every child is at risk of suffering in this world full of imperfect adults and childhood scars cut deep.

[00:22:41] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:22:41] So the question is, what are you going to do? What world are you going to create? Sometimes you've used to ask me, like, why do you do all of this stuff?

[00:22:49] And I said, you know, I really love my child. And I know other people's children could mess up my child. So I have to really invest in other people's children. Oh, man, I have to invest in their parents [00:23:00] because I'm really, I want my child to be safe. I want my child to feel loved. I want her to have friends and family that nurture her.

[00:23:08] So instantly you get out of parenting what you put in and the context and the environment that you're creating. So everyone wants their child to be happy, safe, and loved. But if we do that, we're going to have to parent, like it matters because we're going to have to build communities of people. Who else is to be loving and kind and wonderful.

[00:23:28] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:23:28] So this might be a really silly question, but I'm going to ask it anyway. So do you think that there are things parents should always be doing and things that they shouldn't be doing that might not be obvious on first glance?

[00:23:41] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:23:41] Oh yeah, definitely. I think one of the things that parents should always be doing is always from the millisecond that they have found out that they have a child, is that they have to start asking themselves, how am I, am I good?

[00:23:57] Do I feel good about who I am? [00:24:00] I just think every caregiver needs to ask and begin with a question about who they are. I think too often, every book that I got was like about the kid, the questions are always like, is the kid good? Is the fetus growing? Is the fetus breathing. And none of those questions are about you.

[00:24:20] How are you doing, how are you doing the entire road? And I think a lot of parents don't think about how they're doing, and then they look up for some it's like when they have the empty-nester for some it's when the children is right about 10 and they're going, went out more and you had no sense of even who you are, because you have just not been in a relationship with yourself.

[00:24:43] And that I think is. Service to children because children run, replicate that process. Children always learn more about from what we do than what we say. People just think that if we say things to children, something will stick. No, it's how you're [00:25:00] living. That leaves the marks of what they should be doing.

[00:25:04] So I think all caregivers need to really commit to self-development as they parent when they're parenting the entire process. And I think all caregivers need to give up notions of perfectionism. Anything to think that you can guarantee the outcome of your child. Give it up, don't even do it. Don't do it to yourself.

[00:25:21] It's just a bad place to be. If I do this, my child's going to turn out. Right.

[00:25:25] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:25:25] It's hard. It's especially hard for women who are very type a personality. Like I've had control of everything pretty much in my life, except maybe



my child, because I was a child actor obviously, and didn't have much control there, but I made it my business to have control because I didn't have control as a child.

[00:25:44] So. What an awakening after you have a child and you realize you have control over, none of it, people would ask me all the time, would you let your kid be an actor? And before I had kids, I was like, no, there is no. Way, are you kidding me? And then after [00:26:00] I had them, I sort of realized they come out pretty much who they are and yes, we can nurture, but if they have this natural inclination of showmanship, Because not every child has that. I have one that has it. I have one that doesn't have one kid that'll perform in front of 200 people, not blink twice. And one that'll hide behind my legs. So, you know, to be able to nurture who they innately are, I think is also part of it. Not trying to wrap their success into what you see as successful.

[00:26:32] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:26:32] So I write in the book that you need to raise the child. You have not the child you wish you had, because first of all, the first thing is that why we should instantly know is that your child is not just a product of you. They have other people who went into their car. Yeah. I would just pause it. Just be like, oh, I, it wasn't his me who did this.

[00:27:00] [00:27:00] **Selected Clips:** [00:27:00] Let's talk numbers really quick to the number of people it took to exchange their genetic loading and love resulting in yours truly. 1985, the year I was born six, the number of years that they endured before ending a toxic marriage. One, the number of people who finally asked what was going on at home 11, how old I was when I moved from one parent to another three, the amount of teachers who rallied around me in court, as I entered foster care.

[00:27:52] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:27:52] There's a whole other person that contributed. And then there is the new social space and the parent did [00:28:00] space and the child comes with their own genius. So it's like be involved with the child. You actually have not the aspirational child. And so caregivers give that up. I think that most of us would be in a better place really quickly.

[00:28:16] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:28:16] It's such a great point. So, what are some of the preconceived notions parents might have about who a girl should be and what impacts do those preconceptions have on the girls we raise?

[00:28:28] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:28:28] One preconception is that people think that they understand what a girl is. That a girl is a particular way, even in this moment where we see the continuum of girls.

[00:28:40] Caregivers lean into gender schema is really seriously. And particularly arcane and old school, gender schema is like, wear a dress, love this color, do this thing. And even if she's not on this kind of hyper feminized version, then it is well, she's a super athlete. So that's why she doesn't [00:29:00] wear the dress.

[00:29:00] And that's why she doesn't do that. Right. We constrain the humanity of girls by suggesting that either be this way or that way. Right. We allow boys our whole full range of humanity, like he's creative or he's athletic, or he is a combination. Boys get to be full human

beings. They get to be angry and . But girls are dichotomized into these two categories almost all the time.

[00:29:29] And this becomes the way in which we get to de-humanize girls and girls respond by either being super human. I can do everything. I'm going to be high-performing all the time. They already have low expectations of me. So I'm just going to opt out and it is in fostering girls, humanity, the range of themselves, again, to this idea of the girl you actually have versus the girl you want to have.

[00:29:52] Right. Seen on TV is that people need to look at girls as humans and treat them accordingly by allowing their fullest self, to [00:30:00] always be present.

[00:30:01] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:30:01] And to encourage their own joy.

[00:30:03] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:30:03] Their own joy on their terms.

[00:30:06] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:30:06] So what are some of the traits parents should be modeling for their daughters and what. Do they look like in the real world?

[00:30:12] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:30:12] So I think that people who in mostly traditional family have some mom and some dad, I think it is really essential that girls see gender roles being disrupted, especially since the dominant messages outside of their homes are going to be that there are people who mother, and then there are people who father.

[00:30:31] And then we have some land of misfit toys where some mother's father and some fathers, mother girls need to see the adults in their lives. Being human and taken on multiple ways of being. They also need to hear stories very often of their caregivers, successes, and failures too often caregivers present to their children models of I've got it all the way together all the time.

[00:30:57] And often children do not hear [00:31:00] stories of caregivers, failings, grand failings. Especially as kids and their recovery. So children think they're ahistorical. They grew up with these adult people. They see them as adults and they too do not see adults as having come all the way to the place they currently are.

[00:31:17] And caregivers really need to invite kids in, by having conversations with them, listening to them, sharing themselves with their children. I remember very early on, our daughter would be like, well, I didn't know that about you. I didn't know that about you. And you quickly begin to discover that your children only know you in the person who puts them to bed, who provides for them this way.

[00:31:39] And then they don't have any sense of the fact that if they step misstep, that you had many missteps that you recovered from. Those of us who are of a certain age, we should just be lucky to be alive, like, right, right. All of the things that I do...

[00:31:54] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:31:54] we didn't even have seat belts. We're lucky we made it.

[00:31:59] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:31:59] And [00:32:00] our children do not have that kind of frame of reference.

[00:32:03] So our children need to see differences in gender roles. They need to see us as humans so that they can understand. And be in relationship with their own humanity.

[00:32:13] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:32:13] There's something in the book that you write about joyful parenting that really stuck with me. You said to reach this joy, we must have a sense of gratefulness respect for human rights and a desire to engage in actions that can bring about social change.

[00:32:29] This seems like your idea of joy is intimately connected to community and the world at large, which I love so much instead of focusing inward. And it seems like your vision of parenting also carries this idea with it. Can you just talk a little bit about why that is.

[00:32:49] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:32:49] Yeah. So there are several reasons I think to me, joy comes about when we're engaged in a process of doing acting and a process of [00:33:00] really being invested in making, in trying to make the world good.

[00:33:05] Is that the very act of doing something to increase the. Health and wellbeing of others is a process that really feeds us. So you get more from given then you realize, like you think, oh, I've donated this coat. I gave that person that coat, but you actually now get to think better of yourself. And that is a kind of gratitude that you now get to have for yourself having engaged in something that on the face of it only seems like it's outside of you.

[00:33:43] **Selected Clips:** [00:33:43] Giving recurred in my life, not only with friends who really did give and became lifelong friends, but I was on scholarship. And so I found myself at these donor dinners and I didn't understand it. There were all these older people, they didn't know me at all. And we were sit there and say, thank you for my scholarship. [00:34:00] Someone may have done that in here. But what astounded me was their joy. They seem to derive a personal joy out of giving to me.

[00:34:13] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:34:13] For me much of what I think about with the world. And I think about this for myself is like, why do I feel so peaceful? And I think it is because every day I am doing this. Something that is not narcissistic, right? That is not just simply self care and self centering is that I am trying to find ways every day to connect with others, such that we can have a greater. Sense of community, of wellness, of relationship so that when something goes awry, I essentially have a whole safety net, emotionally and physical fulfillment have really been connecting.

[00:34:58] Joy [00:35:00] comes from this sense of, I am not alone. My child is not alone. My family is not alone. It is almost like building an inheritance. Right. In many respects because we're not all going to be here forever, but what is that legacy? The legacy are the people that we have touched the lives that we have been a part of the connectedness is the thing.

[00:35:24] And so it feels in many respects. A real pushback to the kind of dominant American ideology of individualness. And that's why I feel like so many people feel so deeply saddened because they feel so isolated and individualize. And what I'm encouraging people to do is to move out of that, to be connected with others and find that that connection can really feed them.

[00:35:51] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:35:51] What you're saying is such music to my ears. I remember maybe a year and a half ago, I found a new therapist who had said to [00:36:00] me, you know, like, what do you do for self care? I remember thinking like, first of all, I don't even know what to make of that question. But second of all, like I looked into my, I said, you mean, where do I find my fulfillment?

[00:36:12] Like my joy. And he was like, no, like, how do you take care of yourself? And I went back to you mean, where do I find my fulfillment and my joy? Because to me that is my self-care. My self-care is fighting for people and fighting for injustices and amplifying voices like yours. That's my self care. That's my soul care.

[00:36:34] But for some reason, and it's gotta be just through all of these tips are billion dollar businesses.

[00:36:42] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:36:42] Yes.

[00:36:43] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:36:43] Right? So people have made very long careers out of, you know, telling people how they should live or how they should find their joy. And we've gotten so disconnected from communities and from each other.

[00:36:57] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:36:57] That's the thing, it's the disconnect. So I [00:37:00] like a massage. I like to have my nails done. I particularly like to have my lashes done. It's been self care to me though.

[00:37:06] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:37:06] That's like maintenance right?

[00:37:08] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:37:08] And those things make me very temporarily happy and I enjoyed them and I have no issues with those things. I think we miss often in that is that those are routinized activities that enhances all levels of whatever vanity we have and they're not necessary.

[00:37:28] Joy and fulfillment are about that. What are the necessary things? The necessary thing is that I don't feel isolated. My children don't feel isolated that I am in coalition with people trying to do things that enhance how I feel about myself, how they feel about themselves and how we function, that's something else.

[00:37:50] And I think that much of the mega- messages about parenting or about the society says, well, you know, keep it in your [00:38:00] house. Right. Like people don't need to know your business. So a lot of it is isolationists and disconnected kind of work. And I just think that harms our children and it really harms our society.

[00:38:12] Instead, we can say no, clearly they're things that are private in nature, but connection. We've got to always be trying to push ourselves to be in connected, to caring, to knowing, to feeling one in coordination with others. Cause then we can understand when they hurt and we can celebrate when they win.

[00:38:34] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:38:34] How do we do that in this disconnected world, even without COVID where it feels like technology has replaced to many families a way of connection?

[00:38:48] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:38:48] I actually think there's some interesting community stuff that's happening. Some of it distorted, but still really this pod life that people seem to be living, I think has a lot of promise, [00:39:00] not in the ways of being exclusionary, but people really saw with COVID that they really needed to come together, smaller communities in a way. Now it is privileged and a whole host of challenges surround pod life. But it gives us example of like, when we get through this, people will look like I couldn't have gotten through this alone. I'm fairly optimistic in general, but I'm actually quite optimistic about the strategic learnings of COVID because COVID has introduced in our vocabulary, the term public health, which is actually really at the heart of connection.

[00:39:41] **Selected Clips:** [00:39:41] Stay home, engage in social distancing, protect yourselves, protect our system. And let's get through this strongly as a country. The call to stay away from each other grows more urgent by the day. And as a new normal descends, it can feel so solitary. And yet we're all alone [00:40:00] together. People are sharing the same moment in time. That's to make sure you're staying far enough apart. Right? Exactly. Any way they can. So when you can get together with your neighbors, it makes us

[00:40:14] good. As you realize the value community. Community is being redefined by the day.

[00:40:23] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:40:23] I think it's one of the many reasons why we're struggling right now, because it is antithetical to all things American that you're saying my house is connected to somebody else's house. I don't really want my health to be connected to other people's health. And it's like, no, because guess what? We are all actually connected.

[00:40:41] So public health gives us connections and it gives us social justice. It says that you cannot simply operate. By yourself. And so the people who keep pushing back on public health practices are the people who are illiquid at this moment to be in connection. And so those are the people [00:41:00] who we really have to start doing some work on, but we again can not do it.

[00:41:04] If we've decided that they're useless and need to be thrown away, we have to try to figure out a way in order to get them to value community. And I think the way we do that is actually through parenting. Because again, Any person who has given birth or is in charge of young people all want the same thing.

[00:41:24] I want my kids to be happy. I want my kids to be safe and those caregivers I've not yet seen the docs. They don't see it connected. So schools, I think are just a really great place as the intersection of government and community where we can do some real work. If we want to have a promise. Of a future that is about connection.

[00:41:46] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:41:46] You're so amazing. So much of this work that we do as parents, obviously a super important, but I wonder if there's similar work that older siblings, or maybe especially brothers [00:42:00] named Milo should be doing as part of a family.

[00:42:03] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:42:03] Yes. So that's, what's so great. So each chapter has a set of assignments, some for individuals, some for family, some for extended family and community.

[00:42:12] I think though the book is called parent like it matters it's for anybody who has a young girl in their lives. That includes brothers. So I only have brothers, I have three older brothers and I wish, you know, if I would go back, I was like, y'all need to read this. Is that brothers. Have this amazing role of what feels like the voice of truth.

[00:42:35] So parents by the time a child is five or so, they're skeptical of whether or not their parents are just saying nice things to them because it's true. Or because they're their parents, but your siblings voice feels like that's the actual truth. You're simply tells you that you actually look good. That feels like the truth.

[00:42:51] Your mom told you the same thing. Your dad told you the same thing and just like, oh my God. But conversely, if your sibling says you [00:43:00] don't look good, You are not smart. Then it also feels like the same voice of validation and that voice grows more and more because when your children in a household, you feel like you're both being governed by these old people.

[00:43:14] No matter how young the parent is, the parent is always cast as the old person and they don't really understand, but this person understands. And so siblings, I think really have to be a part of the caregiver and circle that really helps us protect and love and nurture and engender confidence in girls and have that sibling could be a boy, but the sibling could also be a girl, is that everyone has a role. If we want to raise young girls to be confident, we have to get all hands on deck.

[00:43:46] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:43:46] I want to give you an opportunity to tell us more about grassroots community foundation and how my listeners can support you and your incredible work.

[00:43:54] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:43:54] So grassroots is my love and like most things in my life. I always [00:44:00] think like I'm bright and then my friends are like, you should be doing more.

[00:44:03] And so I have a very good friend, Dr. Melody Goodman who really, and she will say invited me to use my talent this way. So grassroots is a federally recognized 501(c)(3). And we do the work of leading this leadership camp, which you read about in the book over the past 10 years. And we've done the camp in New Jersey, as well as in Philadelphia.

[00:44:25] And again, we really take a holistic care to children and their families. And so people can support that work as it continues, because we also do like wraparound work throughout the year where we. Train girls on history, health, wellbeing, current events, parliamentary style of leadership, but we have really three major campaigns that could use support.

[00:44:48] One is the end period poverty campaign, which we have picked up and we do work in the U S. Primarily New Jersey Ghana and in Jamaica. So we've provided supplies

[00:45:00] to girls to make sure that they are able to continue their schooling. And we have an Amazon link that people can help and send supplies in order to support that work.

[00:45:09] And then we have my daughter's work, the 1000 black girl books campaign, which we collect and donate books where black girls are the main characters and donate them across the globe. And when I say across the globe, I mean, across the globe, when we started the campaign, we hadn't thought that it needed money.

[00:45:25] We just collected books a bit, or like, how are we going to pay for that? We're going to ship these. So it was just a campaign of books. So she's collecting 13,000 books. And so we were like, oh my gosh, Small detail.

[00:45:37] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:45:37] That's amazing.

[00:45:38] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:45:38] And then we have a campaign that is around food insecurity that operates during the months of October through December, where we provide meals for our elders, as well as for people in housing development in New York, Philadelphia, Memphis, several communities across the country. And we usually do that in a thing called a Turkey challenge, where [00:46:00] we invite people to actually compete, to see who can in fact donate the most Turkey. And even though it's really not turkeys for say, cause we give organic fruits and vegetables.

[00:46:11] All the rest of those things, but the name, the Turkey challenge is really, so we have board members compete in friends competing to see who can, and I was the reigning champion for many years. I've since been unseated by my board member, Lisa Maxwell, who has corporate dollar money. Um, but the three big ways our website is grassroots community foundation.org.

[00:46:36] That's grass, G R a S S roots with an S. Foundation.org. And also we're on Instagram at grassroots found and on Twitter as well. Even though I don't enjoy the Twitter space, it's very angry.

[00:46:51] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:46:51] It is so angry. It's so very angry, very angry. If you're looking for your joy, you won't find it on Twitter. And finally, [00:47:00] my last question for you is what gives you hope?

[00:47:03] **Janice Johnson Dias:** [00:47:03] Learners, anyone who is a learner gives me hope. I don't take for granted the idea that any of us who know a thing, but I do really value people who are in search of who wants to better understand. And so. When I come in contact with learners, I just feel so absolutely hopeful. And as much as this has been such a challenge in period, I am excited at the large numbers of people who say I have so much more to learn.

[00:47:40] That makes me really quite happy.

[00:47:42] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:47:42] Well, Janice you give me hope. So, thank you for that. Thank you for all you do. And for being a part of the podcast.

[00:47:51] **Hillary Clinton:** [00:47:51] For Bill and me, family has been the center of our lives, but we also know [00:48:00] that our family, like your family, is part of a larger community that can help or hurt our best efforts to raise our child.

[00:48:19] **Alyssa Milano:** [00:48:19] We all have a responsibility for breaking down the barriers that keep women from achieving equity in America. It would be great if the men in power would simply, you know, make space, safe space for women to exist, but we know that this isn't happening. And so we need to empower our girls to make that change and teach our boys to help them.

[00:48:41] As parents, it's on us. We need to reject our own biases no matter where they come from and teach women that they are not subservient to men. We need to not only tell our daughters that they can be and do whatever they want. We need to empower them to be able to do so. And we [00:49:00] need to teach them how to identify, discuss, confront, and overcome the obstacles our world has put in their path.

[00:49:09] This sounds like work, and maybe it is, but it's truly joyful work. None of us want our kids limited. And there's nothing that brings me more joy than giving my kids freedom and the ability to reach their potential. This is a totally doable thing. It's a goal we can reach together. And if we do it right, it will not only make my daughter have a better life. It will be great for my whole family. So like Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young told us, teach your children well. When we do, the whole world changes.

[00:49:46] Sorry, Not Sorry is executive produced by Alyssa Milano, that's me. Our associate producer is Ben Jackson, editing and engineering by Natasha Jacobs and music by Josh Cook, Alicia Eagle and Milo [00:50:00] Bugliari that's my boy,. Please subscribe on Spotify, iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. And if you like the show, please rate, review and spread the word. Sorry, Not Sorry.