

BOOKS, THE CHILDREN OF THE BRAIN 'Exuberance'

W e psychiatrists typically spend our working days dealing with negative emotions—despair, depression, anxiety, and the like—so it's refreshing to spend a few hours in the company of positive emotions in the form of a new book by Kay Redfield Jamison, Ph.D., entitled "Exuberance: The Passion for Life" (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

As promised in the title of this delightful book, Dr. Jamison examines exuberance, the effervescent cousin of joy.

Dr. Jamison is well known for her earlier books, among them "An Unquiet Mind" (1995), in which she describes her own battles with bipolar disorder. In "Exuberance," she presents a very positive view of ways of thinking, feeling, and relating that are often associated with the manic phase of bipolar disorder. Not all has to be bad about a disorder that includes merriment and enhanced initiative among its symptoms.

Our patients may enjoy reading this book to reflect on the many well-known people who could be described—in cross section at least—as hypomanic, and how they've contributed in many meaningful ways to the happiness of others.

In profiling individuals with exuberant personalities, Dr. Jamison makes it clear that exuberance takes many forms.

Listen, for example, to how Gen. George Patton addressed his troops in August 1942: "We're going to go right in and kill the dirty bastards. We won't just shoot the sons of bitches. We're going to cut out their living guts—and use them to grease the treads of our tanks."

Just in case this message was not exuberant enough, a while later he said: "We'll rape their women and pillage their towns, and run the pusillanimous sons of bitches into the sea."

Patton clearly enjoyed using plenty of the colorful, outrageous, surprising, and utterly remarkable expressions that char-

acterize many of the people Dr. Jamison talks about.

Of course, one doesn't have to be outrageous to be colorful and bubbly. Dr. Robert Gallo, formerly of the National Cancer Institute and now at the University of Maryland, described himself as "very highly exuberant," and indicated that he doesn't wear shoes with laces because tying his shoes would slow him too much.

What would happen if two exuberant people meet in the high Olympus reserved for the very bubbly? They may save the world, as suggested by stories of the encounters between the naturalist John Muir and Theodore Roosevelt that

may have led to our system of national parks, and between Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt during World War II.

There is something partly or fully theatrical about the exploits of the exuberant. Einstein considered Michael Faraday to be one of the four towering physical scientists in history, but Faraday's genius extended well past his seminal contribution to physics to include a brilliant command of the lecture hall. Considered the "Prince of Lecturers" in Victorian England, Faraday wrote that, "bangs, flashes, soap bubbles filled with hydrogen floating upwards, and other spectacular effects" were part of his lecture style.

On this, Faraday was not necessarily far away from P.T. Barnum, who could not visualize a life without constant excitement. "I have lived so long on excitement, pepper, & mustard that plain bread & milk don't agree with me," he wrote.

Some readers may wish to apply for entrance to the club of the exuberant, but Dr. Jamison tells us that this club includes only people who are born exuberant, and they manifest their traits early in life.

Some of our very best taxonomists have tried to classify the exuberant. No less an authority than Emil Kraepelin described a manic predisposition in this way: "The

slightest forms of the disorder lead us to certain personal predispositions still in the domain of the normal. It concerns here brilliant, but unevenly gifted personalities with artistic inclinations. They charm us by their intellectual mobility, their versatility, their wealth of ideas, their ready accessibility and their delight in adventure, their artistic capability, their good nature, their cheery, sunny mood."

Hagop Akiskal has more recently described hyperthymia—characterized by optimism, high energy, enthusiasm, and extraversion—as part of a continuum of traits in the general population.

I've observed a number of patients with bipolar disorder who improved from depression or mania to resume very successful lives characterized by creativity, expansive ideas, simultaneous dedication to many projects, and unusual turns in their careers. They are among the most interesting people who come to my office, and some are visible enough in the community that I can follow their careers in the local media.

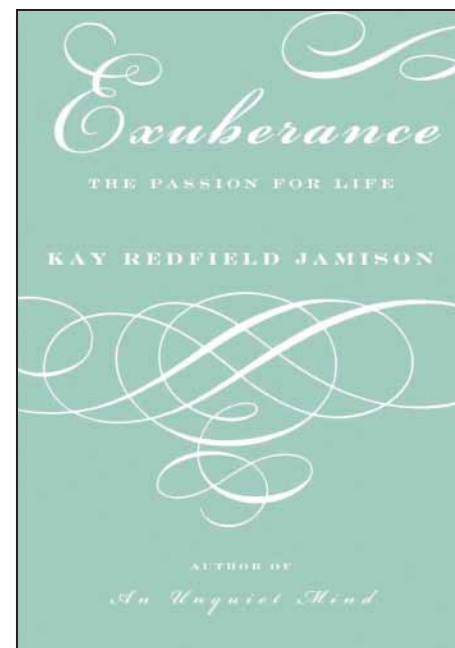
The natural world itself is somewhat anthropomorphized in the pages of this book, as Dr. Jamison describes many examples of nature's exuberance. Anyone who doubts it should know that one pair of poppies may produce 820 thousand million million million descendants in just 7 years, that there are 350,000 varieties of beetles, and that there are a million trillion trillion trillion carats of diamond dust in the Milky Way galaxy.

Nature, Dr. Jamison says, is a seducer with many captives: Wilson "Snowflake" Bentley was captivated by snow as a child and by the age of 19 years he took the first photomicrograph of a snow crystal. He never left the world of snowflakes, which he investigated with the "insistent ardor of the lover and the tireless patience of the scientist," wrote physicist W.J. Humphreys.

What about children? Go to any playground and you'll conclude that exuberance is one of the most prominent characteristics of childhood. "It is fortunate that the muting of exuberance is neither rapid nor absolute," Dr. Jamison writes.



BY RODRIGO A. MUÑOZ, M.D.



From Gen. George Patton to Watson and Crick, exuberance takes many forms.

"Youth is, after all, a time to fly and fall on enthusiasm, to act with audacity."

One wonders about the role of exuberance when Watson and Crick were deciphering the secrets of DNA. Watson recalled that both were "bubbling over with exuberance. We had to share our ideas, we had to talk about it. It was a happy state, virtually delirious."

Dr. Jamison has produced several books that are well researched, well written, and well received. For those of us who share her ideas, this one will join the others as a prized possession. It will please those who want to live life to the fullest.

"Yet it is the infectious energies of exuberance that proclaim and disperse much of what is marvelous in life," Dr. Jamison writes. "Exuberance carries us places we would not otherwise go—across the savannah, to the moon, into the imagination—and if we ourselves are not so exuberant we will, caught up in the contagious joy of those who are, be inclined collectively to go yonder." ■

DR. MUÑOZ is a psychiatrist in private practice in San Diego. He can be reached at cpnews@elsevier.com.

Louisiana Democrat Backs Individual Insurance Mandate

BY MARY ELLEN SCHNEIDER
Senior Writer

NEW ORLEANS — The real social crisis facing America right now isn't fixing Social Security but tackling the problem of the uninsured, former Sen. John Breaux said at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Dermatology.

"The crisis that I see in health care in this country is the fact that we have 44 million Americans who have no form of health insurance whatsoever," he said.

And the crisis is likely to get worse as more and more companies are opting not to provide health insurance to their employees, said Mr. Breaux, a Democrat who represented Louisiana in the U.S. Senate for the past 18 years.

But the problem isn't how much money is being spent on the system, he said, it's the way the system is orga-

nized. Currently, most individuals receive their health coverage either through their employer or through Medicare, Medicaid, or the Department of Veterans Affairs. If they don't fit into one of these eligible groups, or their employer doesn't provide coverage, they are unlikely to be insured.

One way to get away from this traditional system of coverage would be to create a federal mandate that every individual must have health insurance, Mr. Breaux said. Under this type of plan, the government would offer subsidies to low-income individuals to purchase coverage.

The government would also need to create some type of state or multistate purchasing pools and ensure that the system prevents adverse risk selection so that insurance could be purchased at a reasonable price, he said.

Mr. Breaux compared such a plan to the existing requirement in most states that drivers must have a liabil-

ity insurance policy. "People understand that and they have accepted that," he said.

Under such a system, if an individual without insurance sought care in an emergency department, he or she would be enrolled in a purchasing pool at that time, he said. Or people might need to show proof of health insurance when they get their driver's license, he said.

Mr. Breaux said that such a plan would help to move away from the current segmented system of health care and the waste, fraud, abuse, and duplication that accompanies each of those separate bureaucracies.

And providing insurance to more Americans would cut down on overall costs because it would allow more people to have access to preventive treatments. The best way to get a handle on health care costs is through disease management, Mr. Breaux said, but you have to get the patients into the physician's office to do that. ■