



THE TRUE JOY OF LIFE

By Neil Starkie

It's funny how the universe works sometimes. A single thought enters my mind, and without notice, a cascade of interconnected ideas emerge from the most unexpected places.

Recently, I visited the home of a friend's father. The elderly gentleman had moved into a residential care community, leaving my friend with the bittersweet task of sorting through his life's possessions. It's a difficult responsibility—deciding, in an instant, the fate of objects that once brought joy. Each item is weighed between a skip bin or a charity shop, its sentimental value now lost to time.

For me, joy came in the form of browsing through his old record collection—an eclectic mix of obscure folk music and timeless classics. Out of the 200 or so records, I selected eight, including an Edith Piaf album featuring her 1946 signature song, *La Vie en Rose*, and a Louis Armstrong record with the eternally uplifting *What a Wonderful World*.

Piaf sings of love's joy and the beauty of viewing life through a rose-tinted lens, while the great Satchmo reminds us of the simple wonders around us—the "skies of blue and clouds of white, the bright blessed day and the dark sacred night."

For years, a quote from Irish writer George Bernard Shaw has sat by my desk, a constant source of inspiration. Shaw speaks of *The True Joy in Life*, describing it as "*being used for a purpose recognised by yourself as a mighty one. Being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.*" He continues, "*I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it what I can.*"

These words came to life on Friday, March 7, when we celebrated International Women's Day at The Spiers Centre.

We were joined by an incredible group of individuals who have shaped the Centre over the past 45 years—John, Keith, Jill, Jackie, and David. Their reflections on the early days reminded us of the Centre’s rich history and unwavering mission.

Our guest of honour was Joy Coleman, a woman who embodies Shaw’s philosophy. In 1980, Joy founded The Spiers Centre from her lounge room in what was then the remote outpost of Heathridge. With a fierce determination and an unbreakable commitment to her community, she rallied a passionate group of 40 women to build something extraordinary. Joy is, without doubt, a *force of nature*. As we reflected on the legacy of these pioneering women, we also acknowledged our responsibility as its current stewards. This legacy demands that we serve everyone who comes to us—unconditionally and without judgement.

Throughout the week, we have witnessed the *true joy in life* in many forms, most profoundly in the legacy of Joy Coleman. But sometimes, joy appears in the simplest of moments.

This morning, as the day was just beginning, a mother and her young daughter arrived for our Monday morning playgroup. The little girl, no older than two or three, was practically a quivering jelly of excitement. She danced on the spot, flailed her arms, and squealed with the pure, unfiltered delight that only a toddler can.

In that moment, it was clear—the joy of a life well lived, the joy of community service, and the joy of unrestrained, childlike wonder. With so much joy surrounding us, how can we not see *La vie en rose* and think to ourselves, *What a wonderful world?*