
“What fills your heart with joy?” This simple question is the main theme of this book. Everyone has a passion, be it bird watching, cooking, or throwing pots. Sometimes it takes years and changes in circumstances to realize what actually “fills your heart with joy.”

Fifteen year old Julian has to come to grips with his mother leaving him and his father to run her family’s motel in Florida. Hoping that this is a temporary separation, Julian takes on the responsibilities of cooking and cleaning the house while his father works as a nurse in the local hospital. Since he has never been very close to his father, Julian plans to live with his mother after the school year ends.

Julian befriends an elderly neighbor, Mrs. Peters, and starts helping her with her bird feeders. Through this friendship, Julian begins to realize that everyone is passionate about something and that Mrs. Peter’s passion is bird watching. Mrs. Peters helps Julian to see a better side of his father and when dad begins training for a marathon, Julian starts training with him, causing them to develop a much closer relationship.

Every week, Julian and his father go to the grocery store where Julian befriends Tia, a girl who shares his love of cooking. As Tia and Julian experience love, his parents continue to drift farther apart. Julian and his father come up with a unique way of letting his mother know that she is missed and that they would like her to come back home.

By the time school ends, Julian has a very good relationship with his father, and a budding romance with Tia. After a short time in Florida, he gets into a routine with his mother but misses his home in Greensboro, North Carolina. Now, he has to make a decision to either stay with his mother or go back with his father.

*Heart with Joy* is an uplifting coming-of-age novel that shows that there are many different ways to develop your passion and to follow your heart. It also shows that a family is not necessarily a father and mother living together. Family can be described in many different ways.

*Heart with Joy* is very enjoyable and highly recommended. This heartwarming novel gives you a new perspective on coming of age. The plot line and characters are believable. Steve Cushman develops his characters very well and gives them life. Julian is a delightful character that left this reader hoping for a sequel. Although a young adult book, probably for early teens, *Heart with Joy* is a good read for adults as well. Steve Cushman has written a previous book, *Portisville*, and a book of short stories entitled *Fracture City*. I highly recommend *Heart with Joy* for teen readers under the age of fifteen and for adults who have teens.

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