



EUDAEMONIA **Passion, with Dawna Markova**

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Kim Forrester 0:00

According to the Australian author and palliative care nurse, Bronnie Ware, people who are dying often regret leaving unfulfilled dreams and untapped possibilities. Well, this begs the question, how can we live without these such regrets? I'm Kim Forrester, you're listening to the Eudaemonia podcast and today we're going to explore the power of passion.

Intro 0:25

Welcome to Eudaemonia, the podcast that is all about flourishing. Plug in, relax and get ready for the goodness as we explore the traits and practices that can help you thrive in life ... with your host, Kim Forrester.

Kim Forrester 0:45

Dr. Dawna Markova is known around the world for her groundbreaking work in helping people learn with passion and live on purpose. She is co-founder of the Random Acts of Kindness movement and the Worldwide Women's Web, a former senior research affiliate of the Organisational Learning Center at MIT, and author of a treasure trove of books including *I Will Not Die An Unlived Life* and her latest title, *Living a Love to Life: Awakening wisdom through stories of inspiration, challenge and possibility*. It's my absolute honour to be chatting with Dawna today to talk about the power of passion and to explore how we can harness an authentic sense of purpose, momentum and contribution to live a more flourishing life. Dawna Markova, it is just a delight to have you here on the Eudaemonia podcast. Aloha to you.

Dawna Markova 1:40

Aloha. Aloha. It's a delight to be connected to you in this moment.

Kim Forrester 1:46

Dawna, passion originally meant suffering, and these days when we use the word passion, it often conjures up images of sexual vitality. What do you mean when you encourage us to cultivate greater passion in our lives?

Dawna Markova 2:03

Well, a friend of mine - this is a story, my brain thinks in stories, so you're going to just have to follow the threads of my story. So a friend of mine called me this morning and he ... the great passion of his life was to go to Africa and to take his wife to Africa, who is a photographer. And so he's been planning it for years and years and years. And it also is a passion of his wife's life. So so they were supposed to leave in two days. And yesterday, they went out on a bike ride through the backwoods of where they where they live in California. And to make a long story short, he hit a rock

and broke his collarbone. So the trip is cancelled. And the trip, as you can imagine during the age of COVID, was challenging to arrange. And he is now basically a cripple. He has one arm that he can use and the rest of his body is reeking in pain. And he said to me, "Do you have any guidance about how this trip can be the passionate trip of my life? What do I do? Where do I find passion in this mess?", is what he said to me. And that was a lovely question to ask actually, because most of where I have experienced passion is in the challenges of my life. In the places I was supposed to experience passion, I in fact, experienced a great deal of pain. But in living on the other side of passion ... you know, everything has two sides. There's nothing in nature that only comes on one side. Everything comes on two sides. And, I'm thinking now - I'm looking at my hands and I have one hand wrapped around a fist - and so I'm thinking about a seed. Because passion is definitely life force. There's no question about that. And in a seed when you plant a seed, like if you were a child, and you planted a lima bean, and the way that I used to do it with kids was that we would put it on a paper towel and that paper towel would be moist. And the lima bean would get ... the shell around it would get moist, and those should - the seed itself, the bean - would push. And the shell was meant to protect the bean so it would hold on. And the seed would push and the shell would protect, and eventually the shell would crack open. And then this green fierce little sprout would push out from the lima bean. And I think of the amount of passion it took for that little seed to push, to break open that shell which had kept it safe for its whole life. And 'crack', it split open. And there was this moment. That, to me is the ultimate experience of passion because everything that was safe and was known, was no longer there. Everything that it protected was no longer there. And it took fierce passion for that seed to reach out into the huge world, in the same way as it will for my friend; to discover that lying in bed in a body cast, he too, is going to have to push against that body cast that will keep him safe, and to find his passion. It's not in Africa for him right now. So it is that struggle, for me, that is my way of finding passion, finding the fierceness of the life force.

Kim Forrester 5:50

Let's go into that deeper, because you're talking about that fierce passion. And I actually celebrate your friend because he obviously had a passion to go to Africa, and you say he was planning for years. Many of us in life don't even get to the planning stage, Dawna. Many of us have a fire that is burning inside of us. But you know, it'll come some other time or I just need to, you know, pay the mortgage off the house or just need to get the kids through school. There's always something putting it off. Do you feel that we've become maybe not just reluctant of passion or dismissive of passion - do you feel that we are also afraid of what passion asks of us as individuals?

Dawna Markova 6:32

Well, I think the only thing that passion asks of us as individuals is to love the life that we are given. To love it fiercely, to love it tenderly. I think that's what life asks of us. And, when you mentioned the word "afraid". So there is fear, there is such a thing as a body sensation, a throbbing, that is fear. And that fear is akin to passion, actually. What you're calling fear, is just the shell around the seed. It's the wanting to be safe and to be protected. And it isn't really a question of either, or. You know, either I'm afraid, or I'm passionate. No, it's the relationship between the shell and the seed, where life's passion bursts inside of us. So that's fear. But there's something else that's just a story we tell ourselves, that's called scared. "I'm scared that, I'm scared that". And so because we're scared that, it's kind of like we keep cringing down inside that shell. I'm scared that I won't have enough money. I'm scared that I won't... whatever story we happen to be telling ourselves to keep ourselves as we are. And a wonderful woman named Mary Catherine Bateson said that, in her mind, the journey of life is not to get from point A to point B; not to reach a destination. But the journey itself is the home.

The journey itself is where passion in life lives, not when you get some place. So if the way that you're getting from A to C, and you're saying "When I get to C then I can go to Africa, when I get to C then I can fall in love. When I'm beautiful enough, tall enough, smart enough, wise enough." That's not passion. That may be excitement. It may be a way you're scaring yourself. It may be a way you're keeping yourself nice and curled up and small. And you don't want to push against the seed. But that's not passion. It may be lust. It may be, I mean, who knows, you know, in the thousands of stories we tell ourselves. But in my experience, and I can only talk from my experience ... My first real experience of passion as an adult was when I was 28 years old. And I had married the prince, you know, and I was the princess. I was married to the prince, he was exactly supposed to be the right man for me, and he went looking for passion in some very horrible ways. And he ... I'm not going to go into the whole story, but he almost killed me and he almost killed my son who was four years old because he made too much noise. And it just came over, his passion overtook him. Anyway, it was a long, terrible story. But in my family, no one ever got a divorce. And so I had very little money, I discovered that he had snorted all my inheritance up his nose. And so, the story is basically, I went to a magazine, I had written one article in my life, a newspaper article about a school I had started. And a new magazine had started in a place called Florida where I lived, and it was called New Woman. And I thought to myself, "Here, I have this, you know, battered child, and I am a battered woman, I've never done anything on my own, ever. Ever". I was very protected. And that shell was very strong. And I was terrified. So I went into the editor's office, I talked my way in, I don't know how I did it. I don't know who it was that was talking to the editor. Her name was Margaret Harold. And I said, "I want to write a column for your magazine." I had no idea what I was going to say before I opened my mouth. "And it's going to be called 'Alternate Lifestyle for a Frustrated Housewife'". And somehow, I talked her into it. Somehow. And I ended up buying a Mercedes diesel in Germany and driving 50,000 miles with a four year old son and a very battered self around the world. And we went to Africa, we went to China, we went to Japan, nobody had ever been in China. We followed Nixon into China, we went down the whole coast of Africa. I mean, it was a very long and very full journey. And it was my passion that led me. And my fear was, in the beginning, David, my son would say to me, "Where are we going, Mommy?" and I said, "Away from here". That was the shell speaking. That was all I knew. That was the fear speaking. But where I was going to, I had no idea. And it was that unknown that actually was the fertile ground of my passion. And it was risking the unknown, because everything I had done up until that point was known. I knew how to be a princess, I knew how to marry a prince, I did everything right, and that 'known' did not lead me where I wanted to go.

Kim Forrester 12:23

Dawna, can I just touch on that, because some of my listeners right now are listening in, and they're concerned that they're not terribly passionate about anything. Maybe they used to be fully engaged with something, and maybe that no longer lights their fire. It's also possible that they're sitting there going, "Nothing lights my fire at the moment, or at least there is nothing I can see in my world or in my possibilities that lights my fire." What is your advice to anyone who's struggling to either preserve an old passion, or identify a new one?

Dawna Markova 13:03

I think you need to have an affair, but not an affair with another person. I think you need to flirt with your passion. I think you need to, and I'm saying this and I feel my cheeks turning pink when I say it, because I can't tell anybody else how to find passion. I can only talk about my own life. But I can explore, and share some questions and some processes that I have used to help other people find ways to live a passionate life. There is no such thing as passion. It is not a noun, it is not a thing. It

is a verb. So to have an affair with passion, you need to keep it a secret to begin with. And you need to begin a conversation with it. You know, the conversation for some people, it's a spoken conversation when they're going for a walk. For another person, it might be a conversation that they have in their mind when they just write at night in a book before they go to sleep, or first thing in the morning, or when they're supposed to be sitting and pretending they're meditating. You begin a conversation, and go "Passion, where are you? Where is that ... I knew you once, where are you?" And there is no one that hasn't known passion, because there's no one that's born an adult. Everyone is born as a child and there's no child that I've ever known or I've ever seen that does not live with passion. So we've all just lost it, or put it in a safe deposit box, or forgotten. It's still there in the brain. It hasn't disappeared. So you need to begin to flirt with your passion, as it were. Or, if that seems too outrageous even, to begin to explore it. And sometimes, you know, I ask people write with both your hands, your right hand and your left hand. Your dominant hand, and your non-dominant hand, whichever it is. And begin with your dominant hand, that's your habitual way, your safe way that's the shell around the seed, and just begin to write: Dear passion, where are you? I knew you when I was six, I haven't known you in 30 years, where are you? What are you so afraid of? And then throw the pen in your non dominant hand and let your non dominant hand begin to answer your dominant hand, or respond. It will be very awkward because it's new neural pathways that we don't use. But, the letter, the writing, will not be beautiful, it'll be weird. However, it will be wise and it will be truthful.

Kim Forrester 15:42

Dawna, you keep bringing us back to this beautiful idea of the seed, and the passion being, you know, locked within the confines of that seed. And, and I think of your friend now inside his cast on the hospital bed. Passion is commonly associated with action, with assertiveness, with forward motion. And yet you say, and as you've displayed already in the conversation here, when we find ourselves devoid of passion and purpose, the first thing we need to do is stop. You wrote that in your book, *I Will Not Die An Unlived Life*. What can we learn about passion in the stillness?

Dawna Markova 16:23

Passion, you know, is born in stillness. A seed, again, I'm going to go ... because passion is a life force. It's a life energy. It is the energy of life. And it isn't an action. A seed is born ... where I used to live, they had a winter. They don't have a winter where I'm living now, or very much of a visible winter. But under the ground, I used to have peony bushes. And in the winter, you would see nothing. It would be frozen. And in the spring, there would be this breaking open. And the breaking open was the ground and that pushing up of the seed. And then the seed would be like a fist, it would be a tight ball, and all over the seed would be crawling these little ants. And the ants would be eating the sticky stuff that held that seed in a ball. And when the sticky stuff was eaten, the ball would open and the most gorgeous deep red, fuchsia pink, hot flowers would emerge. So where was the action, the action that gave birth to that passion? Was it under the ground when it was frozen? Is it in the moment it broke it open? Is it ... when you're making love with somebody, where is the passion? Is what draws you to a person? Is it the actual orgasm? Is it after the orgasm in the moment when you're floating and you're feeling fully alive? We give a noun to something that is a verb, that is process of life. It is not a thing. And as soon as you make it a thing, you have to have it, take it, get it, you're not good enough for it, you know. It becomes dead.

Kim Forrester 18:10

I love that so much Dawna. You suggest that it's the questions we ask ourselves that can determine the amount of passion and purpose that we invite into our lives. Yeah, I love that idea of using our dominant hand to ask the question and our non dominant hand to answer it. What would you like my listeners to understand about the power of questions? What is it about inquiry that can help us ... that can help open our eyes to this concept of passion?

Dawna Markova 18:40

Oh, Kim, I love that question. I love questions. I'm a question junkie, yeah? I'll tell you, I was trained as a cognitive neuroscientist, okay. So I spent a lot of early years, when I was doing research, you know, watching people's brains on monitors as they 'thought', or cognated, or whatever you want to call it. And one of the things that I found that was very interesting was that, when the brain makes connections, which is actually where passion is born. It's the ants that are crawling all over the surface of the peony that eat the sweet stuff. It's that connection that actually causes passion to ignite. When the brain is questioning, is when the brain begins to go from a state called beta waves where your brain is filled with answers. "That to that to that, A and B, and you are smart, and I am dumb, and you go here, and I'll go here". Okay, there is no passion in the brain from what I could see. And your brain's mainly producing beta waves. And it's how we dominate one another, you know. The person with the loudest voice and the strongest voice and all the answers, that person dominates in a situation. But that is not passion. That's not where passion is born. But you go from that state of knowing, next into a state of curiosity, your brain begins to produce more alpha waves. You begin to daydream. "Well, I wonder, maybe...". You get curious. Then if you allow that to happen, like the peony opening up, your brain goes into this state of theta waves, where there's big spaces between your thoughts. Kind of, "I wonder, well, oh, where was I? I was at exit 31 on the highway, and now I'm an exit 35. Who was that person driving the car?" In that state of wonder is where wisdom is born, it's where passion emerges. And it's where connection is made or partnership. You watch on the brain, the whole outside surface of the brain lights up, literally, when a person is wondering. It's the state before inspiration. So wondering gives an orgasm, if you will, of the mind. "Ah-a!" It's an insight. It's a passionate surge. And it happens after wonder. And this what gives birth to wonder is curiosity and luscious questions. So if statements are what creates domination, then questions - and true wonderous questions, I don't mean "What do you want for dinner?", I mean questions when you don't know the answer - that is nature's way of teaching us to partner and connect.

Kim Forrester 21:52

That is so extraordinary, my whole body is tingling with the idea of living in, or stepping into, that state of wonder and curiosity and inquiry. Can we just step back very briefly. You we're talking about your husband, your prince, and the choices that he made in his life...

Dawna Markova 22:12

My "wasband".

Kim Forrester 22:15

Your wasband. So let's step back and talk about your "wasband" and the choices that he was making in his life. Do you feel that passion can misguide us? Is it possible for us to pour our energy,

our intention, into things that are ultimately not healthy for us? And if so, how can we tell that we've misplaced our passion?

Dawna Markova 22:41

What a great ... God, you ask wonderful questions. Okay, so I can talk about him, he's no longer alive. So therefore, that's fine. So what was true about my wasband was that he was raised to believe nothing he ever did was good enough. He was very brilliant. And his father competed with him all the time. So whenever he would become successful, his father would do whatever he could to hold him down. And so he was in this continual struggle between the life force that wanted to bless him, and his experience that said that if he blossomed, he would get beat up by his father. And so he didn't trust his own capacities and his own passion. So he had to find passion someplace else. But he didn't find passion, he found a reasonable facsimile. Because passion comes, remember, it's the blossoming that is innate to us that the life force wants in us. So cocaine, sexual escapades, all of that was his search for a high, if you will, but it wasn't passion. And at the end of our relationship, the end of our relating, I walked into our bedroom and there he was with my best friend. And I was such a good princess - they were in bed, of course - that I hung up their clothes that were on the floor, in the closet. And I left. And when I came home later that evening - because I was driving our station wagon around and around, I didn't know where to go - he had written on all the mirrors and all the windows in the house. "I want to be miserable. Leave me alone."

Kim Forrester 24:37

Wow.

Dawna Markova 24:39

So that is not passion.

Kim Forrester 24:42

No.

Dawna Markova 24:43

Cocaine did not lead him to passion. Orgasms didn't lead him to passion. What he was doing, in fact, was holding back the passion. And when his son, my son, would start to cry, the noise would remind him of the fierceness of life, and he had to make the noise stop. So he'd beat up our son. When I would ask questions like, "What do you need? What do you want, Steve?" He had to make me stop asking questions to which he could not find the answer. So he had to beat me up. That's not what life asks of us.

Kim Forrester 25:27

And yet, I'm reminded of the ways that we use the word passion. And it seems to me that we misuse that word, passion. And in misusing the word passion when we talk about an aggressive and angry human being, when we talk about passion when it is, you know, ambition at all costs, when we talk about passion where it is fiery and destructive, we are actually dishonouring what

passion truly is. We are dishonouring the sanctity and the beauty that lies within pure, authentic, soulful passion. Would you agree?

Dawna Markova 26:08

Of course, because passion, first of all, is a verb. Second of all, passion is meant to foster life. And passion is meant to create connections. That's what the brain is just filled with, all these neurons that whose purpose is to create connections. When whatever it is you're calling x, when it leads to domination, that is not passion.

Kim Forrester 26:35

Dawna, that is just so profound. My final question - and I regret that we've come to my final question, but here we are - my final question is one that I asked every guest on the Eudaemonia podcast. Dawna, can you offer my listeners a morning reminder, this might be a practice, a mantra, a favourite affirmation, something that can help us all reclaim that sense of purpose, reclaim that momentum that is embedded in purpose each day?

Dawna Markova 27:07

Well, what I'd like to share is brand new, it was evoked - passion always evokes, it never provokes, it evokes - and it was evoked by your asking me to do this with you. And I'm going well, "Why do I want to do that? It's a gorgeous day, I could be out on my potter's wheel making beautiful bowls." But I did there was something in me that said, Yes. And so this poem was born to you, who I have no idea what you look like, how you dress. I now know you're almost 50, but that's about it. Anyway, so this is what I would like to offer. And it ends in a question. And it's called These Hours.

I wonder how this day will change you? Will the corners be sharper or rounded off? Will you make decisions that quiet your heart? Will you learn from the things you drop, as well as those you pick up? At the end, will you praise the boundaries where one life begins and another ends? Will you jump off, at the ragged edge between fear and possibility? In the last moment of this day, how will you respond to the single simple question: Did I love well?

Kim Forrester 28:43

Dawna, thank you. That is beyond any words I have the capability to find right now. Thank you so much for sharing that beautiful, beautiful creation.

Dawna Markova 28:55

Well, this is, this is Kim's poem. And my grandmother taught me to say when somebody says thank you, my grandmother taught me to say, "I make your words welcome in me". So I do Kim, I make your words welcome in me. And I am very grateful that we got to share this little tiny piece of our life with each other.

Kim Forrester 29:18

Dawna Markova, my heart is smiling from this, the short time that I've had to spend with you. If listeners want to learn more about the work that you do, you literally have a little treasure trove of inspiring, uplifting, empowering books. Your latest book is called Living A Loved Life. Where can people find out more about you?

Dawna Markova 29:43

Well, I have a website, or the website has me, I'm not sure, but it's called Dawna Markova. My name, dawnamarkova.com. And on the website there are musings, there's poetry, there's music that my current husband of 44 years composes to go with it, and photographs, and a place to reach me and send me questions or whatever. So dawnamarkova.com

Kim Forrester 30:14

I am simply grateful for your graceful, gracious and poetic presence on the Eudaemonia podcast here today, Dawna. Thank you for choosing to come on board.

Dawna Markova 30:26

In Hawaiian they say "a hui hou". Which is, "until our spirits touch". A hui hou.

Kim Forrester 30:32

A hui hou.

Dawna Markova 30:33

A hui hou, Kim.

Kim Forrester 30:34

As Oprah Winfrey once said, "Passion is energy. Feel the power that comes from focusing on what excites you." You have been listening to the Eudaemonia podcast. If you'd like to learn more about how to live a truly flourishing life, please subscribe. Check out eudaemoniapod.com for more inspiring episodes, or come join me on Instagram @iamkimforrester. I'm Kim Forrester. Until next time, be well, be kind to yourself and reclaim your passion.