



Q & A WITH DR. JOHN IZZO **ON SECOND INNOCENCE**

Q: *What is your new book about?*

Dr. Izzo: It is a book about rediscovering wonder, about how we can keep the idealism and optimism of youth without being naïve. I think there is a belief in our society that as we age our innocence and idealism are replaced by experience but I suggest that innocence is a quality we bring to our lives no matter how old we are.

Q: *Why did you name it *Second Innocence*?*

Dr. Izzo: When we are young there is an innocence and faith that characterizes how we approach life. That innocence manifests itself in a variety of ways—a belief in the goodness of the universe, a sense of wonder about the world, an idealism about how we can contribute to making the world a better place, and an almost timeless participation in the world. At some point, we start to recognize the harder truths about life—people die, love fails, we won't always see the positive outcome of all our good works, we fail at work, and then there is just the ongoing reality of the evening news. Second innocence is a choice to see goodness in the world; it is a decision to live with hope not by denying these harder truths but by incorporating them into your life.

Q: *The book has a certain autobiographical quality to it since it is filled with stories from your life: The death of your father, a rowing trip with your grandfather, a junior high teacher who demonstrated courage, experiences from your earlier life as a parish minister, a family suicide, and even the death of your first real love. How do these stories help readers discover their own joy and wonder?*

Dr. Izzo: I think if we are open, our life can teach us how to keep a sense of wonder. It is almost as if all the lessons we need to learn can be found in the experiences that we have had throughout our lives. Life will teach you how to keep a sense of wonder and joy if you listen to it. The book is not really about me, it is about the stories of my life, which are stories everyone can relate to—death, love, lessons learned, disappointment, moments of great happiness, detours that became the main road. They are also the stories of the thousands of people I have met in my work as a minister, retreat leader, and corporate advisor. When people started reading the book they would often tell me about stories from their lives and then I knew the book was doing what it was supposed to do—help people find their own lessons, the ones that would teach them how to keep a sense of joy and purpose in life.



Q: The book is divided into four sections? What are they and what was your thinking behind that?

Dr. Izzo: There are really only four realms of human experience-work, relationships, spirituality, and the daily experience of living moment to moment. So I wanted to help people explore how to rediscover wonder in each of those realms. The lessons are the same-have faith, be open, stay present, choose hope, see the wonder in all things, bring more of yourself to your experiences-but the stories from the various realms help us bring these qualities to our work, relationships, and daily living.

Q: What is the most important quality we need to maintain our idealism and innocence in our lives?

Dr. Izzo: Courage is an important quality in all things. Life is not easy; it is not some new age fairy tale where the whole universe organizes itself for your fulfillment. Throughout the book there are stories of people who had great courage-courage to think about what really matters to them, courage to stand up for their convictions, courage to try to make a difference even when it looked like they couldn't. Many people believe courage is a quality you inherit but I think it is a ways of being in the world that we cultivate throughout our life. It takes a great deal of courage to choose to hold on to our ideals and to keep seeing the world with the perspective of goodness. The word courage comes from an old French word for heart and it seems to me that book is about how you can bring more heart and conviction to your living. When your heart is truly in the world, courage comes naturally.

Q: The book is both very personal and at the same time draws on stories from history ranging from Wordsworth to Victor Frankl. Were you worried about mixing genre in that way?

Dr. Izzo: We learn both from our own stories and from the stories of others. This is a collection of stories that have taught me how to keep joy, wonder and idealism in my life. When we connect with our stories we begin to see the parallels in other people's lives. I find readers enjoy this combination of the personal and the historical. I think a sophisticated person must see the pattern that connects our story with the human story-that is my experience and the experiences of others are very similar. Every person must come to a point in their life when they make a choice between hope and despair, optimism and pessimism, innocence and cynicism, so we can learn from other's journeys. For many people there is a moment when you know you must make that choice. Take Victor Frankl, here is a Jewish psychotherapist who gets sent to Auschwitz and must decide whether to choose second innocence even there in that place. He makes that choice and out of it comes his life's work. If someone can face the worst a human being can endure and still choose to find the wonder then we should pay attention to that story.

Q: What is the reason you use storytelling as the primary vehicle to communicate your message?

Dr. Izzo: Human beings have always thought in stories. All the great myths speak to us in stories. For example, Jesus could have just said, "be nice to your neighbors" but instead he told the story of the Good Samaritan. The story then invites us to put ourselves in the middle of it and make the truth our own. I also believe stories allow the reader to find truth for themselves which is why a great novel will sometimes change your perspective more than a how to book. We hear a story and we connect to the part of it that speaks to us in the place we are in our particular life. That is my hope for this book. For some people there will be just one story that will speak all the truth they need to know about joy and wonder (and it will be a different story for each person).



***Q:** You have said that the word innocence gets a reaction from people, how so?*

Dr. Izzo: Innocence is associated with being naïve and most of us don't want to be accused of that. Some of us don't want to be innocent because we think that only a sophisticated view of the world is legitimate or we think of innocence as it relates to guilt. Others get what I am trying to say immediately. Actually I hoped people would have that kind of reaction, one that made them have a point of view. For me, innocence is not about being naïve which is what I think people fear, it is about remembering what we knew intuitively earlier in our lives-that the world offers us the experience of joy and purpose but we have to choose to embrace it. This is not a book about becoming a child, or even discovering your inner child, it is about how we can bring the qualities of innocence and idealism that characterize youth into our adult lives.

***Q:** If you had to reduce the message of the book to a few sound-bytes, what is the secret to discovering wonder and joy?*

Dr. Izzo: Learn from your life. Remember the things that have helped you experience joy and wonder. Discover what those things are and pay more attention to them. Bring more of yourself to every interaction in life; believe that the world can change from your participation in it. Remember the innocent part of yourself that knew the world was about something and that you could change it in some small way. Choose to embrace that. Most of all let your life teach you what is required to keep that perspective of goodness, you already know the answers and it is a question of remembering.

***Q:** Someone suggested what you are really talking about is choosing to be an optimist?*

Dr. Izzo: Innocence and optimism are related but not identical. Optimism is how you see the world whereas innocence is about how you experience the world. You can be an optimist and life will still whack you on the side of the head. To me the optimist and the pessimist are both wrong, life is wonderful and it is very painful. Second innocence is about how we work with the harder truths about life and the choice we must make each day to join the dance of life again with an open heart.

***Q:** Would you say your book suggests experiencing life rather than evaluating it?*

Dr. Izzo: I think many people live their whole lives trying to figure out if they are winning. Second innocence is about taking your eyes off the scoreboard of your life and trusting that you are making a difference even when you don't see it. So many of the experiences that I share in the book remind me of this important truth. I like to tell the story of the English poet William Wordsworth. **He wanted to** write a great work but felt there was something he had to get out of his system first so he began working on a poem he titled The Prelude (because it was the prelude to his great work). It turned out to be a 500-page poem and the work he is most remembered for. It is a great reminder that if we give all of our heart to our life then the great work will emerge on its own. Many people are working on their prelude right now and don't know it. If you hold back, your life will not find you.



Q: Why did you write this book after spending so many years writing about corporate culture and business?

Dr. Izzo: I am forty-seven years old and like many people my age this is the time of your life when you start to ask important questions about how you are experiencing the world. Some people age with a spirit of joy while others become cynical and I suppose I wanted to explore what it means to keep a spirit of wonder all your life. When I began my work life twenty-five years ago as a parish minister it was questions about life that interested me most. If you look at my writing and speaking over the last fifteen years what emerges is that I spent most of my time talking to business people about life. People were always saying things to me like-“great ideas about leadership but what I really liked was what you taught me about life.” I think I have been writing this book all my life and it took midlife to get me to write it.

Q: What part did the events of the last few years play in your writing this book-September 11th, the shootings at Columbine, Enron, and so forth?

Dr. Izzo: If you watch the evening news you probably think the world is getting worse every day. You lose perspective on all the goodness that is going on around us. This tends to cause a paralysis, a feeling that there are so many problems, so what can I do? I wanted to remind people that when we hold on to our innocence and idealism, one person could truly move the world. People who discover second innocence know there is darkness, but choose to spend their days lighting matches. The book is a very personal one but I think it has the potential to create dialogue about how we hold to wonder as a society as well.