“Joy for Beginners takes us on the emotional journeys of seven women seeking to transform their lives, and proves that sometimes what we really need to inspire us to change is a good, firm shove.”—Garth Stein, author of The Art of Racing in the Rain

Having survived a life-threatening illness, Kate celebrates by gathering with six close friends. At an intimate outdoor dinner on a warm September evening, the women challenge Kate to start her new lease on life by going white-water rafting down the Grand Canyon with her daughter. But Kate is reluctant to take the risk.

That is, until her friend Marion proposes a pact: if Kate will face the rapids, each woman will do one thing in the next year that scares her. Kate agrees, with one provision—she didn’t get to choose her challenge, so she gets to choose theirs. Whether it’s learning to let go of the past or getting a tattoo, each woman’s story interweaves with the others, forming a seamless portrait of the power of female friendships.

Amazon.com Review

"Moving, touching, wonderfully written, inspiring to read." -Garth Stein, author of The Art of Racing in the Rain

At an intimate, festive dinner party in Seattle, six women gather to celebrate their friend Kate's recovery from cancer. Wineglass in hand, Kate strikes a bargain with them. To celebrate her new lease on life, she’ll do the one thing that's always terrified her: white-water rafting. But if she goes, all of them will also do something they always swore
they’d never do—and Kate is going to choose their adventures.

Shimmering with warmth, wit, and insight, *Joy for Beginners* is a celebration of life: unexpected, lyrical, and deeply satisfying.

**Author Q&A with Erica Bauermeister**

**Q:** What compelled you to write *Joy for Beginners*?

**A:** A few years ago, my sister-in-law, who has been part of a band for years, told me that she was going to celebrate her 50th birthday by singing her first solo concert. There was something so bold and liberating in her declaration, especially as it came from someone who is actually quite shy. I loved the audacity of it, the courage behind it, and it gave me the idea for a book. In the end, a group of seven women characters showed up in my imagination, ranging in age and personality and facing an equally eclectic group of challenges, but that first idea of reaching beyond what is comfortable remained the same.

**Q:** When you gave readings from your previous book, *The School of Essential Ingredients*, you sometimes mentioned the idea for this new novel, and received a strong reaction from the women in your audiences. What did they say?

**A:** I think many of us want to stretch ourselves—try something new, face a fear, break out of a role or a rut we have fallen into. Sometimes we just need an excuse (or a good, firm shove) to get ourselves to do it. I see *Joy for Beginners* providing that inspiration, by showing readers ordinary, complicated people pushing themselves into new and different territories. I’ve talked with several book clubs that have decided to read the book and do their own set of challenges at the same time, and I think that’s a wonderful idea.

**Q:** The mysterious power of food to heal and to bring people back to their essential selves was a central theme of your first book. Your new book is not focused on food, yet you see a strong connection between the two books. What is it?

**A:** As with *The School of Essential Ingredients*—where the focus was food but the point was all the emotional and mental revelations that occurred before, during and because of cooking—the emotional center of *Joy for Beginners* lies in what the women learn through their challenges, even more than the challenges themselves. As a result, the challenges range from the overtly and physically demanding to ones that might seem simple on the surface. As I was writing, I was thinking—what are we truly afraid of? For some, it might mean climbing a mountain or sky diving, but my guess is that for many people fear is often contained within something far less obvious. As Eudora Welty said: “all serious daring starts from within.”

**Q:** Your books are in many ways a celebration of the senses. Why is there such a strong emphasis on the senses in your work?

**A:** I think our senses are one of the greatest gifts we have been given, and that our lives only become richer by paying attention to them. Most of us spend so much of our days facing a screen – computer, phone or television. What a delight to remember that we live in bodies with fingers that touch and tongues that taste and noses that have the power to take us, with one inhalation, back in time or into the presence of someone we once loved.

**Q:** Which of your characters are you most like?

**A:** I get asked that question a lot. The truth, as I think is the same for many authors, is that they are all me and none
of them are me. I made a promise to myself a long time ago that I wouldn’t write any character that I couldn’t feel empathy with—which meant I had to get into their heads and understand how they thought. What surprised me was that it was often the characters that were least like me who really surprised me into empathy.

Photo of Erica Bauermeister © Susan Doupe

Product Description

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