



S2:E5 – Ruth Coates | The Power of Writing

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Beth Stallwood: Welcome to the Work Joy Jam podcast. I'm Beth Stallwood with your host and founder of Create Work Joy. Today, I am joined by the wonderful Ruth Coates and I was introduced to Ruth by another one of our podcast guests. And she is psychotherapist as somebody who's really started to work on, on has an amazing program that helps people with their challenges, the struggles with things that they need to work through via writing as therapy.

[00:01:05] And I thought, wow. What a really interesting perspective to come on and talk a little bit more about this and to think about how that can help to bring us some Work Joy as well. So I really hope you enjoy this conversation with Ruth. I know I did lots of great hints and tips and I'll pop on at the end to give you some of my takeaways.

[00:01:31] Hello, welcome to the Work Joy Jam podcast. I'm joined today by the fantastic Ruth Coates who has the most amazing backgrounds. I'm really interested to dig into it and understand where she gets her joy from and where she can tell us a little bit of her advice. But rather than me introduce her, it's almost much better if she introduces herself.

[00:01:55] So Ruth over to you, tell us a bit about you, where you've come from, what you do and how you got to where you are today.

Ruth Coates: [00:02:03] Lovely. Hi, Beth. It's great to chat to you today. Thanks for having me on. I'm a psychotherapist. , and I'm based in east Lothian, sunny east Lothian, a little town, just, half an hour south of Edinburgh.

So that's where I'm based and I've been a psychotherapist for about 11 years, I actually qualified. Pregnant with my first child. So that was a heavy time. I've been practicing pretty much ever since, in various different sectors, but my, my career has really been in the voluntary sector actually the whole time.

[00:02:41] So kind of 23 years and counting, and the mental health and social justice sector in various roles, I've worked with. In homelessness and I've worked in employability, mental health, advocacy, and befriending. I've worked with postnatal, depression and family therapy project. So it's been really a mixed bag.

[00:03:01] And most recently I've been, I'm a trauma therapist for the Edinburgh rape crisis centers. And that's actually coming to an end quite soon. But I really had taken all that experience into my private psychotherapy work, which has been bubbling along, I can say for about 10 years alongside that, 10-11 years, , And so I'm finding what I've found over those years is that I've gravitated more towards creative ways of working with clients.

[00:03:30] I see clients one-to-one and over the last year or two, I've really developed, more creative ways. So at the moment I'm. thick in the middle of a writing, a therapeutic writing course. And this is something I've been doing for just over a year now, so it's kind of joining, writing and therapy together.

And I'm also been dabbling with a bit of movement too. So I'm almost a qualified animal flow instructor too. So there's a few things going on, but it's, and it's been a really amazing journey. Actually, I'm constantly learning, constantly being challenged, and really just learning most actually from the people that I support. That's where I learned the most.

Beth Stallwood: [00:04:13] Ye. It's such an amazing background and I kind of really want to just say thank you for doing that work because I think it's really important work and it's not work that everybody can do that. Everyone feels able to do, but supporting some of the most vulnerable people is a fantastic thing to offer to people with all of your skills and abilities.

[00:04:32] So thank you for that. And I'm so interested in this and I was scribbling some notes down, and then I realized that I was doing shorthand for psychotherapist and calling it psycho and thinking probably not the best thing to write. I'm really fascinated and we're going to, I'm going to dig into this in a minute about how you're combining creativity and movement with therapy, because I know a lot of people, probably including myself, we have a very stereotypical view of what therapy might look like. And I think it's, isn't it for all the media and stuff like that. It's like you're laying on a sofa and someone's digging into your deepest, darkest past. And, uh, I, it's really interesting to hear different, innovative ways. I have no idea. So I'm going to get you to tell me what animal flow is. I mean, I like, I love animals, so whenever anyone says animals, I'm like, ye, I'm on board, even though I have no idea what that is.

[00:05:23] So tell me a little bit more, first of all, about this idea of bringing the hybrid of creativity and therapy together. And what led you down that direction and how does it work? Tell us more.

Ruth Coates: Do you know what Beth that's really helped me put a little piece in place, actually, because I think when you talked about like the stereotypical view of counseling and psychotherapy, I think what I've done over these last few years is really liberated myself from that stereotype by like following my own intuition about what works with people and what people really want, like that human interaction, which is actually about creativity and maybe not the creativity we immediately jumped to. It's not about art and necessarily it's not about kind of being really good at drawing or, you know, in drama and things like that.

[00:06:10] It's maybe not, I think creativity is far more commonplace in everyday than we think. And I can get into that in a bit if you like, but where, where the writing comes from for me is it's. Do you know when you kind of get to a point in your life and you look back and you realize why you did certain things that you maybe didn't at the time....

[00:06:28] **Beth Stallwood:** A total a-ha moment – oh that's why! 12 years later, we now understand to major disposition at the time we didn't know what we were doing.

[00:06:38] **Ruth Coates:** Yes just kind of blindly going forward, going. Ye, this feels okay. So I did, I actually did English literature and this is why I don't come from Edinburgh, but I moved from Darlington the Northeast of England to go to Edinburgh university. And I did English literature there, which I only chose and was very grateful to, you know, very privileged to, to get that place because [00:07:00] I love it. Cause I love English literature. I love, I've always loved reading, always love writing and what the piece that kind of fell into place for me, that kind of light bulb moment that we talked about is that I realized the reason why I love it all is because it's always about relationship.

[00:07:13] It's all about human relationships and the study of English literature in particular is about really the study of empathy about what's going on in people's minds and what's going on in relationship dynamics and families and histories. And, and that was my a moment. That's that was my preparation for becoming a counselor becoming a psychotherapist. That was really, you know, it's not always a formal route, is it? And I could, I could quite easily say to you, oh yeah, that was just something I did. It was kind of, I wish I'd done something else at university, but I don't, you know, and know that that was part of my training really.

[00:07:50] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:07:50] So interesting. I think about that for myself sometimes. Like you, you don't always see the connections when you're going through it. You see the connections in reverse, like when you're looking back, but I've never sat down and considered this. And like you've slightly blown my mind a little bit now around the idea that actually, when you look at literature, it is all about empathy, family and history.

[00:08:09] That's what happens in every book, every novel that I read and I'm like, wow, ok, never even thought about it like that. So thank you.

[00:08:18] **Ruth Coates:** It's wonderful. It's like escaping into a different world. Isn't it? But one of my, one of my counseling tutors actually on my diploma, one of the things he said to us all at one point, which really stuck in my mind was the best thing you can do, it was actually just before we began and people were trying to be keen beans and saying, you know, what can we read? What texts can we read to prepare for this course? And he said, read it. And that was just, oh wow. I can read novels and I just thought that was great homework of...

[00:08:48] **Beth Stallwood:** Having fun!

[00:08:50] **Ruth Coates:** [00:08:50] Doing what you love. So yes I've just naturally carried that on in different ways and you know, being an avid reader that whole time and looking for support and inspiration from books as well. It's not just an escape. It's a kind of real nourishment for me. But I've also used writing quite intuitively in my one-to-one psychotherapy for years.

[00:09:14] So I'll talk about. You know, we've been using things like the unwritten letter, the unsent letter, sorry, we'll write it. Or the person will go away and write it, my client, and then they'll either burn it or bin it or shred it, or, but the whole idea is that they don't send it or I'll encourage people to journal, at the end of a session maybe, or once a week, to support the therapeutic growth.

[00:09:41] And to support the sessions actually. So writing's always been there in my therapeutic work. It's just never been quite centralized in this way that I'm doing now and really naming it, naming the, kind of the therapeutic value of it and the beauty and the joy of it actually.

Beth Stallwood: [00:10:00] So tell me a bit more, cause I love, I, you know, I love to write as well and I love to read, so I'm totally on board with the idea of it. I love the idea of the unsent letter. Tell me a bit more about what that is, because I think that could be an exercise that a lot of people who are listening would like, I'd quite like to do that. So give us a little tip about how we could do something in that world.

Ruth Coates: So when people come to a therapeutic session.

[00:10:26] You know, they, as often with some kind of frustration, some kind of unspoken truth that they want to get off their chest and express. And actually it's, it's brilliant being listened to and being heard by a therapist, but sometimes we need to direct it out of ourselves towards the person, but that person might not, you know, might not really want to, you know, send that letter, have that in there kind of environment, make you let that person receive it for whatever reason and they might actually not be around anymore that person. So whether it's [00:11:00] about anger or that it's about love or sadness. There's still that directional energy in writing a letter and addressing it to that person from your heart and soul, and then deciding what to do with that letter next to whether it's folding it away and putting it in the back of your diary or in a drawer somewhere, or actually, saying now I'm going to ceremoniously burn this thing, you know, you get to decide and let it go. Yeah, it's a real, and I really believe this about writing. It's a transformational experience. The, there is neuroscience behind this actually, Beth...

[00:11:39] **Beth Stallwood:** Tell me more because I love to nerd out a bit on neuroscience.

[00:11:41] **Ruth Coates:** It's brilliant isn't it so do I..

[00:11:45] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:11:45] I mean, I don't understand half of it, but I like the simple version.

[00:11:54] **Ruth Coates:** [00:11:54] Well basically putting words to our feelings, lights up the brain in a really supportive and transformative way. It makes a change happen.

[00:12:05] So it takes us from point A to point B faster than it. The thought with our feelings, not really naming them. And for me, we can name them verbally with another, in a safe and confidential way or we can name them really powerfully by writing it down. And there is a nearest scientific link with that, the way your brain, uh, the act of writing. It's a physical act writing, it's a physical activity. So there is a connection, a neurological connection between your hand basically, and your brain, so as a, it's almost like a flow state, so you're kind of fully wired, fully connected, and there's the part of our brain, the amygdala that is the kind of fire alarm in our brain. So when we're, what they've noticed is that if we write a name, our feelings in writing that activity in the amygdala, that kind of stress response quiets and what they were really I'm amazed by and these tests and these experiments where that part of the frontal cortex. So the front of your brain lit up. That's really about processing information. So other kinds of stress response went down the understanding when up and I think that's what we've been doing ever since we could, we could write, you know, we've

been helping ourselves resourcing ourselves to move through emotional change. That's why I brought together as writing and therapy to really specifically harness on that, those resources that we have, to actually help ourselves.

[00:13:36] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:13:36] So interesting. And ye, that, that neuroscience thing about I've been really amazed at that, that link between the brain and the hand, like writing stuff, physical stuff.

[00:13:45] So sometimes when I, you know, coaching people, I'm encouraging them to do stuff. I actually encouraged them to write with a pen and paper rather than type stuff. I think that happens that now, I don't think it's all proven whether it's different if you type it or not, but there's something about the connection of pen and paper and your brain. And I definitely feel that I know when I write stuff is I do feel calmer. I do feel able to process things. I feel like my more logical brain versus my stress brain comes into play. So I can totally relate to the science there. I can, I can think. Ye, that that's really interesting. And I love the idea of being able to kind of name your emotions in that way and being able to connect and understand them.

[00:14:30] **Ruth Coates:** [00:14:30] And it's I mean, there's so many, it's almost kind of limitless what you can do in therapeutic writing the different styles, the different creative tasks and exercises that you can, help people through. So there's the letter and there's something that I call note to self, where you direct the letter to a part of yourself or to a future self or a past version of yourself.

[00:14:51] And that can be really supportive and, and revealing actually and then there's free writing where you just go with an object in the room when you describe it. And then you realize you're writing about memories and associations, and you know, really take, time to make sure that people are relaxed in sessions as well.

[00:15:11] So that we do some relaxation and meditation techniques within therapeutic writing sessions so that people are most available to themselves so they can get out what they most need, it's quite unique ...

[00:15:23] **Beth Stallwood:** I've done free writing before I do it quite, quite a lot, actually, if I just need, if I feel like there's something on my mind, but I don't know what it is sometimes I just sit down and see what comes out and it's almost like you don't know what's going to come.

[00:15:40] You have no idea. And suddenly it's there and you're like, oh, that's what it. You might be staring at like some flowers or something, and then suddenly realize that what you're thinking about is something completely different.

[00:15:53] **Ruth Coates:** [00:15:53] It's incredible. What's just there at our fingertips. .

[00:15:58] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:15:58] This is one of the challenges there, isn't it is that time and space to actually do it, to reflect, to use that opportunity and those resources to make it happen.

So interesting. I love it. I could dig for hours and hours and talk to more about it. And I'm going to talk to you more about a minute, but now I, in my head is "find out what animal flow is."

So what I want to know is this other side of things that you're training towards, what is that all about.

[00:16:27] **Ruth Coates:** [00:16:27] You know, what I love is when it's people's reactions to animal flow. Anything about animal flow. I just love like just leaving a bit of space and going and seeing what the reaction is because people have a really kind of funny idea of it or what they immediately leave to is that I'm kind of making animal noises and things like that.

[00:16:46] But some people think it's yoga, and just different animal poses, and yeah, you could be forgiven for thinking that because of the name, but really it's , it's, it's a really dynamic body strength practice. And it's the guy actually doesn't come from a yoga background. The creator of it is a guy called Mike Fitch. I think he's been doing it for 10 to 15 years or so. And it's actually gathering pace now around the world or instructors around the world. It's quite a movement, but he's I think his background is in more martial arts and break dancing and things like that so it's all flow-based movement and there are animal, ,postures that you take up.

[00:17:31] So there's beast and there's crab and scorpion and ape, but you join all these beautiful, like graceful, strong, like us. These are strong movements, like there is quite a lot of muscle strength, core strength, to make them, uh, you, you joined them up into these beautiful, endless, flows, limitless kind of variations of flows.

[00:17:53] And do you know what the most amazing thing about this Beth, is that what, what I find is that it's a similar flow state to writing for me and that I don't think about anything else, you know, I just kind of I'm in it. So I'm absorbed by it when I'm doing my animal flow. And when I'm teaching people, cause I just started doing.

[00:18:11] Small group sessions I can see that for them too, that they it's a kind of moving, but we're relaxing and kind of zoning out and people can progress through it really quickly. They can find their own strength and realize that actually they're, they've got potential to increase their skill at this and get better and better.

[00:18:31] So it's really rewarding to see. So I don't see the two are separate. I don't see writing and this animal flow of movement, the separate see them as really connected because there's both physical movement and a kind of flow to it as well.

[00:18:47] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:18:47] Sold me on it. I totally, I'm going to come to one of your classes

[00:18:50] **Ruth Coates:** [00:18:50] Watch some videos, animal flow videos, it just kind of mesmerizing it. just

[00:18:57] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:18:57] It sounds brilliant. And I love the idea of anything that I mean.... The modern day world, especially in the modern day world of work is very brave. Heavy isn't it it's very much, you have to be on it all the time.

[00:19:12] You've got emails flying in and out or things that you have to do. I have never yet met someone who said they've got an, an average amount of things on their to do list. They're always telling me it's too much. And it there's so much to do. Where you can find something that gets you in that not thinking about anything else, state.

Ruth Coates: Back in your body.

Yeah like, I always know for me, there are two things that do that and I'd love to add some more things to it. Meditation doesn't do it for me. It doesn't work well. I haven't made it work yet. I'm not going to say it doesn't work. There might be a day when it does work, but for me, if I play the piano or if I go for a swim, I am in that state like that, those are the two kinds of physical things that switch my brain into a totally different gear into that complete flow state. And I think partly because when you're swimming, it's like let's not breathe in water and drown. So there's that side of it.

[00:20:08] You just get really focused on the physical, when I'm playing the piano, I'm really bad at it. So I'm getting better, but I'm, I'm not an excellent piano player. So I really have to concentrate on what I'm doing and I have to concentrate on my hands and my head. So there's no way that anything else can fit in my brain when I'm doing it.

I'm, I'm kind of loving the idea of that, that physicality idea of moving around. I also wasn't the same. Is this something around like making animal noises and stuff? Cause I have heard about things like scream therapy and might

[00:20:39] **Ruth Coates:** [00:20:39] I have a friend who's a laughter therapist and I still haven't done it with her, but she, she keeps threatened to come and laugh with me, but I find that really intriguing. What was I going to say there about, the animal? Well, I'll come back to me. It will come back to me. Oh, is it was your piano playing?

[00:21:03] What was the other thing you were saying about your swimming? Swimming? Yeah, they are both moved to sensory aren't they? So your brain has to respond in a certain way to get your body on board. So there's that unity? I think that's the word actually, is that unity that's required. You need to, you need to be moving your muscles at the same time as thinking, and if you're in that unit and I guess that's what yoga is about, isn't it that's yoga does actually mean unity of mind and body.

[00:21:28] And I think that's what that's being bringing together in my writing therapy, , group is that unity of mind and body. And I do actually really, call that out, I address that in the sessions as well. Like I ask people to check in with how they're feeling physically, because emotions are physical. So that, you know, regularly ask people to check in on that because they, they tell you, nobody is this resource that we just overlook, all the time, if we're just walking brains, but actually there's so much to learn from our bodies.

Beth Stallwood: [00:22:01] Ye. And I think, ye, if you think about how some people kind of turn off and relax, it's like, I know so many people who, if they, if they need to quiet in the brain, we'll go for a run or, you know, will do some meditation or we'll do some yoga. And what is that? What are those things? And I also think that we're probably many of us, in fact, they're probably guilty of this is we totally forget about our bodies until something goes wrong with them. Yes. And they're like, oh yeah, I've got a sore shoulder because I've been sat at my desk for too many days in a row and haven't moved around enough and it's like, oh yeah, I should have done that. But taking that active time to join brain and body together can be really powerful.

Ruth Coates: Yeah it can be, like I say, I think we've got a lot to learn from our bodies. And one of the animal flow instructors that taught me actually said, uh, don't forget your skin suit, which is something I think because of the way it sounds it really stuck in my brain, but don't forget your skin suits really helps me.

Beth Stallwood: I love that you skin suit. It does remind me of some things that we probably shouldn't talk about on here with skin suits and things, but I think it's, now we pass that on. I'm going to pass it onto others and it's worth thinking, well, what are we thinking about our skin suits the questions.

Beth Stallwood: [00:23:18] Tell me a bit more, because I'm really interested in linking this to joy in your life and thinking about how powerful having some joy is.

[00:23:27] Maybe for you personally, or for what you, you know, w with your clients that you work with, what are the sort of things that they're getting out of having some writing based therapy or some flow, animal flow based therapy? What is it that's working for them and how is it helping them to create some more joy?

Ruth Coates: [Great question. I think that what I'm hearing, cause people are very willing to give me feedback about this, which is different from one-to-one. Psychotherapy, they're kind of more forthcoming with how this has helped them, which I think is kind of really telling in itself just how kind of impactful and transformative it can be.

[00:24:06] So what they're telling me is that it's like, there are lots of wow moments, lots of, kind of connective pieces. So a chance to kind of pause and reflect and realize how you're feeling, and learn from yourself as well, they're, they're kind of what people are saying is that they recognize themselves more in the writing.

It's like they're writing and then going, oh, that's me getting to know themselves, in a different way, and I think that that is a source of joy. That kind of there's a poem, what's it, who's it by it'll come back to me. It's about meeting yourself in the mirror. It's not the Michael Jackson song.

[00:24:54] It's me seeing yourself in the mirror. It's, the final words are basically sit down and feast on your life. And that is a real, that's what I really want to offer people in the therapeutic writing is actually they come and meet themselves. And that's what that's, what people are saying is that kind of pause that kind of slowing down and pause.

And tuning into what it is, who they are, their identity, what it is they want from life, how they can actually make some real changes as well. We pay, we take time in these sessions to actually look at the practical changes that people can make, that we maybe don't even give ourselves time to think about.

So it's an empowering experience for people. And a lot of people that I hear from are actually have actually started. They might not have had a journaling practice before, but they've started to kind of spontaneously write on a more regular basis in their life. And that's helped them find more meaning and more fulfillment in the, in the days.

Beth Stallwood: [00:25:54] So from the, some of the self discovery things, also some really practical things about their lives and how they can change or do what they want to do and focus where they want to focus. I love when anything becomes practical and helps people actually do what they want to do, but you're right unless you do the discovery that first, it's pretty hard to decide what those practical things.

Ruth Coates: [00:26:16] Yes this isn't just, and I think that is where, where the joy is the kind of tangible, this can have an effect on my life. Like I can, I feel empowered in order to make this change because they've connected it up.

[00:26:26] They've made, they've looked at themselves reflected and had a bit self-discovery and I, and I do make special effort to connect that up with then going out, you know, going out with a writing space and out into the life and for what, what needs to change then? , Because we are our own resource where our best resource, that's how I approach my psychotherapy.

You're the only expert on yourself. So you're the one that's best place to make any changes that you need to. And I really do think that writing, we can find ourselves really empowered by writing in this way.

Beth Stallwood: It's really interesting. I believe it as well. We are our best resource, but if we don't take the time or have the tools or know how to do it, we can get into that situation where we feel a bit stuck or a bit like we don't know what to do. So it sounds like this type of process could really help people to get unstuck to think about what do I do next to rediscover themselves almost?

Ruth Coates: [00:27:24] Ye, I think a huge part of it is about curiosity, actually, Beth, because when you said stuckness there, when I moved the kind of beginning stages of my work, whether it's one-to-one or in writing therapy groups, I didn't actually an animal flow curiosity about your body is people are at that point, whether they are ready to change something, they're still feeling stuck, still feeling frustrated.

But they're like, they're on the verge of like, okay, what next? And they're starting to feel curious. And I think that's what joy is really underpinned by one of the things is that kind of childlike curiosity about the world about themselves. Like they can ask questions and they could wonder. And that's what I harness in my work is that, that curiosity and we try and feed that and nourish it.

And I think that's what then starts to help people broaden horizons and look at different perspectives. And that helps them make changes. Like the curiosity is where it begins.

Beth Stallwood: [00:28:21] Yeah, I think the wonder that you said that really stuck with me, it's like just having that chance and opportunity to wonder about yourself or wonder about your past or your future and what do you want is a really valuable thing to have? And it also makes me think about the other version of wonder, which is how kind of going for a walk and thinking about this stuff is also really powerful as well. Isn't it? That whole getting outside, doing stuff. Anything where you've got that physical mind connection, it just really makes me connect.

Ruth Coates: That's the other bit that wonder. And one day I actually do walking therapy as well, which I hadn't mentioned. So there's some woods nearby, which my husband's got a gym in the

woods. So, I now have a shepherd's hut down there which is going to be a therapeutic space when we can, when we can get back to that kind of work, one-to-one work.

[00:29:12] But, that's my base at the moment for doing walking therapy from, and you're absolutely right. It's that again, it's that kind of joining together of movement. And at wondering, wondering and wondering, maybe that's what I should call it.

Beth Stallwood: [00:29:25] There you go. Take it.

[00:29:31] And I love that and I think one of the things....If I say the term wander in my head, and I'm thinking about the wandering versus the walking site and thinking about the brain side of it for a second, Is if I'm wondering about something, I don't place any judgment on what I'm thinking about. I don't try and stop myself it's just allowing that free space. So even the word I find quite freeing.

Ruth Coates: Yes. I really agree with you. And I think it's, one, like I say, wonder and joy are such childlike things, but we think that they're not for adults. They're not serious enough for something. And actually I think that's where, that's what we're really missing out on that's where growth is.

[00:30:08] That's where we can adapt and change is when we've become quite playful. And, in my writing, again, I encourage people to be compassionate for themselves and self compassion. You know, it can be compassionate for others, but we were not so good at being compassionate towards ourselves. So that's what I cultivate.

[00:30:26] And I think that's part of wonder as well. They kind of go hand in hand.

Beth Stallwood: It's really interesting because like the terms wonder and joy you're right. Are associated with a more carefree, like childlike state of being. But I always think that that grownups are just children with more responsibility, right.

[00:30:45] We haven't really changed and people will say to me, oh, Beth, you're doing something about work joy. Is their really joy? Is that serious enough? And I'm like, well, I'm super serious about the importance of joy in life. So I think it is serious. I think it's an important thing for us to consider and not just to spend all our days miserably or gloomily walking around thinking, what am I doing here?

[00:31:08] Why am I doing this? Because. Feel that feeling, even if it's only for a moment can just light you up the feeling of joy, the feeling of wonder the feeling of curiosity are all things that get humans, whatever age you are excited about life and able to do things and be creative in your thinking. So for me, when I say wonder, I felt I get a very different vibe for, if I say go and think about something, I feel like when I think about something, it has to be quite structured and formal and like it has to have an outcome. If I just go wander about something, it doesn't matter where it goes.

[00:31:41] **Ruth Coates:** It's s far more open. Isn't it? You know, it's more permissive you can kind of exactly. You can go where you like with it.

[00:31:51] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:31:51] Good bit of freedom there..., oh, so interesting. So I'm thinking now, so you do there's the writing therapy, you've got the animal flow therapy, which I'm totally, totally going to get on board with.

[00:32:05] I love trying new things. That's part of my curiosity. And so I'll just try it, give it a go and walking therapy, and I'm loving the combination of this. And maybe just, dig into this a little bit deeper is this idea that combining anything creative. And you said earlier, and I totally agree with it.

Creativity. Isn't just about our traditional views on it, around it's kind of arts and a lot of us, have the impression I know so many people do that. They say, oh, no, I'm not creative. And when you boil it down, it's because they weren't very good at art at school or some not even that, they weren't very good.

Somebody told them they weren't very good at art school and suddenly their whole world of like, gosh, cutoff the world of creativity. So talk to me a little more creativity and the bigger picture thing.

Ruth Coates: [00:32:49] I think we, we create all the time, but we're, we're kind of pretty closed to it. We don't like I say, like you just said, actually we're especially our, education's got a lot to blame for that.

[00:33:02] I think, you know, in, in telling us what is creative and what isn't, or if we're a creative person or not, and people tend to talk about themselves in that way. I'm not very creative. So they dismiss opportunities. Or they need to be good at something before they even try something, you know it, so it can really kind of narrow your world when we have the carry, those labels around with us.

[00:33:21] Creativity to me means transforming one thing to another, you know, making a meal, making a brilliant cup of coffee, you know, pretty good at tinkering about in the garden or you know, that there are skill everywhere, human skill, but we tend to think about the kind of fine arts, you know, being good at drawing or sculpting or, you know, even, you know, even good at writing. I'm not very good at writing, so I can't write, therefore, you know, they kind of, we close opportunities down for ourselves all the time, but I think being human, creative, I think our lives, you know, growth, aging, birth, pregnancy, all of these things.

[00:34:06] You know, if you, if you, if you gave me any one example of human activity, it would be creative. Community is creative because we, you know, there's this "Writing Unbound", the therapeutic writing course I have just now we're right at the beginning and we're creating the community together we're checking each other out and we are making ourselves a wee bit vulnerable to see what happens next.

[00:34:27] And that really is what creativity is about for me. It's about, Ooh, like that wonder again, what what's going to happen next. So when, when I, when I think about it that way it's really liberating because I see people as creative entities and, and if we're creative, then we've got so much still to learn so much still to grow and we can really, , experience more joy in the world. I really believe that.

Beth Stallwood: [00:34:55] I love it. I totally agree with you is that we're all creative, but some we've been shut down in some ways to think like that and it underpins

Ruth Coates: [00:35:05] That's what, no, no, that's what under pins the Psychotherapeutic model, that I am trained in anyway, is that we are capable of change that personality for example, isn't fixed. It's something that we, you know, we're not fixing our identities. We can change and adapt all

the time and actually to be healthy, we should be, we should be creating, ourselves, our relationships, our wellbeing or habits, and you all the time.

Beth Stallwood: I do think there's something again about, you know, getting older where we assume that we're, we're kind of set don't we where it's like that whole, oh, well I'm here now. This is who I am, but that's actually probably another 20 different versions of us that could be there could be great and exciting and enjoyable if we opened ourselves up to some of these opportunities or to. Just even sometimes just having a neutral base. It's not like you say, I'm super creative. You don't go from, I'm not very creative, so I'm super, but maybe just. It's something I can do. It's something I can try. And I do think, and I'm sure I've talked about this before, but this idea that just because we're not good at something doesn't mean we can't enjoy it.

[00:36:15] I think we get somehow that because a lot of recognition in the world comes from when you get good at something. So you get promoted or you get a new opportunity in your career when you're good at something you might win medals or, you know, certificates when you're a kid, if you're good at something, I feel we have a really, maybe false association with being good, being joyful.

[00:36:40] And actually I'm learning even more now that I get a lot of joy from trying new things, even when I'm not good at them not being good at something, isn't the joy.

[00:36:55] **Ruth Coates:** [00:36:55] Yes, absolutely. Just trying something new, even if, or not even trying something new, but doing something that you love. Exactly. Even if you're not good by world standards, you know, just it's that flow state again, I think we're back to that.

[00:37:09] It's like, what helps you just feel in that kind of, space of freedom and self-expression, and whatever that is, that's your joy? You don't have to reach any specific level. I do think we are conditioned and, uh, a lot of the kind of work of therapy is to kind of undo a lot of what's done under a lot of those stories that we tell about ourselves and start to tell a new story.

And especially, especially around aging, maybe it's the age amount, but I think that it's, it's amazing to see, adults go. Oh yeah I can, I can give myself permission to go and try out this new thing, or I can actually, I do need to have a look at this career that I don't want to kind of carry on working in this way when it's not, it's not satisfying to me and it's actually making me feel really unwell that people can, [00:38:00] uh, change, uh, even as they grow old. And I read something recently actually about it. Oh, what is that? I wish I could remember the quote, but it was really, it made you really just want to age and grow old because it's like, you don't stop changing until your very last breath, you know?

It's something like that.

[00:38:24] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:38:24] Embrace the change. Amazing. I could talk for hours more, cause I want to go into all these different types of therapies that you could offer and basically get a free therapy session while we are on the podcast. But we won't do that because I think it's been amazing listening to you and understanding how were these things connected together?

I love it when we talk about stuff that it's not like this one box over here and this one box over here, but it's actually a giant web of stuff, all links together that we can really consider. So before we finish

off, are you okay if I ask you some quick fire questions? Okay. First one what is one thing that's always guaranteed to bring you personally at a little bit of work joy.

Ruth Coates: Oh, I think it's connection. I think it's having connection with another person like being able to be seen and heard and known with someone, whether that's a client or a colleague or anyone, I think it's that, and that can be. Through a conversation or it can be through an email. I think it's all about for me always has been about that human relationship, that connectedness.

[00:39:42] So I try every day to have that kind of real conversation with someone and it can sometimes be about challenge, but it's about being met, so yeah, no, has that question. I've had.

[00:39:56] **Beth Stallwood:** Brilliant. And that importance of that connection and, being able to have a conversation or talk about something or email about something is ye.

It's reaching out of what, what has worked or ye, love it. What book are you currently reading?

Ruth Coates: [00:40:11] Oh, my goodness. I've got such, I'm one of those people that have like a stack of books by the bedside table and aspirational stack and I'm oh yeah. Anyway, I collect them. I'm a bit of a book hoarder.

[00:40:25] Absolutely. You know, when, when we can, I think we can now actually here is my absolute dream is to just go and sit in a bookshop and with the best coffee and just spend hours. That's my smile. I love to do. B by my bed is a book, called Shuggie Bain. It's by an author called Douglas Stewart. I think it won the Booker prize last year.

I've got a tendency to read some quite dark stuff, and this is, uh, not an easy tale. It's a bit of a tough read about growing up in Glasgow in the 1980s. Uh, ye, but it's incredible. It's beautifully written. So that's my, my fiction that I've got at the moment and my nonfiction is a book called the Power of Ritual. I don't know whether you've heard of that. It's by a guy called Casper tur Kuile and really it's about turning everyday activities into into soulful. I think he calls them soulful activities. So it's really about what I do. It's about things like writing and meditating, if that's your thing, moving, but making rituals out of them.

[00:41:33] So making time and space to really give attention to them and your day and get the squeeze, the most juice out of them. It's really a great book.

Beth Stallwood: Great. Because I am also a book obsessive. I made a thing a few years ago. So whenever, when I ran anyone recommended me a book, I just go and order it straight away, which is why my pile is massive..

[00:41:53] I just love that. I love books. So ye, I'm totally onboard with that. They sound amazing. Thank you for sharing those. One thing I'd like to ask you is what's the best or most useful bit of advice that someone has given you in your life that you find yourself always coming back to.

Ruth Coates: [00:42:12] This is so easy because it's something I hear now myself saying to others so much as well, and in my work and, you know, friends, and if there's any difficult times that friends are having and stuff, and actually to myself, it's one of those ones that come back and it was a supervisor that said it to me.

So as a counselor, as a therapist, I see a supervisor every month who I take my, that my stuff too. , and it's an incredible support, someone I don't work with anymore, but she said at the end of the session, as I was leaving, just going through a door, she said, she just tapped me on the shoulder.

[00:42:46] It's a really memorable moment. She just said you have your own resources, and it was just a moment of such empowerment. It was almost like something switched in me. And it's like a real recognition that actually, I'm walking around with all my skills and my knowledge and my energy and just what we've been talking about. Actually it's only ever us that can make the change, but we can look to each other and play and joy to be empowered to do so you have your own resources. It really comes back to me time and time.

[00:43:21] **Beth Stallwood:** Love that. And I know that you pass it on as well. So that's a great thing to think about and on that...And I would love if you've got one thing that you think people in our audience could go and do really easy thing today, tomorrow the next day, maybe build it as a habit or a ritual, as you're saying there about that, but, that you think would help them to get a bit more work joy. What would you recommend?

Ruth Coates: [00:43:45] Oh, it's going to be really obvious, but I would really encourage people to write. And I don't really subscribe to you know, the kind of daily journaling or the gratitude diary. That's not really my thing. It's the way I write is I will, write whatever comes up on any given day. And if I look back it's so different, you know, it's sometimes it's an absolute rant and sometimes it's, and sometimes it's just reflections. Sometimes it can be quite philosophical and you know, it's not every day, but it's when I need it. So it's, it's a really kind of loose and easy, , habit that I've built up now that is there. If I need it. And I do often turn to it but writing, you know, I think it's so supportive and it can really build that relationship with yourself that it's perhaps needed to strengthening for you to, squeeze more joy out of life and to do the next, the next right thing.

Beth Stallwood: It's so lovely to hear someone say, you don't have to do it every day and you don't have to do it in this prescribed way. I think there's a lot of noise in the world. As we all know there, isn't on social media and things are saying, no, you must do a gratitude journal. You must do it every day. You must do it at 5:00 AM. You [00:45:00] must do all of these things. And it's so lovely to say, use it when you need it.

Ruth Coates: Not intuitive sense, you know?

Beth Stallwood: It's just much more real and I'm all for the real, like real live in the real world. Not all of these things are going to be able to own it that way.

[00:45:21] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:45:21] Love it. Thank you so much for coming on, where can people find out more about you, your work and get in touch?

[00:45:31] **Ruth Coates:** [00:45:31] Yes, they can. I'm just about to launch my new website. So that's Ruthcoatestherapy.com. That'll be ready very soon and that has details of my, psychotherapy one-to-one work and my therapeutic writing work and soon my animal flow work as well.

And so you'll see my different therapeutic writing products there as well. And I'm also on Instagram @ruthcoatestherapy

[00:45:58] **Beth Stallwood:** [00:45:58] And we will put those details into the show notes and on our social media so that people can click straight through if they want to get on board with me and get your animal flow classes and find out more about you. So, Ruth it's been delightful. Thank you very much for coming on for sharing your story with me and for sharing such great advice.

[00:46:18] **Ruth Coates:** [It's been really wonderful talking to you about, has there been so much fun and really interesting. Thanks so much.

[00:46:24] **Beth Stallwood:** Thank you.

Beth Stallwood: [00:46:30] Thank you for listening to this episode with Ruth Coates. I have so many takeaways from here. The first thing is I'm so excited about maybe going and trying this animal flow thing. It sounds like so much fun. And I personally love trying new things. It's the new and shiny, the exciting, the thing I haven't tried before that always gets me going, so really excited to do that.

[00:46:51] So Ruth won't be able to keep me away. I also think there's some really great practical stuff we can all think about like the unsent letter. What is the stuff that you want to say to somebody that you don't need to send, but maybe helps get it out of your hands or help stop it being an issue for you. I also love the idea of wondering whilst you wander. The idea of walking therapy I find walking massively therapeutic anyway, but the idea of. Conversations while you're doing it. What a great way to consider things. And my final and amazing takeaway here is that one and that she had as advice that she really uses. I love this, which is, is that you have your own resources. And in my head, whenever I think of that, now I'm thinking about Dorothy and the wizard of Oz, and I'm a bit obsessed with the Wizard of Oz and I, I think about it quite a lot, but the idea that Dorothy was already had the resources she needed to get home, she had the magic. And slippers on. And all she had to do was to use them. Now, I obviously don't have a pair of those slippers, although I would love to, but think about this, we do all have our own resources.

[00:47:56] How are we going to use them? What are we going to call upon in different situations? And that one is just really really sticking with me. So I thought I was chatting up with you. Do you look in the show notes to find out more about where you can get in contact with Ruth. Maybe you're interested in the animal flow or the writing as therapy stuff, really great interesting and different ways of thinking about how we can help ourselves. Make sure you're following us CreateWork Joy on all the socials at whichever one suits you, we are on LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. We also have the website www.createworkjoy.com, where you can find out more about the Work Joy Way coaching program, which is 16 week program to help you create and cultivate more joy in your working life.

And upcoming is all Club Work Joy launching later on this year, which is a fabulous developing community of people who are all trying to get more joy in their working life with some inspiration for you all to do that. Thank you very much for listening. Have a great rest of your day.