

JUDAY'S SECRETS TO *Happiness*

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Celebrated actress, wife, and supermom of three **Judy Ann Santos-Agoncillo** shares her tips on how to live your best life—and no, perfection is not required.

IT'S A BIG YEAR FOR JUDY ANN SANTOS-AGONCILLO. The former child star, the angel-faced girl whom many of us first came to know and love as kind-hearted Mara in the hit ABS-CBN drama series *Mara Clara*, is celebrating her 30th year in showbiz. And looking at her now, standing tall and accomplished at 39 years old (she celebrates her birthday on May 11), it's almost impossible to make out any trace of the meek underdog persona of her youth.

Not that she looks any less angelic. The years have been good to her—her rounded face has kept her features soft and young-looking; her skin is clear and glowing; and her smile, if it's possible, has only gotten bigger. It always reaches all the way up to her eyes, and we see her laugh lines—they're natural and hard-earned.

It's just that this Judy Ann, or "Juday," as she is more popularly known, is anything but the girl you feel sorry for. She's gone a long way from being the child who had to work at a young age just so she could continue schooling, or so her family could have something decent to eat. Today, she's a multi-awarded film and TV actress (with around 70 films and a slew of top-rated TV series under her belt), an in-demand celebrity endorser, a successful recording artist (she's

released three albums), a film producer, and most recently, a best-selling cookbook author.

For sure, Juday's life is a lot more comfortable now. She and her husband of eight years, actor Ryan Agoncillo, own a gorgeous family home in Alabang, a beachfront abode in Batangas, and just last year, purchased a property in Las Vegas, Nevada. But more than the houses and the wealth they've acquired, they take most pride in the beautiful family they have built and raised together. They have three children: daughter Yohan (who was adopted at 2 by Juday), now 12, son Lucho, 6, and youngest daughter Luna, 1.

"It's the reality that I've been wanting for the longest time since I was a child," says Juday. "It's not the luxury items, it's not having a big house... Just looking at my children, it makes me happy.

"I think I am at my happiest," she continues. "Simply because kumpleto na ako sa kabuuan, as a woman, as a person. I'm just grateful because for me, I have everything I've wished for."

In between cuddling her youngest daughter and keeping an eye on her two older kids running about the spacious Siren Studios in Makati, Juday opens up about her journey to here and now, and the lessons she's learned along the way.

Text by Elaine Natividad Reyes. Photographs by Ronnie Salvacion. Makeup by Juan Sarte. Hair by Jing Monis. Assisted by Raven Dizon. Fashion styling by Maita Baello and Melville Sy of Gaurator Studio. Assisted by Sharmaine Tanabel and Alex Castillo. Set styling by Jen Innumerable-Suarez. Art direction by Theodore Cruz. On Judy Ann: Dress, Warehouse. On Yohan: Top, Gingersnaps; skirt, Forever 21. On Lucho: Shirt, Gingersnaps; shorts, Mango Kids. On Luna: Top and skirt, Gingersnaps.



"Just looking at my children makes me happy," shares Judy, who's always had a soft spot for little ones. This May, she's returning as the host of the second season of family-oriented game show Bet On Your Baby on ABS-CBN.



Juday reveals that there are *pikon* moments between Lucho and Yohan, and she just assures them it's a normal part of life. "Sasabihin ko na lang, 'Sweetheart, ganu'n talaga ang magkakapatid, nag-aasaran talaga.'"

HAPPINESS SECRET #1: LEARN TO RELAX AND LAUGH MORE.

Charmed as her life may appear on the outside, Juday admits that things can get “chaotic” at home, given that her kids are of varying ages: The youngest is a curious toddler, the second is a school-aged energizer bunny, and the eldest is a girl on the throes of puberty. “But it’s a happy household!” she stresses. “Masaya siya. I never actually expected na, ‘Ah, okay naman pala,’”

Perhaps it’s because she’s at a point in her life when she’s learned to just enjoy the moments as they come, and to simply laugh off the things she cannot control. “Most people say kapag tatlo na yung anak mo, it’s a handful, and you can’t do anything for yourself anymore. But basically, it all boils down to how you organize and handle it on your own pace,” she says.

It also helps that the older children have grown up to be very responsible. “Yohan is very much an Ate to the two. Si Lucho naman, parang na-miss na niya magkaroon ng kalaro, eh nagkataon baby girl pa, so mas gentle siya, mas caring,” shares Juday. “He would even tell me, ‘I love having sisters. I love that I’m the only boy.’”

Juday admits, though, that each kid comes with a unique parenting challenge. For Yohan, it’s watching her transition into a teenager. “You can feel it eh. Parang gusto niya i-fay forward yung buhay niya na maging dalaga na siya.

“When you have pala a child that age, there’s this extra effort...na same wavelength kayo dapat. Kasi you want her to be honest with you, you want her to be comfortable telling her secrets,” she continues. “Siyempre, may mga moments na nag-ca-clash kami. But I have to remind myself na, ‘Hoy Juday, umo-OA [over-acting] ka na.’ Iniisip ko na lang, proseso naman ‘yun [pagdadalaga], anak, hold hands na lang tayo.”

For the other two, the struggle is less emotional or mental, but more physical—it’s keeping up with their endless energy. Lucho’s is typical of a boy his age. But Luna? “Hindi mo siya mapapa-stay put diyan! Si Lucho nu’ng ganyang age, hindi siya ganyan kalikot.”

It’s a good thing Juday is past worrying about every ouchie or boo-boo. “Mas confident lang. ‘Pag may nadapa, ay okay lang ‘yan, marami pa ‘yan,’” she says with a chuckle. “Even si Ryan, hindi na rin siya masyado nagugulat if may insect bites. Extra relaxed na lang yung parenting style.”

Instead of incessant worrying, the couple has shifted their focus to creating more happy memories with each child. “Mas palatawa na lang kami ngayon,” she says, adding that they try to extend this easygoing attitude beyond parenthood. “We learn so much from our children, how to be more understanding and more positive.”

HAPPINESS SECRET #2: TRUST THAT GOD WILL GIVE YOU WHAT YOU NEED AT THE RIGHT TIME.

“When I met Ryan, I was at a time of my life when I really needed a person who’s true and real,” says Juday, who got close to the actor on the set of fantasy series *Krystala* in 2004. “I’ve been working most of my life so hindi ko na alam kung sino yung nagsasabi ng totoo, at kung sino yung nambobola. So nung dumating si Ryan at sobra namang honesty ang naramdaman ko, ‘Ah, ito na pala yung dinasal ko!’ Sa lahat ng mga lalaking nanligaw sa ‘kin, ito lang talaga yung taong naging honest sa ‘kin.”

More than a husband, Ryan is Juday’s ultimate confidante and sounding board on all things—even trivial stuff like what she’s wearing or a hairstyle she’s keen to try. “Sasabihin niya talaga sa ‘yo eh, diretso... regardless if you get hurt, regardless if pumalakpak yung tenga mo,” she says. “I-co-compliment ka niya kung deserve mo ‘yun, pero sasabihin din niya if sobra din namang ‘di maganda yung ginawa mo.”

This walang-plastikan dynamic keeps Juday grounded and sane, and their marriage strong. “I love how he supports me with lambing, and also supports me with a stern attitude that would always wake me up when I get too relaxed,” Juday reveals. “I think more than anything, Ryan brings out the positivity in me. And at the same time, siya yung nag-boo-boost ng confidence ko. Siya talaga ‘yun.”

Cliché as it may sound, but it truly appears that Ryan was made for Juday—and vice versa. “I realized na God will really give you someone you really deserve and you really need,” she says. “Ryan, he would be the first person to say if I am beautiful today... He is very supportive, especially when it comes to building my confidence back, getting back into shape. Basta kasama ko siya, kaya ko gawin kahit ano.”

HAPPINESS SECRET #3: SHARE YOUR BLESSINGS.

Perhaps a reason why Juday is so blessed? She strives to be a blessing to others, and is teaching her children to do the same.

Knowing what it's like to grow up in poverty, Juday is keen on providing well for her kids, but that doesn't mean she's shielding them from the harsh realities of life. "I want them to see na not everyone is as lucky as them. Not everyone gets the chance to eat three times a day, or sleep on a soft bed, with aircon pa," says this mom, whose charitable works include heading Touch A Heart Foundation, which supports Aeta children and families in Zambales. "More than being appreciative of what they have, I want them to know the feeling of sharing, and not be alienated by the people who are less fortunate than them."

This is why as early as now, she's teaching them how to pay it forward. She recounts how recently, when she did her groceries, she saw a struggling woman and her grandchild outside. She got them clothes and a few other necessities.

"Yung mga bata ang pinag-abot ko. Natuwa naman yung mag-lola," she says. "Tapos 'pag sakay namin sa kotse, sabi ni Yohan, 'My heart is aching. There's a pain in my heart.' Si Lucho naman, sabi niya, 'That's a good feeling, Mom, I like this.'"

"It was an accidental charity work, and it gave them that impact already. Feeling ko meron akong mommy award nung araw na 'yun!" she adds with a laugh. Now, Juday is training her kids to regularly sort through their belongings, choose what they want to keep, and decide if they want to sell or donate the others. She quips that it's also a tactic to rid the house of clutter. "Si Lucho, minsan yung mga [water] bottle sa bahay, kino-collect niya, sasabihin niya, 'I'm gonna sell it, and then the money, I will give it to the poor children,'" Juday shares proudly. "Meron nang ganu'ng motivation."

HAPPINESS SECRET #4: YOU CAN'T PLEASE EVERYONE, SO DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME TRYING.

As a public figure for most of her life, Juday has learned to take things with a grain of salt, and to not get affected by everything she sees, hears, or reads especially on social media. But then again, she admits she's still human. "Minsan gusto ko lang pumatol, kasi, hello, tao naman ako. It's not as if I won't get affected diyan sa mga comments niyo na parang napaka-perfect niyo," she says with some feistiness, referring to random bashers and internet trolls.

"Pero hindi kita pagbabantaan, hindi kita susungitan," she adds, her tone mellowing a bit. "Ipaparamdam ko lang sa 'yo na naramdaman kita para quits tayo. Hindi ko lang talaga kayang hindi magpakita ng bwiset."

Her true fans know this: With Juday, what you see is what you get. "I would always say this to my supporters, lalo na 'pag may mga bagong sumasama sa fans' club. 'Ito ako, ha? Okay lang kung hindi mo carry.' May mga nakakaintindi naman, may mga ibang hindi. It's okay kasi ibig sabihin, hindi sila magpapaka-plastic na pakisamahan ako. Ako din, hindi naman ako magbibigay ng time na magbago ng ugali para lang ma-please sila."

On the whole, though, she appreciates getting feedback, as they're from people who take the time to observe what she does and what she says. In fact, she's fine with being corrected—especially when it comes to her English. "Inaamin ko naman, hindi talaga ako magaling mag-English. Marunong naman, hindi lang ako confident," she says.

Ultimately, she just believes she's entitled to be her true self. "Tatanggapin ko kayo na ganyan ang komento niyo, pero tanggapin niyo ako kung anong isasagot ko, kasi nasa feed ko kayo eh," she says. "Whatever I say dito sa feed ko, feed ko 'to, at paninindigan ko 'to. Kung mabwiset ka sa 'kin, you're more than free to leave my feed. Ayaw mong umalis? Ibo-block na lang kita. Ganu'n lang naman yung usapan dito."



MUCH TO CELEBRATE

This Mother's Day, which falls three days after Juday's 39th birthday, the star's plans are simple: "I just want to spend it with my children, and of course, my mom," she says. "I never get to spend much time with my mom recently, and I just want to have some mommy bonding. So I'll focus on being a daughter to my mom."



"Silang tatlo, nakakatawa In their own little ways," says Juday of her tribe. "Masaya silang kausap!"

HAPPINESS SECRET #5: BE GOOD TO YOURSELF.

After giving birth to Luna last year, Juday, like the average mom, struggled to lose the pregnancy pounds. "Yung first weeks of working out, parang wala talagang nangyayari," she admits. "Susubukan talaga yung patience mo. Susubukan yung determination mo!"

But things changed when she decided to change her mindset. "What really worked for me was when I wasn't trying to lose weight anymore; I just wanted to feel healthy and strong for my children," she says. "Gusto ko lang pagpawisan." Eventually, she started shedding four to five pounds a week, and the best part was she wasn't killing herself at the gym to do so. "Mas nag-wo-work sa 'kin yung ganu'n kesa yung pine-pressure ko yung sarili ko na may i-me-meet akong deadline." As her dress size went down and her body got stronger, she felt her confidence return. "You're slowly trying to look good again, and mayroon ka nang moments na nag-li-lipstick ka na ulit bago lumabas ng bahay," she says with a smile. "Pagkatapos mo kasi manganak, andiyan yung post-partum

feelings, na, 'Yuck, parang ang pangit-pangit ko, ang laki-laki ko. Ayaw ko lumabas!'"

Now, she's all about healthy habits—not just for her kids, but also for herself. On a typical day, Juday wakes up at around 6:30 a.m. to help the children get ready for school and have breakfast with them. "Then, mag-wo-work out na kami ni Ry for at least an hour and a half," she says. At best, she works out four times a week. "I'm happy na my husband is very supportive when it comes to these things."

She's learned that moms really have to make an effort to take care of themselves, and more importantly, to find the time for it. "Hindi ako naniniwala du'n sa, 'Wala kasi akong time.' Desisyon mo 'yan," she emphasizes. It doesn't even have to be a whole-day escape or an extravagant spa session, although Juday admits she does love getting pampering treatments whenever she has a day off work. "For me, yung me-time kasi, maglakad ka lang sa labas ng bahay niyo, that's me-time already. Or magkulong ka lang sa banyo. Anything that you can do for yourself for 30 minutes." Or more, if you can afford it.

"It's always a choice," she repeats.

HAPPINESS SECRET #6: LIVE WITH GRATITUDE IN YOUR HEART.

"Pwede ka palang dumating sa point ng buhay mo na you choose what makes you sad, and you can just choose to be happy the whole day," she remarks, a revelation that easily explains her general disposition, as well as her mood at the shoot. We're running a little behind schedule—it's almost 2 p.m. and she hasn't eaten lunch yet—but she's still game to answer more interview questions.

She stresses that indulging in prayer time really makes a difference. "You have to have that time to inhale all this positivity and just be grateful," she says. "At least for me, it works. Yung 'pag gising ko sa umaga, grateful ako na naririnig ko na yung mga anak ko, tapos maaamoy ko na nagkakape na si Ryan. And then ma-realize mo na lang na, 'Ay nakangiti ba ako? Okay, I think perfect ang araw ko ngayon.' Pwede pala 'yun!" She adds with a laugh, "Pag may kasama kang matulog na medyo hindi alam yung ritual mo, medyo ma-we-weirdohan lang sa 'pag gising mo na nakangiti ka na. Feeling ko pa-weird ako nang pa-weird!"

Of course, she has her off days and moments, too, but she's learned not to dwell on the negatives. "For some reason, there's this automatic shut-down sa sarili ko 'pag feeling ko nume-nega na yung paligid ko," she says. "Alis muna ako, basa-basa muna, mag-games muna ako. Pero 'pag feeling ko I have to step in and control the situation, I step in naman."

At the end of the day, knowing her priorities—and carefully choosing which things to spend her time and energy on—keeps her from feeling spent. "When you're a mom and a wife, ganito pala 'yun—you're like a superwoman. Hindi mo alam, natapos mo pala yung araw nang sakto lang at may energy ka pa para maglambing sa asawa mo, or may energy ka pa para gawin yung facial rituals mo," she says. Lately, though, she's been spending her extra energy dabbling in aromatherapy, mixing her own essential oils. It's a new hobby that she finds calming, and it's pretty apt for this time in her life, too. "Pa-kalma na lang nang pa-kalma na buhay yung gusto namin ni Ryan."

"I'm just grateful that my kids are healthy, we live a normal life, we have a very nice home—it's not that big, but we're okay with it. Sakto kami sa bahay namin," she says. "Yun lang naman ang prayers ko every night. I'm very grateful and happy na we live in a house that's full of laughter and love."

MEET THE KIDS

Juday dishes about her children's different personalities.



MOST LIKELY TO ENTER SHOWBIZ: YOHAN

"Yohan is charming. She loves singing. She's asking questions na about being a singer, an actor. Hindi ko siya i-impluwensyahan pero hindi ko din naman sisirain sa kanya yung pangarap niya. Sabi nga ng mommy ko, it's inevitable. Growing up, nakikita niya kung ano yung type ng trabaho namin. And I think she likes that. Kami ni Ry, if that's the case, we just have to equip her with skills to help her if she really wants to enter showbiz."



MOST AFFECTIONATE: LUCHO

"Lucho likes that he's the only boy and he's the bodyguard of his sisters. He's very affectionate. One night, he just hugged me and said, 'You know what, Ma? I love you so much. I don't want to get married. I wanna stay with you for the rest of my life.' Gusto ko i-record!

Sabi ko, 'Why? Ayaw mo bang magkaro'n ng sariling family? Sabi niya, 'No, because I have you and Daddy. I'm happy with that.'"



MOST MALIKOT: LUNA

"She's a ball of energy! She'll just run around. Para siyang baby boy. At saka malakas na bata. Hindi siya lalampa-lampa. May mga moments din 'yan na kapag ayaw niya, ayaw niya talaga. So she's really a combination of me and Ryan. At saka lumalaban talaga siya, matapang."