

The Happiness Solution Newsletter

February 2007

**THE
HAPPINESS
SOLUTION**



Quote of the Month

You can't have everything. Where would you put it?

-Steven Wright

A Couple of Things to Think About

(1) My books are about finding joy and meaning and landing on your feet in this upside down world. Thus, the following thought:

Of course life is bizarre:
the more bizarre it gets,
the more interesting it is.
The only way to approach it
is to make yourself some popcorn
and enjoy the show.
-Anonymous

(2) Stop comparing yourself unfavorably or favorably to others. Give up that egocentric comparison trap.

Newborns aren't lying around the hospital nursery checking out who's thinner or who has the most hair. And toddlers who play together aren't trying to figure out whose blocks are imported from Germany and whose are hand-me-downs.
-Stephen M. Pollan & Mark Levine

Recent Research

If you'd like to read a relevant article on happiness that appeared in the New York Times on January 7, 2007, go to:

<http://www.biopsychiatry.com/happiness/happy101.html>

Part of the article discusses experiments done with college students. They had been asked to first do something that gave them pleasure (i.e., scuba diving or watching a TV show) and then to do something altruistic such as performing an act of selfless kindness. Just about all the students learned that they

experienced more happiness when they did the altruistic rather than the pleasurable acts. Being kind and less obsessed with pleasure seem to be important variables with respect to feeling happy.

The Latest Quiz

Are You Unhappy?

Circle a number after each question. The higher the number circled, the more true the statement is at it applies to you. When you're done, add all the circled numbers.

- 1) I often feel sad. 1 2 3 4 5
- 2) It's hard for me to trust others. 1 2 3 4 5
- 3) I dwell on the past. 1 2 3 4 5
- 4) I'm frightened for the future. 1 2 3 4 5
- 5) I have many lingering resentments. 1 2 3 4 5
- 6) I'm quite controlling. 1 2 3 4 5
- 7) I sometimes feel cursed. 1 2 3 4 5
- 8) I'm a perfectionist. 1 2 3 4 5
- 9) I feel trapped. 1 2 3 4 5
- 10) Much of the time, I feel anxious. 1 2 3 4 5
- 11) I frequently think, "Why me?" 1 2 3 4 5
- 12) I rarely stop to smell the coffee (or the roses). 1 2 3 4 5
- 13) I feel helpless at times. 1 2 3 4 5
- 14) I rarely count my blessings. 1 2 3 4 5
- 15) I'm disappointed often. 1 2 3 4 5
- 16) I don't believe my life has a purpose. 1 2 3 4 5
- 17) I'm a pessimist. 1 2 3 4 5
- 18) I'm dissatisfied with my career. 1 2 3 4 5
- 19) I struggle with health-related issues. 1 2 3 4 5
- 20) I have many regrets. 1 2 3 4 5

Interpretation:

- | | |
|--------|---|
| 20-30 | Wow! Jump in the air and click your heels together. |
| 31-45 | You're doing okay. |
| 46-59 | You may be struggling and/or feel unhappy at times. |
| 60-79 | Uh-oh. Heading for the dark side. |
| 80-100 | It's time to deal with your depression. |

Humor? Wisdom?

The basic paradox: everything is a mess
yet all is well.
-Ezra Bayda

Continuing the themes of humor and lightening up the load, I've chosen two light-hearted stories to share with you.

Stories of the Month

“Coffee, Anyone?”

In Cape Cod this past summer, I discovered a little hole-in-the-wall Brazilian bakery. I've always had a penchant for strong coffee. One cup a day is plenty for me, but I look forward to that cup. I'm not addicted. Sometimes I go weeks without having any. But for me, coffee is one of the small pleasures of life. When I saw the bakery, the line of an old song began running through my head. I'm not sure about the name of the song, but I think it's called “The Coffee Song.” It may have been by Sinatra. The line of the song as I remember it is, “They make an awful lot of coffee in Brazil!” I'm pretty sure it's something like that. Anyway, this refrain seemed to get stuck in my brain circuitry and I was humming it and singing it for a good deal of the summer. Luckily, it felt like an unobtrusive obsession and I felt fine whenever it showed up. “They make an awful lot of coffee in Brazil!” There it goes again.

Back to the story of the little Brazilian bakery. As I entered the place, which was painted a pale lime green, I encountered the store owner. He nodded. I asked something along the lines of, “What kind of coffee do you have?” He pointed. I looked in the direction his finger indicated and there it was. One coffee pot. That was it. Wait a minute. Was that really it? It was true. There was no decaf. No latte. No French vanilla, hazelnut, or chocolate raspberry. There was no dark roast, morning blend, or Ethiopian organic. No cappuccinos. No espressos. There was just a pot of coffee. Take it or leave it. Well, since I'm pretty much of a no frills guy and happen to like a strong cup of black coffee, this was fine by me. In fact, it was more than fine.

Life has seemingly gotten more hectic and more complicated with each decade. As a kid, if I needed sneakers, they were black or white and were Keds or Converse. That was it. Now, buying sneakers is like buying a car. The options with colors and styles and heel gels and, well, you get the idea. Sometimes things are more complicated than they need to be. The simplicity of the Brazilian bakery was akin to a bit of an oasis in the midst of our hurried lives. The store carried five or six different types of baked goods and rolls. They all looked interesting although I wasn't quite sure what any of them were.

I got a cup of coffee to go. They only offered one size cup. No small, medium, large, extra large, grandee, or fire hydrant size. Just a regular size cup. The owner spoke very little English but we communicated just fine. I pointed to a slice of something that looked like corn bread and said, “I'll have one of those.” Then, I pointed to a small, round baked item about the size of a golf ball and asked for two of those. He gave me everything in a previously used brown paper bag.

“Three dollars,” he said.

Later that morning I savored the coffee and shared the baked goodies with my wife. They hit the spot. Much of the day I was singing, “They grow an awful

lot of coffee in Brazil!” Sometimes it was “grow” and other times it was “make.” Sometimes I’d sing it silently but other times I’d belt it out. After awhile, my wife was singing it too.

The next morning, I returned to the bakery, and after exchanging good morning smiles and nods with the owner, I bought a cup of coffee, three fairly large rolls, and something that resembled a single serving size of pie.

“Three dollars,” said the proprietor.

The following day, I got my cup of coffee and six of those golf ball sized things. When the owner asked for three dollars, I began to wonder if this was simply coincidental or not. I ordered something different on each of the next ten days. I changed the number of items, ordering as few as two and as many as seven. He always charged me three dollars. It worked for him and it worked for me. Whenever I was in the Brazilian bakery, life seemed simpler and easier. I think the mantra “keep things simple” is helpful with regard to being happy. Otherwise, it’s easy to feel overworked, oversubscribed, overly stressed, and overwhelmed – all of which lead in the opposite direction of happiness.

There’s probably something going on in your life now that is difficult, stressful, or discouraging. Think about it from a different vantage point. Take action to make it feel less complex and less confusing. Ask yourself, “How can I turn this situation into a Brazilian bakery for me?” Wake up and smell the coffee.

“Where There’s a Will There’s a Way”

When my friend Carl was in high school, he set a goal for himself. He wanted to be a “Harvard Man.” This was his dream. People who knew him thought it was more of a pipe dream, not considering Carl to be Harvard material, so to speak. He applied to a handful of colleges and although four accepted him, he was flatly rejected by Harvard. That however was not the end of his dream.

In college, Carl did well both academically and athletically. In fact, he developed into a nationally competitive sprinter for the track team. After a brilliant junior year, he applied to Harvard as a transfer student, this time believing that he had a great chance of being accepted. He didn’t get in. Carl turned his focus toward graduate school and his dream of being a Harvard man continued. Harvard wasn’t very concerned about his dream and rejected Carl for the third time. The dream seemingly had become not quite a nightmare, but something quite different than Carl originally had hoped for.

After college, job success, marriage, and a child, Carl found himself once again thinking of Harvard. Then it came to him like a bolt of lightning. Indeed, he would be a Harvard Man. He would donate his body to the Harvard Medical School. He sent a detailed letter explaining his almost life long interest in being a Harvard Man and how proud he would be to give his body to them. In the letter, he stated, “Instead of dying and going to heaven, I look forward to dying and going to Harvard!” Then while visiting a friend in the Boston area, he spent time walking on the Harvard campus talking to students and purchasing various Harvard paraphernalia. He even managed to sit in on a class and talk to the professor afterward. Nirvana.

About two weeks later the letter from Harvard Medical School arrived. It stated, “Please try a local medical school.” Maybe it was destiny. Maybe Carl

was just not supposed to be a Harvard Man. That final rejection took place about ten years ago. I'm happy to say that life went on for Carl. He's had an active fulfilling decade since his final rejection and is certainly not preoccupied with never having been accepted to Harvard.

So perhaps you really can find happiness despite important things not working out exactly as you hoped they would. Oh, I almost forgot to mention that Carl confided in me that in his will, he has asked his wife to cremate him and spread his ashes all over the great lawn at Harvard.

Poem of the Month

If there were ever a time to dare,
to make a difference,
to embark on something worth doing,

IT IS NOW.

Not for any grand cause, necessarily...
but for something that tugs at your heart,
something that's your aspiration,
something that's your dream.

You owe it to yourself
to make your days here count.

**HAVE FUN.
DIG DEEP.
STRETCH.**

DREAM BIG.

Know, though, that things worth doing
seldom come easy.
There will be good days.
And there will be bad days.

There will be times when you want to turn around,
pack it up,
and call it quits.

Those times tell you
that you are pushing yourself,
that you are not afraid to learn by trying.

PERSIST.

Because with an idea,
determination,
and the right tools,
you can do great things.
Let your instincts,
your intellect,

and your heart
guide you.

TRUST.

Believe in the incredible power of the human mind.
Of doing something that makes a difference.
Of working hard.
Of laughing and hoping.
Of lazy afternoons.
Of lasting friends.
Of all the things that will cross your path this year.

The start of something new
brings the hope of something great.

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE.

There is only one you.
And you will pass this way only once.

DO IT RIGHT.

-Author Unknown

Your Input

As I continue work on my latest book, I'd appreciate your ideas for stories. What topics or themes are of interest to you as they relate to mental and spiritual health and general well-being? Please email me with your thoughts.

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My Two Cents

Not to sound like a Hallmark card, but February is Valentine's Day. Let's all try to open up our hearts and exude kindness, compassion and love. Do an experiment one day and try leading with your heart. Stop over-thinking and just do what feels right. Act boldly, responsibly, and give of yourself generously. You'll feel much better for having done so. Have a great February and check out new stories to be posted soon at <http://www.thehappinessolution.com>

Best regards,

Alan Gettis

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