

# The Happiness Solution Newsletter

April 2007

THE  
HAPPINESS  
SOLUTION



## Quotes of the Month

**“Life isn’t about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.”**

**-George Bernard Shaw**

**“Nothing about human life is more precious than that we can define our own purpose and shape our own destiny.”**

**-Norman Cousins**

## A Bit of Humor?

Recently, a guy came into my office with a very unusual presenting problem. He was afraid of nickels, dimes, and quarters. When he asked what I thought about his problem, I replied, “It’s simple. You’re afraid of change.”

## Recent Research

Dr. Laura Carstensen of Stanford University conducted research related to age and happiness that was published in the journal *Issues in Science and Technology* (Winter, 2007), C. Munsey summarized the findings for *The Monitor*, a publication of the American Psychological Association:

Younger people explore new experiences with the belief that they’ve got plenty of time to spare and long, nebulous futures to prepare for. They are often willing to tackle any cognitive task just for the challenge. But for an older person, the timeline shrinks with the awareness of impending mortality. Greater attention is paid to seeking emotional rewards through meaningful activities, she said.

“We designed a world in which young people thrive,” she said. The side effect of more children surviving childhood is healthier adults thriving into their 70’s and 80’s, she said.

Carstensen’s larger theory of how the growing group of elderly lives out its final decades is tied to socioemotional selectivity theory, which holds that people’s goals and cognitive functioning are tied to their awareness of where they stand in the life span.

In one series of studies, Carstensen, along with Susan Turk Charles, Ph.D., and Mara Mather, Ph.D., presented younger and older participants with a series of positive, negative or neutral images. The results showed that while younger adults remembered both positive and negative images, older people recalled more positive images than negative images. In another test, when presented with

photos of people either smiling or scowling, older people remembered the smiling faces more quickly, she said.

The selective attention to the positive might explain why older people report the least amount of distress in day-to-day life, are less likely to be depressed and experience lower rates of phobia than younger people do. It seems that getting old may not be as bad as you think.

Spring is a time of renewal and growth. Crocuses poke through the snow. It's a technicolor time for blossoming and regeneration. Yes, spring is a time for...

## Metaphorical Reincarnation

Who you were yesterday need have very little bearing on who you are today or who you will be tomorrow. It is natural to evolve, to grow, to be born again. The non-literal or metaphorical view of reincarnation suggests that you can have many incarnations in this lifetime. You are not a static entity. Even if you have had a long period of stagnation or dormancy, you are still capable of changing, or re-inventing yourself. If you insist that you cannot change, that you cannot be different, you are clinging to a false belief. You are denying your freedom and are not in touch with your power and potential.

I have a vested interest in metaphorical reincarnation. That's because I'm a psychologist and I've worked with thousands of people who have been stuck in incarnations that were troubling. My job is to help get them unstuck and able to re-invent themselves.

As a therapist, I firmly believe that people can, in essence, reincarnate in this lifetime. I have seen it again and again. Sometimes therapy is kind of like an argument in which the person insists she cannot change and I insist she can (because I know that to be the case). This argument can go on for quite a while and can be very emotionally draining, but it's always done in an atmosphere of caring and respect. She tells me she can't reincarnate. I tell her that she can. We repeat this dance again and again in a myriad of forms. I give it my all. I want so badly to win the argument. I realize that if she wins, she loses.

## Poem of the Month

Everybody knows: You can't be all things to all people.  
You can't do all things at once.  
You can't do all things equally well.  
You can't do all things better than everyone else.  
Your humanity is showing just like everyone else's.

So:

You have to find out who you are, and be that.  
You have to decide what comes first, and do that.  
You have to discover your strengths, and use them.

**You have to learn not to compete with others,  
Because no one else is in the contest of being you.**

**Then:**

**You will have learned to accept your own uniqueness.  
You will have learned to set priorities and make decisions.  
You will have learned to live with your limitations.  
You will have learned to give yourself the respect that is due.  
And you'll be a most vital mortal.**

**Dare to Believe:**

**That you are a wonderful, unique person.  
That you are a once-in-all-history event.  
That it's more than a right, it's your duty, to be who you are.  
That life is not a problem to solve, but a gift to cherish.  
And you'll be able to stay one up on what used to get you down.**

**-Author Unknown**

## **My Two Cents**

**Here's my two cents, even though you didn't ask for it. Eat your vegetables. Take your vitamins. Wear your seatbelt. Exercise. Don't smoke. Don't abuse food or alcohol or people. Let go of anger. Be kind to animals. Help others. And, here's my answer as to why you should do all that: "Just for the health of it!"**

**You are the sum of your choices. If you value life and value yourself, the likelihood is that you'll make healthy choices, and that increases your chances to have a lengthier life span, more disability-free living, and more happiness. Studies have shown that people who don't wear their seatbelts are more likely to be smokers than those who wear them. The non-seatbelt users are less likely to take vitamins and more likely to rely on fast foods and fried foods. Healthy habits lead to other healthy choices, and soon a healthy lifestyle is developed.**

**The Surgeon General has emphatically stated that being sedentary is a major risk factor for heart disease and other ills. Inactivity is correlated with obesity, which is a growing problem for our country, and our children in particular, who for the first time in our history, may have a shorter life span than their parents. We can't control certain risk factors such as family history, but we can control exercise, smoking, drinking, seat belt wearing, vitamin usage, attitude, anger, and other variables that affect the quality of our lives.**

**Many people are digging their own graves with their spoons and forks. Seven of the top ten killer diseases are associated with what we eat and how much of it. In particular, coronary artery disease, certain cancers, and diabetes can be created by our food choices. The key word there is "choices." Let me emphasize again that you are your choices. If you continue to make unhealthy choices, they will catch up to you both physiologically and psychologically. It's just a matter of time. You can only get away with it for so long. Most people finally get interested in healthy choices after the fact, i.e., after the heart attack or the diagnosis or cancer. Don't wait until then. There's no time like the present. In fact, give yourself a present by remembering to eat your vegetables, take your**

vitamins, wear your seatbelt, exercise, let go of anger, help others and be kind to animals. And forget about smoking and eating or drinking to excess. Yes, give yourself that present. Just for the health of it!

## Nutrition Corner

For those of you who aren't familiar with me, I'm both a psychologist and a nutritionist. My nutrition degree is from Columbia University, The Institute of Human Nutrition, College of Physicians & Surgeons. A recent journal article appearing in the esteemed journal *Lancet* concluded that 800 micrograms of folic acid a day leads to improved memory and information processing speed. Those getting placebos showed no such improvement.

Also, a study at Columbia found that those with the highest intake of folic acid had the lowest risk of getting Alzheimer's. The findings appeared in the *Archives of Neurology*. Folic acid is also being studied for use in depressive disorders and in maintaining cardiovascular health. It is found in many multiple vitamins and B-complexes. If your multiple or B-complex contains 400 mcg., consider adding an additional 400 mcg. tablet. Folic acid is found in whole grains, beans, green leafy vegetables, broccoli, spinach, citrus, and fortified cereals. Anyone for a three bean salad?

The stories on the website have changed. Check them out at:

[www.thehappinesssolution.com](http://www.thehappinesssolution.com)

Thanks for your interest in my stories. I care about your stories.

**“My lifetime listens to yours.”  
-Muriel Rukeyser**

**My best to you,  
Alan Gettis**