



EMBRACING HAPPINESS

*Unhappiness is not knowing what we want
and killing ourselves to get it*

—Don Herold

When I was a child in St. Louis, Missouri, black families focused on the essentials: shelter, food, clothes, church. We were raised to steer clear of behavior that could land us or our family in trouble with the law or with white people... which was the same thing.

Growing up in a segregated neighborhood had its comforts, though. Everything we needed was nearby. My elementary school was two blocks away, my church one block from my elementary school, and my high school was just an eight-block walk. The Jewish storekeepers and movie theater owners were friendly and mostly patient with us kids scampering through their pricey inventories. After all, we were the reason they were profitable.

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We kids were encouraged by our teachers and church leaders to achieve an education and better life. After all, they were victims of segregation, too. Even the neighborhood drunkard leaning against a power pole shouted out words of encouragement as he saw us strolling by on our way to school or church.

There were a few bullies, of course, who tested their power over us, but my youngest sister, Mildred, although two years younger than I, called their bluffs early. I soon had an invisible wall of protection around me. “Don’t bother her,” the other kids said. “That’s Mildred’s sister.”

Happiness—at least not genuine happiness—is a luxury oppressed people often think they can’t afford. After all, how can you be really happy when you can’t even go to certain movie theaters or public venues because you had the poor judgment to be born black? Anyone running around saying they were happy was judged with a suspicious eye. Clearly, that black child must be shallow, addle-brained, or silly.

And yet my mother always strove for a better life for us. Because she was an excellent seamstress, for example, she made us stylish wool jumpers and pleated skirts for school. She created full-length, formal dresses for our concert performances in the Children’s Choir at church. She sewed us unique Halloween costumes. My favorite costume was a gypsy skirt she made for me, sewing together wide strips cut from an old white sheet that she had painstakingly dyed different colors.

Mom was never willing to settle for the cheaper

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toys that were easily accessible at the local stores. She listened to Art Linkletter's *House Party* radio show while she was working on customers in her beauty shop and made mental notes on which toys were recommended for their entertainment and educational value. Then, months before Christmas shopping officially started, she put our toys on layaway at the big downtown St. Louis department stores. Every Tuesday on her day off, she caught the bus and went downtown to shop and make another payment on our toys. Until I wrote this, I never thought about how she got our toys home. We didn't own a car.

Negro spirituals left over from the days of slavery, like "I Got Shoes," promised delayed happiness: "When I get to Heaven, gonna put on my shoes and shout all over God's Heaven." But my mother embraced the possibility of happiness for us in the here and now, and worked at arranging for as much happiness as possible for her family, sometimes against some pretty tough odds.

BRING HAPPINESS INTO THE PRESENT

We often talk about happiness as though it's lurking "out there," somewhere outside ourselves. We see evidence of happiness in other people, but we aren't sure we can experience it ourselves. The truth is that *you can't be happy in the future unless you're happy now*. The potential for happiness is already inside you, just as the potential for a plant is already there inside a seed.

This brings to mind an experience I had after I

retired. I decided to plant a vegetable garden. I was intrigued not just with the idea of eating healthier meals, but also with the chance to watch nature close-up and in action. So I bought a variety of herb and vegetable seeds from my local garden shop and planted them alongside my house. Within just a few days of watering, I could see tiny green signs of life peeking up through the dirt.

I love zucchini, so I'd purchased two little potted plants. As they grew and became recognizable, I saw that, sure enough, one of them was forming the familiar green squash shape. But the other one was yellow and had a bulging bottom. I reread the identification cards that came with both little pots. Sure enough, they were identical: "Squash, Zucchini."

Soon it became clear that something was wrong. No matter what the label said, one of the plants wasn't the zucchini I thought I'd bought. It was obvious one had been mislabeled. Even though the yellow squash had been labeled zucchini, with my care and nurturing, it produced what it had inside all along: the potential to become a yellow squash.

Like that plant, no matter what labels get attached to us, we have the potential to manifest our own happiness. Once we recognize the "seed of happiness" within us right now, we can free ourselves to grow and bring it forth.

Just as my zucchini plant yielded zucchini while the yellow squash plant yielded yellow squash, your happiness is not the same as another person's happiness. I don't imagine either plant (if plants can think) wished

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it was the same as the other one. Each squash just grew into what it was meant to be.

ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE HAPPY

Don't rely on someone else for your happiness and self-worth. Only you can be responsible for that. If you can't love and respect yourself, no one else will be able to make that happen. Accept who you are—completely; the good and the bad, and make changes as YOU see fit—not because you think someone else wants you to be different.

—Stacey Charter

If you've been unhappy most of your life, you may be astonished to learn that you have the power to change your attitude. If you're a hardcore pessimist, you may even derive some pleasure from being negative, even though it eventually makes you sad. Pessimism may even lead to depression. (If you're mostly cynical and enjoy it, embrace it. I think we're in danger of becoming cynical as we get older.)

Listening to other people gripe and complain, we hear how much we restrict our own happiness by focusing on the negative. For example, one day I listened to a friend share a string of problems in her life. Suddenly it occurred to me that none of the things she saw as problems were

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really that serious, so I asked her to tell me about the *good* things going on in her life. She was taken aback.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Well, let me help you get started,” I said. “You have a loving husband, you’re doing the work you love, you live in a beautiful home, you can afford to travel wherever you want, and you have raised two successful children.”

“You’re right,” she said. “I must remember the good.”

Not only do we get caught up in recounting our “problems,” but I think we actually enjoy sharing the negative more than rejoicing in the positive.

Where does this come from, and how do we learn to embrace happiness? Perhaps some of us think that dwelling on happy thoughts will jinx us. Because my husband and I separated right after Christmas one year, for example, one relative thought I had jinxed our family and brought on this marital split because I had been writing about positive things in our family every year in my Christmas letters.

Many of us don’t enjoy happiness because we have an aversion to it. Many of us were brought up to mistrust happiness and to avoid embracing it for fear it won’t last. Sadly, this leaves us more comfortable with misery than with joy in our lives.

To enjoy happiness, we must allow it into our lives.

ALIGN YOUR LIFE WITH HAPPINESS

Years ago, my husband, our four children, and I returned from a vacation in Yosemite National Park, a spectacularly

beautiful wilderness park in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. I shared the highlights of our vacation with one of my friends—the trip by car, our stay in a tent cabin (a cabin with solid walls, but a canvas roof and door flaps), horseback riding, and cooking around the campfire. My friend was absolutely fascinated. She was also puzzled as to how we were able to plan such a vacation.

“How did you know about Yosemite and how to get there?” she asked me.

I was a little confused by her question. “What do you mean?”

“How did you figure out how to get there?”

“Oh,” I responded, “I got a map from the Automobile Club of America. They marked the route for us. There was information about accommodations on the back of the map. I just called to make reservations.”

Even though that was in the days before the Internet, there were many resources for planning vacations.

Just as my friend was puzzled about how to plan a vacation and how to get where you’re going, some people are puzzled about how to set up their lives. If you desire happiness, then you must plan and organize your life in a way that will allow happiness. Here are some ways to do this.

1. *Spend time with people you enjoy.* You may think this is obvious, but we don’t always practice it. My friend Connie (name changed) complained about her friend Shelly’s (name changed) annoying habit of always being short of money when they went

out to lunch. But even though it bothered her, Connie just paid the check. Then she complained about her cheap friend Shelly.

When I asked why she continued to go to lunch with Shelly, she answered, “Because she’s my friend.”

Connie felt stuck. She didn’t realize that no one else viewed Shelly as a friend. Worst of all, Connie didn’t know that she had the power to change how and with whom she spent her time.

2. *Avoid toxic people and sad situations.* You don’t have to look far to find people (maybe even some of your relatives) who enjoy complaining and griping about personal and world problems. Acknowledging what is going on in the news and fretting a bit are harmless. But constantly being exposed to people who revel in spewing vicious gossip, repeating the gory details of the latest mass murder, or retelling blow by blow the pain they suffered during their last surgery is exhausting. It’s guaranteed to sour and pull down your mood.

Keep your environment pleasing by not allowing toxic people to disturb the harmony and tranquility. Likewise, if horror movies make you upset, or loud music disturbs you, then don’t go to those movies and stay away from places where loud music is playing. (Read more about identifying and avoiding toxic people in Chapter 7.)

3. *Take care of your spiritual and emotional needs.* Every one of us can benefit from taking a step back from our day-to-day life to get quiet, to reflect, and to calm our emotions. To neglect this is like trying to drive your car without giving it adequate maintenance. Eventually your car will break down from neglect.

You need adequate renewal so you can have the energy and the strength of mind and emotions to handle the challenges of life as well as enjoy personal growth. When you don't make time to meet your spiritual and emotional needs, you set yourself up for burnout, exhaustion, apathy, and possibly depression.

Covey (2013) calls his Habit #7 "Sharpening the Saw." He tells a story about a man who was cutting firewood for his family. He was working and sweating and straining. An observer could see that this chore was really a big challenge and asked him if his saw was sharp. The man said that it sure didn't seem too sharp. The observer then recommended that he take a few moments and sharpen the saw. The man replied, "I am too busy sawing to take time to sharpen my saw."

Taking care of your spiritual and emotional needs is "sharpening your saw." It's renewing yourself. If you don't take time to renew yourself, you will be working harder than necessary just to get your needs met.

You can experience spiritual renewal without subscribing to any specific religious belief. Some of the ways

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are through meditation, reading motivational materials (books, poetry, quotations), listening to inspirational speakers, taking a nature walk, or enjoying beautiful music. (In Chapter 7, you will learn about additional ways to meet your spiritual needs.)

You can meet your emotional needs by forming meaningful relationships and associations with others. Whatever enables you to fortify your mind and spirit for dealing with the everyday will enable you not only to cope with life, but also to enjoy a happier life.

SHOW GRATITUDE FOR ALL THE GOOD IN YOUR LIFE

Emmons (2007) has conducted research on gratitude, its components, and its benefits. He admitted that when he began his research on gratitude, he didn't expect it to be as deep and complex as it turned out to be. Soon, however, he discovered that gratitude was one of the few things that could measurably change our lives.

He pointed out that being grateful includes acknowledging good and recognizing that it comes from outside ourselves. It doesn't matter whether the gift is material or nonmaterial. When we recognize the gift, thank the giver, or express thankfulness for the gift, we are transformed.

Emmons identified a number of benefits of gratitude and its connection to happiness. Three benefits are:

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- Practicing gratitude can increase happiness levels by around 25 percent.
- Keeping a gratitude journal for as little as three weeks will improve your sleep and increase your energy.
- Increasing happiness by practicing gratitude will be sustained over a long period of time.

ADOPT A WINNING ATTITUDE

How we think about the future is generally described in two ways. We are either optimists or pessimists. An optimist is often said to be someone who sees a glass as half full, whereas a pessimist is said to be someone who sees it as half empty.

Even though we've been told that optimists tend to be more successful, folks stuck in pessimism are hard-pressed to turn themselves around. Part of the reason is that pessimists are so accustomed to seeing the dark side that they've lost sight, if they ever had it, of the bright side.

My second daughter showed a pessimistic side at an early age. When she was in elementary school, she complained and worked herself into tears each time a new concept was introduced. "I can't do it," she wailed after she had mastered addition and the teacher was introducing subtraction. She repeated her doubts and fears when multiplication was introduced, and with division, too. When I reminded her of how she'd conquered new things in the past, she finally calmed down and learned each new concept.

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When confronted with a problem or a challenge, we all tell ourselves a story. Optimists tell hopeful stories. They expect to succeed. Pessimists tell sad stories. They expect to fail.

Here are three descriptions of pessimists and optimists.

*A pessimist is one who feels bad when he feels good
for fear he'll feel worse when he feels better.*

—Anonymous

*The optimist sees the rose and not its thorns; the
pessimist stares at the thorns, oblivious to the rose.*

—Kahlil Gibran

*Pessimist: One whom when he has the choice
of two evils, chooses both.*

—Oscar Wilde

Let something bad or challenging happen, and the pessimist immediately thinks of the worst-case scenario. This inevitably results in misery, but he repeats it over and over. The results are not only unhappiness, but in extreme cases, prolonged sadness.

Some pessimists, however, succeed despite their negativity. They know they're pessimists, and they're determined to overcome their negative outlook and expectations. They work to create success. They take an extreme view of optimism, so while they can't see themselves as optimists, they work to overcome their pessimism in order

to succeed. They see an optimist as someone who skips through the meadows in the face of danger, oblivious to rocks, singing the song Bobby McFerrin made popular, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.”

DOES OPTIMISM HAVE DRAWBACKS?

Maintaining hope in the face of danger or bad news may not always be the best strategy. Norem (2002) believed that while optimism is great, some folks are prone to anticipating the worst. For these people, trying to put on a happy face doesn’t work.

Because these “defensive pessimists,” to use Norem’s words, believe in Murphy’s Law (“If something can go wrong, it will”), they quash their anxiety with careful planning and defensive strategies. When planning a dinner party, for example, a defensive pessimist considers all the disasters that could occur if certain people sat next to each other and reworks the seating chart and plans for new topics of conversation. An optimist, on the other hand, thinks of all this as unnecessary worry.

Like many of us, Norem viewed pessimists and optimists at extreme ends of a personality continuum. When I’m planning the seating for a dinner party, I don’t see it as pessimistic to seat amiable folks next to each other. It just seems like wise planning to me!

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO BEING A PESSIMIST?

In their research study, Gibson and Sanbonmatsu (2004) concluded that with gambling, pessimists tend to make safer choices than their optimistic counterparts. First they gave three groups of college students a list of questions to determine whether they were optimists or pessimists. Then they conducted three studies.

In the first study, the students were asked about their motivation to gamble and their feelings toward gambling after winning or losing. In the second study, students played several hands of blackjack with a ten-dollar reward they could either bet or keep. In the third study, participants played a simulated slot machine game to win chances at a \$50 prize.

The researchers found that while the optimists tended to have a positive attitude, even toward their losses, they persisted in the face of losses, whereas the pessimists calculated their risks. Gibson and Sanbonmatsu interpreted this to mean that despite optimism's many benefits, there are common situations in which the pessimistic tendency to disengage is beneficial. In other words, they believed that optimists don't know when to quit or pull out of losing situations, such as a failing stock market or a failing entrepreneurial venture.

Coming to this conclusion, Gibson and Sanbonmatsu joined with many people who take the extreme view that optimism and pessimism are opposites and that we are either one or the other. They seem to believe that an optimist has the sense to duck when he sees a big rock

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coming toward his head. They seem to see a pessimist as someone who is *satisfied* with seeing the glass as half empty rather than someone who is working toward filling the glass.

I think the optimist believes that the world is mostly good and expects things to go well, but at the same time has the good judgment to evaluate situations to determine whether they are best for him. As I see it, the pessimist may believe that the world is mostly bad and expects things to go wrong, but she can still have the good judgment to evaluate a situation and participate in ventures that she believes will go well. Both optimists and pessimists can be healthy skeptics who withhold judgment on decisions until they check out the details.

While we may tend to be more of one than the other, no one is 100 percent optimistic or pessimistic. But those who lean toward optimism have the advantage of being able to cope with changes, overcome adversities, achieve their personal best, and create happiness for themselves.

Do you want to embrace happiness? In spite of what some see as the benefits of being pessimistic, countless studies have shown that an optimistic outlook enables us to live longer, be healthier, find positive solutions, look upon adversity as temporary, and persevere.

If you lean toward pessimism, there is good news for you. You can become more optimistic.

How?

By telling yourself a new story.

When a problem or challenge arises, it's important

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to be aware of the story that pops into your head. Here's what they say:

*Optimist: I'm quite capable. I can handle this.
Let's see what I can do.*

*Pessimist: I can't handle this. I'll fail. There's
no point in even trying.*

If you're a pessimist, then flip the script! Talk back and talk louder than you did with the flawed script you've followed in the past. Challenge your old story with a new one.

*Rescued pessimist: I can handle this. I've
succeeded many times before. Now, where do
I begin?*

*Cowards die many times before their deaths;
the valiant never taste of death but once.*

—William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

I ran across the following on a blog. It's an old story worth sharing:

One day, a farmer's donkey fell down into a well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally, he decided the animal was old, and the well needed to be covered up anyway; it just wasn't worth it to retrieve the donkey. He invited all his neighbors

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to come over and help him, and they all grabbed shovels and began to shovel dirt into the well. At first, the donkey realized what was happening and cried horribly. Then, to everyone's amazement, he quieted down. A few shovel loads later, the farmer finally looked down the well. He was astonished at what he saw. With each shovel of dirt that hit his back, the donkey did something amazing. He shook it off into a little pile and took a step up to that new level. As the neighbors continued to shovel dirt on top of the animal, he shook it off and took another step up. Pretty soon, everyone was amazed to see the donkey step up over the edge of the well and happily trot off!

The donkey had the right attitude about the dirt hitting his back. He didn't accept it as a death sentence. He shook off the dirt and took a step up.

Like the donkey in this story, at some point in our lives, we will find ourselves in deep trouble, distress, or what may seem like a hopeless situation. Our first reaction may be to cry and curse, lament our troubles, and fight against our situation. The sooner we turn from these fruitless reactions and calm ourselves, however, the sooner we can discover what positive actions we can take. We can shake off our troubles and rise to a satisfying solution. We cannot control or change others, but we can definitely control our reactions to outside circumstances.

BE A GOOD LANDLORD OF YOUR LIFE

Renters love to complain about their landlords, who are portrayed as selfish, money-hungry, hard-hearted, negligent with repairs, and slow to make improvements. The landlord has been vilified throughout history as a mean and evil person worthy only of contempt.

If this is true, then why are you renting? Why not become your own property owner?

Save your excuses. I've heard them all.

Put yourself in the landlord's place for a moment. Would you be willing to risk your savings to buy income property, wade through the laws involved, rent the property to people like you, and then hope each month to receive your rent on time so you can pay your mortgage on time and more?

Perhaps you would. Perhaps you wouldn't.

Bear with me... I'm getting to the point.

The truth is that *you are a landlord*. You're the landlord of your own life, your body, your world. What kind of landlord are you?

Do you have a contract that outlines what you will do to maintain a good relationship with yourself? Do you have a life plan, written goals, and a life mission?

Do you maintain your life in a healthy and positive way? Do you properly water, feed, and cultivate your mind, body, and spirit?

Do you keep your word? Do you stick to your goals and make the best choices for yourself?

Do you pay the price required to keep your property

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in good shape? Do you guard against pests and loiterers looking to make you their host?

As the landlord of your life, you have the responsibility—*the duty*—to create a happy life. No one knows exactly what the plan will be, only you. But there's no mistaking when your plan is in force. You feel good about the choices you make, even though they're not always perfect.

Even though you sometimes feel out of sorts or sad, you have a maintenance plan to take care of needed repairs. You spot leaks before they become costly holes. You use preventive measures to keep pests away before they become parasites.

You welcome only other caring and loving people to your “property;” people who honor and respect it as you do.

Be a good landlord to yourself. Take care of your life, and it will take care of you.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR LIFE

Seligman (2011) pointed out that we are born helpless and dependent on others to meet our needs and keep us alive. If all goes well, we depend less on others as we grow. We realize our own abilities and power to take care of our needs.

It's true that as we age, we may slip into a level of helplessness as our bodies, senses, and sometimes our minds betray us. However, there's a time between infancy and our last days that Seligman calls “unclaimed

territory.” During this in-between time, we’re on our own. We choose how we will react to others, how events will shape our lives, and what direction we will take. What we think and do during this period largely determines our ability to embrace happiness.

Here are some things that you can think and do during this in-between time that will enable you to embrace happiness:

- Accept that you cannot control all the circumstances outside you.
- Take responsibility for controlling your reaction to those circumstances.
- Spend time with positive happy people.
- Avoid toxic people and sad situations.

Just as a single event is perceived differently by the optimist and the pessimist, so will the direction we take in our lives be determined by our perception.

When I took a photography class a few years ago, the teacher pointed out that a photo we see as black and white is also 18 percent gray. What we perceive as pure black or white really has many gradations. That idea stuck with me. I realized it’s true about various aspects of life.

Life is not clear-cut or only black and white. There are many shades of gray, many answers to questions; there is no absolute right or wrong. No amount of preparation and goal setting will ensure that things go according to plan. Being able to accept uncertainty and go with occurrences

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we weren't expecting is an indicator of maturity and is essential for happiness.

Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans.

—John Lennon

Waiting for the perfect answer, the perfect mate, the absolutely right time will paralyze us. We can waste our entire lives just waiting. We have to make choices, but each choice requires some element of risk. Only those willing to risk will enjoy the rewards. Those who don't want to take a risk are not spared, though. Even inaction is a risk. Unfortunately, if you choose not to take a risk, the results probably won't be to your liking. Researchers say there are benefits and drawbacks of both optimism and pessimism. Ultimately, you must choose which suits you better. As an optimist, you may expect the best and have high hopes, but stick with a failing project longer than you should or be the victim of smooth-talking scam artists. As a pessimist, you may not expect things to turn out well. You will be right some of the time, thereby feeling gratified in your belief, but in the process neglect to celebrate when things go well.

No matter how much we plan and study, there will always be some uncertainty, pain, and disappointment in life. Get comfortable with this truth. It will help strengthen your confidence and belief in your ability to handle anything that comes up.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON'T GET WHAT YOU DON'T WANT?

I have worked all my adult life. In 1982, I grew weary of commuting seventy-two miles, roundtrip, to my university teaching job. I enjoyed my job, but then I received an opportunity to interview for a new one, which gave me the chance to cut my commute to only ten miles, which was exciting. Wearing my good blue “interview” suit, I showed up for the interview fairly confident that I would get the job. After all, my qualifications exceeded the minimum and I had always interviewed well.

But as the interview progressed, I felt the job slipping away. I was a bit taken aback, but I was right. A week after the interview, I received the obligatory “thank you for considering us” rejection letter.

Later as I reflected on this loss, I realized that I hadn't really wanted that job... at least not for the right reasons. It was a community college position, which in those days I considered a step back almost to high school teaching. And the school was located in a declining neighborhood. I had pushed all that aside with my eagerness to cut out the long commute so I could get back home to my family sooner every day.

That job was not to be. And now I'm very happy it didn't happen. I would have been miserable on that campus. I would likely have been looking for another job soon thereafter. Instead, I resigned from my university job to follow my dream to start a private tutoring program.

Have you ever gone after something you didn't really

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want? Have you ever felt frustrated because you didn't know what you wanted? Maybe it's a blessing to not get what you didn't get.

Perhaps rejection is protection.

Spend some time reflecting on what you really want. It may not be the highest paying job or the shiniest object. It may be an experience or a destination that may not make sense to anyone else you know. That's not what matters at all.

What matters is that you spend this wonderful thing called your life going after what feels rewarding, uplifting, and fulfilling to you. In the end, that's all that matters.

Trying to avoid risk or randomness or only going after the sure thing leads some people to take shortcuts, some of which are dangerous and even illegal. Insider trading, quick college degrees, and embezzlement bring fast riches and achievement, but what is lost? Peace of mind and sometimes freedom.

Ultimately, it comes down to taking responsibility for your life. Once you've done this, then you are ready to embrace happiness. Reinhold Niebuhr, an American minister, ethicist, and political activist, composed a popular prayer. You'll recognize this excerpt, best known as the "Serenity Prayer," which is used in the Alcoholics Anonymous Recovery Program.

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

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Color your life *interesting* by taking stock of the colors in your wardrobe. Introduce a variety of colors to reflect your various moods.

SUMMARY

Embracing happiness means accepting yourself the way you are, allowing yourself to be happy, aligning yourself with happiness, and adopting a positive attitude.

Take responsibility for your happiness. While building relationships is part of it, don't count on others to define your self-worth. Spend time with people you enjoy, and avoid toxic people who enjoy creating negative situations and reactions.

Take care of your spiritual and emotional needs and keep your mind and spirit strong. Acknowledge those who have been good to you and have made a difference in your life. Gratitude is one of the easiest and quickest ways to sustain happiness.

Accept and become comfortable with the fact that life is filled with uncertainties.

Happiness doesn't require you to display a nonstop cheery disposition, but it does mean taking responsibility for your own life. As soon as you give up the notion of being perfect and are willing to risk going after what you want, then you have already opened your arms to embrace happiness.

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Such as are your habitual thoughts; such also will be the character of your mind; for the soul is dyed by the color of your thoughts.

—Marcus Aurelius

Take the Happiness Pledge

Flora Morris Brown

Each day when I awake and discover I'm still alive,
I know I have another chance to grow, to learn, to thrive.
So as I enter the world anew, I will bypass the door marked
CRAPPY
And with a smile on my face and a song in my heart,
Walk through the door marked HAPPY.

HAPPINESS FLASHBACK

I bought Christmas gifts and toys for my children all year round when things were on sale and available. Then I hid their toys in various places all over the house. One Christmas morning after the kids had opened their toys and were happily playing with them, I remembered I had neglected to put one toy under the tree.

Oh, no! The Cabbage Patch doll my youngest wanted so much was still in the far back of my closet. How was I going to handle this and maintain the Santa Claus myth?

While the kids were busy playing away from the tree, I quickly retrieved the Cabbage Patch doll from her hiding place and put her under the tree, then placed other boxes and packaging around her.

Then I called out to my youngest. "Did you get everything from under the tree?"

"Yes."

"There still seems to be something under the tree—over there in the back."

"No," she said impatiently. "I got everything,"

"Come and take another look."

"Okay." She was clearly annoyed. She walked toward the tree and reached underneath, pushing aside the camouflage. "How did this get here?" she cried out as she picked up the Cabbage Patch doll.

"I guess you just didn't see it," I replied, trying to look innocent.

She was so happy to get her doll that she didn't care how it arrived under our tree.

