

A compilation of works

# everyday happiness FOR DUMMIES

## Learn:

- 😊 What happiness is....  
from our perspective
- 😊 About others' self-reflections  
that might resonate with you
- 😊 About arts and culture that could  
bring you happiness
- 😊 How to seek happiness...  
when life is meak



# INTRODUCTION

Happiness. What exactly is it? How do you find it? How do you know if you are, in fact, happy? Don't fret—this book will walk you through all of the ins and outs of happiness. In twenty-one short chapters, we will explore happiness from every angle. And we hope, when all is said and done, that you can close this book and feel that you've learned something about that little feeling that makes life worth living.

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# Are you happy?

Before we get started, first thing is first—we need to see whether or not you're actually happy. Dive into some chapters that ask that vital yes or no question, which is actually so much more complex than just a simple “yes” or “no” or even “maybe so.”

# You will never be happy

EVAN LASLO

## YOU WILL NEVER BE HAPPY

And now the bad news: Happiness, as no one seems to understand it, isn't a state of being or even a state of mind. In fact, included in your free trial of life and its always-possibly-soon-to-expire subscription is a guarantee that you will never be sad. Sorry, no refunds. In any case, should you ever be so unlucky as to be happy for a whole second or so lucky as to be sad for a whole season, take solace in the fact that you're just being delusional—you're certainly not being happy. You can never be happy, you have never been happy, and you will never be happy.

## THE BIG LIE

The pursuit of happiness, as you know it, is a lie. Wealth, power, sex—yes, even volunteering at the soup kitchen— will never make you happy. Finding a BOGO coupon betwixt couch cushions, washed wad of a dollar, an extra hour of REM—you will never be happy. Even hot coffee, a baby puppy, or the perfect rule of three—no, you will never be happy.

Being happy is impossible. Even when a loved one passes away, they will either go to heaven or hell and, thankfully, no one is happy in either place.

## PSEUDOSCIENCE

Being happy is something you should be afraid of. Rumor has it that sources claim that scientists speculate that there may be trace amounts of happiness in the water, but the president says that the experts are idiots. Be advised: even though you've never had and never will have happiness in your system, you have to get it out of your head that you will ever be happy. You will never be happy.

## DEFINITION

Being happy is oxymoronic; trying to be happy is very moronic. Happiness (pronounced happiness) is a disease caused by an uncontrolled division of abnormal cells in a part of the body, especially the brain; a pipe dream. Happiness is a commonly used word that has lost all meaning. To use it in a sentence: I wouldn't wish happiness on my worst enemy.

## AS SEEN ON TV

But if you still hope to be happy, then abandon all hope: just fill out these papers, and these papers, and sign here, here, and here, and on the dotted line here, initial here, and now hand over your payment information, your fingerprints, and your humanity. Your pills should arrive contact-free in the mail (please be patient with delivery times: the mailman hasn't received his pills yet).

But if you are sane and normal and not so compelled to be happy, press one. No one will be with you shortly. Remain on your phone and in your bed and in your rut, tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow until you're so terminally online that it's only ethical to leave you plugged in forever.

## THE PRICE IS WRONG

Rest assured: even on your deathbed, you will not be happy. Your final rights will not include being happy, nor is happiness a privilege afforded to the 1%. Your loved one(s) will be with you. Your regret(s) will grip you as you go. And you can die peacefully and rest in peace forever after knowing you will never be happy.

So, what does it mean to never be happy? It means you never have to worry. Of course, the cost of society is anxiety, and it is paradoxically true that a person can be wholly, chemically, perpetually anxious while never even thoughtlessly happy. However, it can also be said that the most foundationally shaken people are often built on the loose lies of happiness, that, to be utterly anxious, one must first be desperately, upsettably, feverishly never happy, but wanting to be.

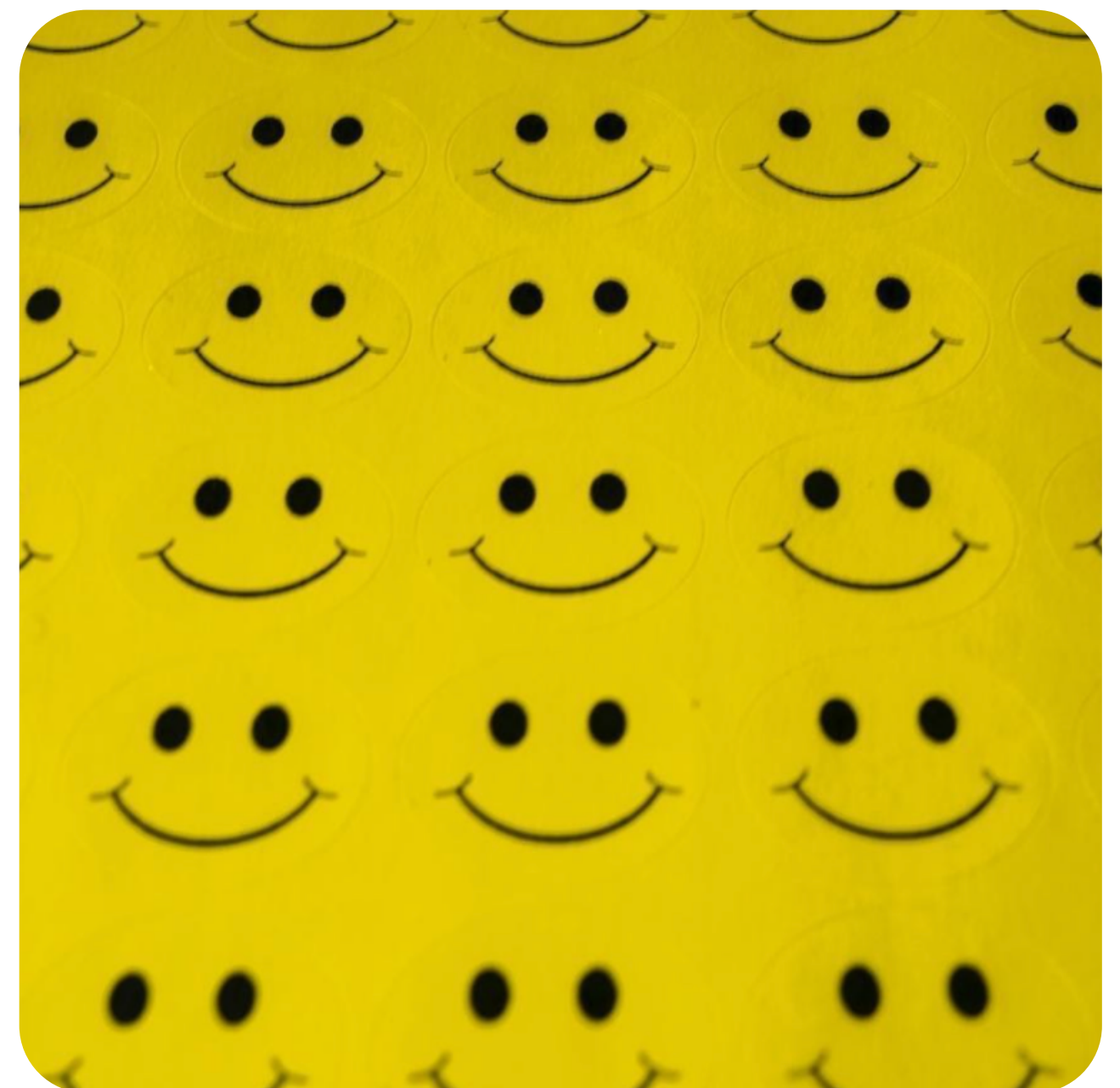
Let's not mince word: the pursuit of happiness is not a mental illness, nor can it be treated as such. Nowadays, there is always an awareness of mental illness, stigmatized or otherwise, but the underlying issues of trying to be happy can never be reckoned with, never be numbed, not really. To suck the venom of the impossible being of happiness out of one's system, people must first sink their teeth into the hard truth: toxic positivity is the greatest pollutant of our time (and Congress isn't even investing in it).

Imagine, if you will: You are happy. It feels good. However, now it must always feel good, or, again, you can never be happy. Then it seems happiness, as a state of being or mind or soul or stardust, is maintenance, and maintenance, with time, inevitably rusts, corrodes, breaks—either something kills it, or it kills you.

One must imagine question that if Sisyphus let his moss-less stone roll over you, would you be happy? If, in your high-speed pursuit of happiness, you were to crash and tumble and burn, would you end up stopping, dropping, and rolling in a meadow of triumph, of finality, defibrillating the hills with the sound of "I made it," or would you painfully crawl to realization that you will never be happy, and, in your pursuit of it, you never have been happy?

At most, at times, at once, you may feel happy, experience happiness, perhaps even reflect a happy (nice) persona, perhaps even lull into an episode of courage-deprived contentment. But you will have to be content with the fact that you will never be happy and you don't have to be nice about it.

You will never be happy, and that's okay, but you have to be okay with that.



## AUTHOR BIO

Evan Laslo is a senior (class of 2022) with a major in professional writing, a minor in creative writing, and a certificate in creativity entrepreneurship. He is from Toledo, Ohio, and something that makes him happy is his bed at home after a long day, semester, or vacation. Evan would also like to add that he enjoys making fun coffee drinks—the latest being a mocha with whipped cream.



# Rejecting happiness

PAIGE HARTENBURG

To risk sounding absurd, I did not learn how to read ‘til I was twelve. As a result of an undiagnosed learning disability and severe anxiety, reading did not come easy to me, and reading aloud—my school’s benchmark for success—could not have been more of a challenge. For years, I was held back in English classes because my verbal comprehension did not match the level of my peers. I was considered a “green gator,” warned away from books that were too complicated, and told to focus on simple paragraphs that matched my reading level. I let people tell me what I was capable of, limiting my own potential in order to meet the expectations of others. I wanted to identify with the labels everyone else seemed to get naturally, sacrificing my own happiness to fit a narrative. I was woefully depressed as a result, knowing I was capable of more, yet dependent upon the perspectives of others to confirm my worth. I thought all smart people were told they were bright, and that if I were capable of more challenging material, someone would tell me. I waited to be called exceptional, and when that never came, I eventually decided I had enough waiting and pursued happiness on my own.

## THE PURSUIT

Maintaining a growth mindset, regardless of others, has always been important to me. I want to push myself to do better, defining my goals by interests and excitement rather than the expectations of those around me. This, in my opinion, has been crucial in determining my relationship with happiness. Almost intangible, happiness is a ridiculous topic to write about. It means different things to everyone; very rarely is it sustainable, and it changes as you age. Furthermore, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, happiness is almost a symbol of “returning to normal,” as sharing stories about joy, or the pursuit of the feeling, is engrained in most Western narratives. As a whole, happiness seems to be an amalgamation of these stories, feeding into cultural norms and a connotative definition of the feeling. However, at its core, this is drastically unkind as these stories build a definition of happiness that is unachievable which is cruel. We learn to define our feelings through comparison rather than experience, labeling emotions as happy as they correspond to pre-written narratives that “others seem to get naturally.” As a result, happiness is a goal that is constantly out of reach, out of time, and out of place as people are pushed into narratives that do not work for everyone. Instead, I propose we reject happiness altogether, finding other ways to find completion and value.

I stopped looking for happiness when I realized it didn’t interest me. I wasn’t interested in the supposed completion that popular culture suggests only comes with being happy. I wasn’t interested in sharing my experiences with others to help find their happiness. It’s not something I seek daily or through all of my relationships. I just don’t think about it. Instead, I focus on my passions and interests, finding my own sense of bliss detached from the cultural narratives that define living a fulfilling life. I stopped wanting others to see me as “happy” and started defining my life by growth, learning, and development because that’s what I value. By stepping out of the box of happiness, I have found my own place, one that doesn’t make me stereotypically happy or sad, but where my values are centered and independent of others.

## THE GOAL

My goal in life is to be old, by myself, and live in a van. What my family hoped was a phase has stuck with me to this day and is the closest thing I have to a dream. However, this goal does not necessarily match the cultural narrative surrounding being old and happy, which is largely dependent on having financial stability, a loving family, and permanent belonging. While living in a van is my goal, there is still a lot of uncertainty about this dream.

Will this make me feel complete? I don’t know.  
Will I live there forever? I don’t know.  
Is this goal achievable? I don’t know.

What I do know is that this goal is mine, and it is not dependent on anything but my own desires and livelihood. It is something I want eventually, but is not what I strive for every day, nor my only definition of a fulfilling life. At this moment, living in a van is very unachievable as my career, education, and community involvement ground me to one location. However, even though I am not actively pursuing this goal, I am not unfulfilled with my current life. Reflecting on my life so far, I feel satisfied with what I have accomplished. My actions align with my values and identity, but I would not say I am traditionally happy or unhappy. I am content with my life and my goals for the future, and at its core, that is all I look for in the day-to-day.

## THE TAKEAWAY

This is not to say that we should not strive for a sense of community. Instead, we should focus on creating an environment in which definitions, whether they be: economical, socio-political, identity-based, or otherwise, do not determine one’s access to happiness if they so choose. Dismantling the cultural significance of joy is challenging and will require systemic change on a daily basis. However, reflecting on one’s relationship to happiness is crucial in redefining the term individually. We are warned away from paths that may be difficult or defy cultural norms, but sometimes that’s the way we have to go. It is easy to succumb to the labels others place on you to determine your place in the world; however, they don’t know your path to happiness any more than you do. Waiting for some omnipotent figure to tell you that you are worth individual completion or have finally achieved it is unrealistic and cruel, and is built upon expectations chosen for you by mass cultural connotations. Unfortunately, happiness cannot be shared or given away as advice; it must be selfish and entirely self-reflective.


I don’t look for happiness anymore, and if I were to find it, I would not tell you about it.



## AUTHOR BIO

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# What is happiness?

Now that you've established whether or not you're actually happy, let's tackle that pesky question: what exactly is happiness? Is it the same for everyone? What does it look like? What does it feel like? Let's go ahead and find out.

# Versions of happiness

MEGAN FOGARTY

Happiness comes in various forms and levels. Is it fair to say you are at the same level of happy while eating your favorite ice cream versus spending quality time with friends and family? Is the type of happiness that you have when you get birthday presents the same type as when you achieve a goal you've been working hard towards? Humans can achieve many levels of happiness, and no source is superior to another. Happiness can be attained through simple things, experiences or feelings. We can find happiness in materials, altruism, small moments with loved ones, cherished experiences or nostalgia.

## MATERIALISTIC HAPPINESS

You have a package ready for pick up! My favorite subject line. Whether it was a silly package of floss or shampoo from Amazon, a pair of new shoes or a surprise gift—that email notification from the campus package center made me smile like no other. There was always a small bit of anticipation; was this something I ordered for myself, or did my mom send me something? It was usually the former, however, the walk from the package center to my dorm had me on my toes the whole time.

What'd ya get? The first question my roommate would always ask when I walked into our room with a box in hand. We waited together as I would pull off the tape, carefully, as to not damage the contents, unsure of what awaits me. Typically, we both just laughed as I would pull out something that I had ordered myself, but every once in a blue moon, we would get a surprise. My mom loved to send me little treats—granola bars, M&M'S, fruit snacks, anything random in bulk she could find and ship. It was never anything expensive or special, but those random packages never failed to make me smile or cure my homesickness, even if temporarily. It was in those moments that I felt a sort of materialistic happiness.

## ALTRUISTIC HAPPINESS

Altruism as a source of happiness has been up for debate for as long as time. Whether you truly believe giving to others can produce an unselfish happiness or not, these types of acts provide some sort of happiness that we cannot deny. Volunteering has been a large part of my life since I was young. I have many fond memories of spending the days leading up to Christmas at the local food pantry with my family. Christmas music, lights, warm cocoa, an abundance of festive cookies, everyone there filled with holiday cheer, and the spirit of giving filled the air. It made me happy to know that not only was I enjoying myself, but I was making many others very happy as well.

## MOMENTARY HAPPINESS

Even on the worst of days, you can find small reasons to smile—I call this momentary happiness. Maybe it's not mood-changing or any monumental feeling, moment, or act, but there are small bits of happiness around us each day. I typically find this happiness from my friends. I am lucky to live in a house with all of my best friends, who dedicate themselves to supporting one another and lifting each other's spirits up. After every tough exam, hard conversation, bad news, or stressful day, I have happiness waiting for me. Whether it's a sweet note slipped under my door on the day of my exam to remind me how hard I worked and wishing me luck, or a batch of cookies waiting on the table after a rainy, stressful day—I can find happiness in each and every day through the people I surround myself with.

## GENUINE HAPPINESS

Rare, peaceful, harmonious, and beautiful. A happiness where you feel untouchable, and nothing can bring you down. A happiness that makes your soul smile. Time freezes, and you promise to yourself you will never forget this moment and how you felt. As for how often we encounter this moment and how long it lasts, it's much more sparse and fleeting.

It's hard to pick a singular moment to reflect upon. Genuine happiness is what we strive for and no matter how small it may seem, it is significant and important. Maybe you've just accomplished the goal you've been set on for weeks or months. Maybe your loved one just got exciting news and you know how much it means to them. Maybe you're living your dream. This past semester I was living my dream life studying abroad in Luxembourg. COVID-19 has changed travel and the world as we know it. I knew I was lucky to be abroad at all, but I still desired to see as much as I could. Travel was limited and difficult. Many tourist attractions were closed, and some of the countries I had my hopes set on kept their borders closed the entire semester. The last weekend of the semester, we received the news that Greece was reopening, so we planned our last trip there. I will never forget the overwhelming feeling of happiness as we took our boat around the island we were staying at, Crete. It was like a blanket, my insides felt warm and I had a child-like grin on my face. I knew this was a moment I would cherish forever. I felt blessed, adventurous, and overall, genuinely happy.

## NOSTALGIC HAPPINESS

There is something to be said about happiness and nostalgia. Although the past often brings about feelings of sadness, it can also bring a smile to your face as something triggers a buried memory that once made you very happy. My grandma passed away about seven years ago. I was young, but I carry her memory with me at all times. Whenever I see someone sitting with a Sudoku notepad and a pencil, I think of her and smile. She loved blueberries and lived in Michigan near the local farms; so whenever I have blueberries I feel a very nostalgic happiness. She taught me how to make scrambled eggs, so every morning as I butter the pan, I remember us in her kitchen and can't help but feel happy. It's a quiet type of happiness, but comforting.

Every day there is happiness, however, how we perceive it varies. We go through life looking and searching for happiness, we encounter every type and source of happiness. We place them on a scale, but I argue we shouldn't. There's no shame in embracing materialistic happiness; if your package arrives on time or a gift makes you smile, you should embrace it. If something reminds you of a past moment of happiness, admit it and espouse it. We cannot only be on the hunt for genuine happiness. Take every day as it is, and search for the good from every source.



## AUTHOR BIO

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# The root of my happiness

NATHAN GILLIN

## WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

Throughout our collection of works, this question of what is happiness is sure to be asked. However, despite similarities in the answers that my fellow authors and I give, you'll find that our answers are far from the same. We all have different experiences with happiness, and these said experiences have molded our definitions of the word. When crafting this piece, I gave myself a total of five seconds to think of my happiest moments. I came up with a few on the spot and decided to write about the root of these happy moments, highlighting one particular experience that immediately put a smile on my face. It is my hope to bring a smile to your face as we delve deeper into the root of happiness.

## HAPPINESS THROUGH DIFFERENT STAGES OF LIFE

There are times where I feel a warm, glad feeling inside when I go back to things, places, and people that made me happy at a younger time. It's almost like second-hand happiness. I'm sure you've felt this before when rewatching a show you used to love or hearing that throwback song that you still know all the words to. These nostalgic triggers are so interesting, and it's often hard to explain the feelings that arise from them. For me, I know that something once elated me, and I can't help but feel the same way when I explore it again.

A perfect example: Pokémon games.

I'm not really a gamer; I haven't been one for a while. However, when I was in elementary school, I saved up my birthday and Christmas money to buy a Nintendo DS and embarked on countless Pokémon journeys; with every new game I played and replayed and played again. I loved the adventure presented in each game and, every time I played a Pokémon game, I felt as though I could do anything. I have fond memories of intense battles with the Champion—the final boss in each game—and going to my friends' houses to work together and solve puzzles and obstacles that seemed so challenging to us at the time. When I revisit Pokémon today, I can't help but feel a similar feeling of warmth and accomplishment from the games themselves, coupled with their impact on my childhood.

Though the things that make me happy have changed over time, there is something inherently good about the moments that brighten my day. The thirst for adventure was quenched when I played Pokémon as a kid, and the memories I have reignite the adventurer within me today. The quest, which is something that has always driven me throughout my life, played out differently today. I find happiness and fulfillment when traveling the world; I had the privilege to study in Europe and travel to nine different countries last semester. I find purpose and joy in making new friends, crafting new stories to tell, playing tennis matches, and spending time with my loved ones.

Any sort of self-improvement or self-fulfilling journey brings me happiness, but sometimes it's not what we do for ourselves that is most gratifying. Instead, it's what we do for others.

## HAPPINESS THROUGH GIVING

Within those five seconds I allotted to think of my happiest moments, there is one that stands out above the rest. Funnily enough, it seemed like such a small gesture at the time.

Growing up just outside of Akron, Ohio, one of my favorite places to get food is Penn Station. Starting around the time I was thirteen, my dad and I would take monthly visits to the sub shop and munch on delicious sandwiches, fries, and cookies.

Aside from the great food, it became one of our favorite places to return to because of the people. One man in particular, Alex, went out of his way to be kind and go the extra mile for my dad and I. From fun conversations to free cookies every now and then, we loved talking to Alex: a diligent worker with hopes of running his own Penn Station.

In one of our conversations when I was in high school, he mentioned that he was competing in a guitar competition and invited us to stop by. Though my dad and I couldn't attend, Alex said that the finals—if he advanced—would be on the fifth of August—his birthday. I made a note of this on my phone.

Weeks later, Alex's birthday was here. I was in the car with my mom on the way back from church when I asked her if I could run into the local Guitar Center. I already had a card ready with a message from me and my dad, and we drove to Penn Station with a Guitar Center gift card. Though I wasn't sure if Alex was working, I hoped I could at least leave it for him at the restaurant.

I walked in, nervously excited. There's Alex. I asked him how his day was going, to which he replied, "alright," with a somewhat deflated tone. It seemed he was making the best of an okay day.

Nonetheless, he went right to work. "What can I get for you, eight-inch club?"

"I'm good today. It's more like what can I get for you! Happy birthday Alex!"

my day."

Handing him the card, I can still picture his face. His eyes—through his colored glasses—were wide open and his jaw dropped. A look of surprise slowly turned to a grin, soon becoming a smile. He couldn't believe it!

Being the guy he is, he immediately offered me free cookies.

It turned out that my gift to Alex was the first one he'd received all day. It was even the first happy birthday wish he'd received, and by now it was six o'clock. His day was off to a grim start working at another Penn Station earlier in the day and dealing with a whole host of problems over there. Afterwards, Alex went right to the Akron location and didn't have a moment to rest. As more customers came in, he seemed reluctant to get back to work, but he left me with this:

"Thank you so much, I was thinking how shitty of a birthday this was, but you really made

## WHAT'S THE ROOT?

I'll never forget the look on Alex's face and the reaction of pure joy he had. I couldn't stop smiling as I wrote that story. Knowing what kind of a day he'd had before I walked in the Penn Station, I have never felt as fulfilled as I felt then.

To be honest, I'm still not sure I know the root of happiness yet. However, I think that we, as humans, inherently want to do good. We want to make our loved ones proud of the things we accomplish. We want to be there for our friend who just needs a friend. We want to help our classmate with that homework problem.

I want to make a positive impact on the world through my words and actions; one way I strive to do so is to make someone smile every day.

Speaking of smiling, take this collection of photos at the beginning of the passage. It's me and two of my friends when we were in Malta on a weekend trip. We were already having fun: exploring a new country, drinking milkshakes, and spending time with each other walking around town. The reason we were laughing? Mason, the man on the right, didn't take a single picture while we posed. By the time he started taking pictures, we were already hysterical.

Go out and make a difference. Better yourself and the people around you, and I assure you that you can find happiness.



## AUTHOR BIO

Nathan Gillin is a junior (class of 2023) with a double major in professional writing and media and culture. He is from Akron, Ohio, and some things that bring him happiness are playing tennis, discovering new music, and finding great television shows and movies to get lost in.



# What is happiness to you?

EVA COLE

Happiness is a hug. It's a warm cookie or a slice of cake on your birthday. Happiness is the sun on a warm day, or maybe it's driving by Christmas lights in the snow. Happiness is passing a test you thought you failed. Or is it? Is happiness a rainy day? Is it studying at the library with your friends? Is it a drive alone with music? What is happiness to you?

I ask this question because what brings you happiness may be different than what makes someone else happy. There is this general idea that everyone is happy when they eat a piece of cake on their birthday, but what if you hate cake? What if you love a rainy day over a sunny one? Who is to tell you that you can't be happy because of things that make them unhappy?

Happiness is a concept that is often depicted by actions such as smiling, laughter, or dancing. The reality of this is very different, however. Happiness looks and feels different for each person it touches. There's a stigma that you should be happy all the time and that if you feel off, it's bad. The reason I ask what happiness is to you is so you have a chance to identify objects or ideas that truly make you happy on your own.

If we know our own forms of happiness, why is it that we as a human race often force ourselves to be happy for something when we know we aren't? Is it the social drawbacks? The fear of judgment for what we enjoy? It's time to stop letting others control our happiness and take matters into our own hands.

## THE STIGMA

With the current social media activity that goes on in the world, it is so easy to feel like you're falling behind. People live that "Facebook Life": you know, the perfect life where everything is all smiles and achievements. I'm here to remind you that social media's idea of life isn't true. Social media is an inaccurate depiction of someone's life. It's often staged, untrue, and, more often than not, is just brutal to its viewers.

You look at celebrities and influencers and wonder why that's not you. You wish you were doing more at your age to be as successful as they are, so you take their advice and sponsorships. You fall into a pit of doing something because someone says so. For a personal example, I love following Khloe Kardashian. Her sense of humor reminds me of myself, and I like seeing what she's involved with so I can continue to relate to her and, hypothetically, live her life through her pictures. However, as many people know, the majority of what the Kardashians (and other famous celebrities) do is staged, edited, and fake. Still, I went out and purchased Khloe's collagen products that were available because I was curious if a product done by her would work as she said. Now, it just sits in my pantry unused.

Oftentimes, we force ourselves to be happy with things that celebrities, influencers, and even our own friends and family love so we can relate to them. We want to seem connected and similar, even if it means risking our own enjoyment and pleasure.

## THE UGLY TRUTH

The issue with forcing your own happiness is that you know, deep down, that you aren't truly happy. That sounds silly, I know, but you force yourself into a false belief that these are things you enjoy even when you know they aren't. There's nothing wrong with trying to fit in, but after a life of shoving myself into things that others enjoyed that I didn't, I can't stand that unhappy feeling of not speaking up and being a people pleaser.

I could sit in a crowded room to watch DC's Joker, but it wouldn't be as enjoyable as watching Marvel's Black Widow, since I'm a Marvel fan. I would feel like the money I spent on the DC ticket wasn't as worth it as the money I would spend for a Marvel movie. I'm sure there are people who would say the opposite, and that's perfectly fine! It's a matter of investing your time and effort in areas where it will be beneficial to you: emotionally, mentally, or physically. Th

Forcing happiness is more harmful to you as an individual than not being happy at all. Going through the efforts to reroute your mind and feelings to give positive reactions (such as smiling or laughing) when you'd rather not can be very damaging. The sad reality with forcing happiness is that it is a reflection of our friends, our family, society as a whole, and what is expected of us. Instead of looking at what we should be, our focus and intentions should be on achieving and growing into what we want to be.

## WHY SHOULD YOU STOP?

Stopping yourself from hiding what you truly enjoy and forcing yourself to indulge in other activities is hard. It is way easier said than done. This is a personal challenge for me as well. I spend a lot of time being a pleaser and giving too much to people who don't deserve it. This includes participating in things that make me uncomfortable or unhappy, but I do it because it will make them happy. Giving too much of my own mental effort and emotions to other people has caused a lot of negativity in my life, and I'm sure it has for others! I am making a promise to myself to focus more on things that make me happy, like spending time with music, my family, my best friends, and my dog.

I channel a lot of my emotions into the music I listen to, because it gives me a chance to express my feelings without saying or doing anything that would cause a situation to get even worse. Even then, I turn to my family and friends for reassurance and advice. For unconditional love and support, my dog is always ready for whatever I need him for. I encourage you to find those sources of happiness that always support you—and just know, no matter what anyone says, they'll be there when you need them most.

(P.S. See my support system doggo below)



## AUTHOR BIO

Eva Cole is a junior (class of 2023) with a major in professional writing and minors in information systems and information security. She is from Cincinnati, Ohio, and something that makes her happy is spending time with her friends.



# Rating happiness

MAYA STOFFER

## INTRODUCTION

I consulted five colleagues and friends to question whether they were happy. After asking them if they were happy at that moment and why, I proceeded to ask them to make a list of items that would make them happy. I compiled a list of these happiness factors and asked each person to rate on a scale of zero to ten—with zero symbolizing no change in happiness, and ten representing the achievement of ultimate happiness—their lists of items and activities:

## INTERVIEWS

Jenny:

Currently unhappy because she feels extremely behind on work, and as she does her make-up work, Jenny is falling behind on her current assignment, but what would make her happy is:

- Being warm (physically a little chilled right now) (4)
- Perfecting her mac ‘n’ cheese craft (4)
- Not being “not sick;” being completely well (5)
- Being sure about doing well in courses (5)
- Watching The Labyrinth; bringing back her childhood (6)
- Better weather (still cold) (6)
- Not having to worry about past work (7)
- Getting caught up on work (8)
- Seeing Brayden, her brother, now that he’s living in Ohio (9)
- Seeing her three dogs (10)
- Going to New Mexico to visit grandma (10)

Griffin:

Not happy right now because his exam tomorrow morning has him stressed and midterm week in general is just rough for him, but what would make him happy is:

- Watching sports game (4)
- Sleep (5)
- Eating Chick-fil-A (6)
- FaceTime with parents and/or pets (8)
- Relaxing night drive (8)
- Hanging out with friends (8)
- Going back home to Boston because has been feeling homesick lately (9)
- Petting puppies (9)
- The exam tomorrow being cancelled (10)
- A good grade on the exam tomorrow (10)

Lily:

Fairly happy at the moment, as she is just chilling, watching a show on her laptop because she finished her homework for the night. However, what would make her happier is:

- Eating food (2)
- Sleeping (3)
- Watching TV shows, movies, scrolling through TikTok or other social media platforms (4)
- Listening to a sports game (5)
- Listening to music (6)
- Talking to friends, whether over the phone or over text message (7)
- Going to a sporting event live (8)
- Knowing that the Cincinnati Reds are going to make the playoffs (8)
- For the future, she would like to be successful in whatever she ends up doing after graduation in May. She just wants all the hard work from school to pay off (8)
- Singing or dancing (9)
- Hanging out with friends (9)
- Having time to relax (10)

Sabrina:

Not happy right at this moment because she had to wake up early and be somewhere by 7:30am, so she feels very tired. Her happiness is:

- Eating (4)
- Sleeping (5)
- Having mac ‘n’ cheese specifically (7)
- Seeing friends (7)
- Going on a trip (9)
- Petting a dog (10)

Maura:

She is pretty happy right now! She feels like she’s finally starting to get back on track with school, where she gets to see her friends a lot more than last year, and she is really enjoying her apartment. Things that would make her happy for the future are:

- Having a consistent workout routine, which is something she’s struggling with right now (7)
- Figuring out more healthy recipes she loves (7)
- Having a porch or balcony or deck for her future house (8)
- Having a family eventually (9)
- Having a job she feels fulfilled in (10)
- Getting married eventually (10)

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the people I asked are not happy right now. However, there are several things that could bring them happiness in less than five minutes. Also, many of the things people associate with happiness are food, dogs, and spending time with loved ones (friends, family members, or pets). Many of the associated items with happiness are feasible right now, rather than a long-term idea. One thing I found interesting was that even though spending time with friends, whether in person or online, brought happiness to people, they generally rated it as a 7–8 on the happiness scale. Consistently, I saw animals rated higher than spending time with friends, which is fascinating to hear about. It makes me wonder if it’s because spending time with friends is easier and can happen more often than petting a random dog or seeing our pets that are not in Oxford? Another interesting thing I found was that happiness was commonly thought of as a short-term thing, with the rationale of “what could bring me happiness in this moment to fix this current issue or problem?” To further support this argument, only two of the five people talked about what being happy would look like for them after graduation—with getting married, fulfillment in a future job, and owning a home with some exterior amenities as examples. A third point I drew from this was the fact that things and activities that can bring happiness can also be put on a 0–10 scale. When I asked these people to rate the items on their list from a 0–10 scale, with 0 being no change in happiness and 10 being them achieving ultimate happiness, none of them were hesitant to assign a number to each item. I found this interesting because they all knew certain things bring them more happiness than others, and all of them were able to determine the difference between two numbers (such as what makes an item an 8 rather than a 7 on the scale). Despite these distinctions, I made a collage of all things that bring these people and myself happiness, regardless of how high the item or activity ranks on their scale. Enjoy!



## AUTHOR BIO

Maya Stoffer is a senior (class of 2022) with a double major in professional writing and marketing. She is from Cincinnati, Ohio, and something that makes her happy is “when it’s a clear sky and you’re able to look up and see a sky full of twinkling and sparkling stars.”



# Lexicon of happiness

CAMRYN SMITH

## HAPPINESS (NOUN): \ HAP-PI-NESS \

### 1. A state of well-being and contentment

Well-being, contentment, pleasure, meaning—what do these words all mean? Online dictionaries say they mean happiness, but do we know what happiness really is? It is desired by all, yet looks different to everyone. Is happiness simply increased levels of dopamine and serotonin? Was Aristotle onto something when he said that happiness is the achievement of health, wealth, knowledge, and friends? What about Plato and his idea that happiness is the highest aim of moral conduct? Or is it really just whatever we want it to be?

## CAMMY (NOUN) : \ CAM-MY \

### 1. 21 y/o college female with a love for coffee, books, and soccer.

I am sitting in my house, full of the all-encompassing laughter and personalities of seven other college girls. The pumpkin spice candle flickers while a movie plays on the TV; I think it is The Parent Trap, but no one is really listening.

I am driving home from what could possibly be my last soccer game of my playing career. The game was cold and rainy, but my car is toasty warm. My mom, dad, and niece came to watch me play. My mom brought me homemade soup to take back to school. I'm close to home now, and it is not completely dark yet. I will walk into my warm house, take a shower, and warm up a slice of my store-bought pumpkin bread and finish reading my book.

I am walking home from class and the leaves are finally changing colors. It is my favorite kind of weather—dark grey sky, brisk air that is borderline cold. Everything is bathed in the dark, hazy light of a fall afternoon encroaching on the evening.

I am sitting on the deck of a cottage in northern Michigan. The sun is setting, and my dad has classic rock playing on the Bluetooth speaker. We all have our hoodies on as the temperature begins to drop on this lazy summer evening on the shores of Lake Michigan. I look to my right and I see kids skipping rocks on the beach. This is happiness.

## NONNIE (NOUN): \ NON-NIE \

### 1. 90 y/o grandmother of six; great-grandmother of four 2. Wife of Poppie for 70 years

What is happiness to someone who has lived a full life filled with love, family, and memories spanning decades? The answer is simple: family.

“That’s an easy question...”

“My wonderful loving family and my good health.”

“When life gives you lemons, make lemonade”

“I see trees of green,  
red roses too,  
I see them bloom  
For me and you  
And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world” — Louis Armstrong (but sung by Nonnie through the phone).

“How happy we are to have been here long enough to enjoy all of you.”

## POPPIE (NOUN): \ POP-PIE \

### 1. 91 y/o grandfather of six; great-grandfather of four 2. Husband of Nonnie for 70 years

What is happiness to someone who has seen so much? Who has met so many people? Who has experienced so many things? What is happiness to a man who has lived for 91 years, married to the same woman for 70 of them? Who dipped his future wife's pigtails in the inkwells at school when they were kids? The answer is simple: family.

“THE BEST THING IN THE WORLD IS FAMILY—IT MEANS MORE TO ME THAN ANYTHING ELSE.”

“...TO ENJOY THEIR LIVES AND TO DO IT TOGETHER.”

“EVERY DAY IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT, ESPECIALLY WITH A SMILE.”

## DAD (NOUN): \ DAD \

### 1. 65 y/o father of four; grandfather of three

### 2. A man who still acts like a little kid

What is happiness to a man who has worked his whole adult life for his family? Who has successfully raised four children, two of which have children of their own? What is happiness to a man who never fails to make his kids laugh? The answer is simple: money

Just kidding!

“Cam, don’t put that in there, I was joking.”

“Happiness is seeing my children become successful and hardworking. Seeing them have good values and be good people.”

## MOM (NOUN): \ MOM \

### 1. 63 y/o mother of two; stepmother of two; grandmother to three

### 2. The strongest woman on the planet

What is happiness to a woman who crafted her own recipe for success from scratch? Who works harder than anyone to achieve her goals? Who prides herself on this hard work? What is happiness to a woman who is a living miracle? A survivor? The answer is simple: her kids

“My kids are my happiness.”

“My marriage makes me happy.”

“Being healthy after a stroke.”

“Being able to relax and exercise, believe it or not.”

“My health”

## DEVIN (NOUN): \ DE-VIN \

### 1. 23 y/o brother of three; uncle of three

### 2. Annoying older brother of Cammy

What is happiness to a young man, barely out of college, who always seems to be living his best life? What is happiness to a young man who spends his days working his hard-earned job, hanging out with his beautiful girlfriend, placing bets with his crazy friends? The answer is simple: winning parlays (no joking this time, he really meant this).

“Living the life you want to live.”

“Always being friendly to others.”

■ ■ ■

I wake up early in the morning and head to the kitchen to make my coffee. The house is quiet—my friends aren’t early risers. This is a process I have perfected: fill the water up to four cups in the pot and fill the milk frother with just enough vanilla creamer to cover the spinner. Pour into my favorite mug that says “Leland, Michigan.” I sit in bed and pull out the second book in the series I am reading. I sip my coffee. This is happiness.



## AUTHOR BIO

Camryn Smith is senior (class of 2022) with a double major in strategic communications and professional writing. She is from Rochester Hills, Michigan, and something that makes her happy is having coffee in the morning.



# The definition of happiness

KAYLEIGH SCHAUSEIL

## WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

What is happiness? We must first start by imagining what emotions are. Psychology Today says, “according to the cognitive appraisal theory, emotions are judgments about the extent that the current situation meets your goals. Happiness is the evaluation that your goals are being satisfied, as when winning the lottery solves your financial problems and being asked out holds the promise of satisfying your romantic needs. Similarly, sadness is the evaluation that your goals are not being satisfied, and anger is the judgment aimed at whatever is blocking the accomplishment of your goals (Psychology Today).”

## EMOTIONS

However, there can also be a more physical association with emotion. Perhaps emotions are simply the response to our heart rate, hormone levels, etc. The (scientific) answer is a combination of judgement, assessment, and physical feeling. Of course, emotions can be extremely varied and subjective. Despite the complexity, according to a study done in the 1970s, “psychologist Paul Eckman identified six basic emotions that he suggested were universally experienced in all human cultures. The emotions he identified were happiness, sadness, disgust, fear, surprise, and anger. He later expanded his list of basic emotions to include such things as pride, shame, embarrassment, and excitement (Cherry).” This may sound familiar—a recent children's film, *Inside Out*, deals with a person's core emotions that rule their lives and actions. Except, in this film, the filmmakers seem to combine happiness and surprise into one emotion—Joy. This is something that deserves to be touched upon; why combine happiness with another emotion? Is happiness not the best emotion? Does changing it to Joy somehow upgrade the experience of it?

This may be the case, at least by present standards and understandings of emotion. Happiness seems to now be associated with simple contentment. It is only when it is combined with surprise/excitement that one feels even better than happy: joyous.

## MOMENTARY HAPPINESS

What does it say about us as people that we are constantly in search of happiness? Will we even know when we have happiness? And even bigger, is it even something that can be reached or achieved?

According to HappinessInternational.org, happiness is when your life fulfills your needs. This seems like a nice thing, but what happens when you have your needs met and you still don't feel happy?

This is to beg the question: is happiness real? Or is it truly a misconception of contentment mistaken for joy?

Everyone has different needs for what will make them happy. Everyone is different and has different experiences, and therefore no two people will find happiness in the same things. There are nine things to take into consideration when deciding what can make a person happy (Happiness International): wellbeing (mind-body connections, aspects of your physical body that affect your mood, and vice versa), environment (external factors like safety, food availability, freedom, weather, beauty, and your home), pleasure (temporary experiences such as joy, sex, love, and eating), relationships (as a social species, relationships are at the foundation of what it means to be human), outlook (how you approach the world through adventurousness, curiosity, and making plans), meaning (having a purpose and the wisdom to understand it), involvement (to be happy you have to be engaged and actively involved), success (confirmation from yourself and others that what you do has value) and elasticity (how you recover from life's inevitable negative events). These nine criteria intersect and overlap in ways that will differentiate from person to person in order to determine their own individual happiness.

Overall, while one can find the experiences and situations that make them happy, it is always a fleeting emotion. According to different philosophies, such as Buddhism, happiness is not always achievable, and it is always shifting. The problem with ordinary happiness is that it never lasts because the objects of happiness don't last. A happy event is soon followed by a sad one (O'Brien). In order to be truly happy, one must be able to experience the happy and the sad moments that come and be able to take joy in both, knowing that all moments have meaning and importance. The best one can do to feel happy is to replace negative thoughts with positive ones, and thus, one will feel more positive emotions, like happiness, more often than negative.

## THE TAKEAWAY

So, the original question still stands: what is happiness? The answer seems to be that it is a complex, multifaceted emotion that can be experienced, but often not fully noticed or understood. When one feels happiness, they may not be aware of it in the moment, for, as with the Buddhist teachings, one is always worried about the sadness that they know may come. Focusing on the loss of happiness in the future keeps people from truly feeling the happiness they have in the present.

The best one can do is practice happiness. Let go and do not focus on the selfish ideals of making yourself happy. To live in the moment and enjoy the happiness around you will lend itself to a much longer duration of the emotion. “His Holiness the Dalai Lama said, ‘If you want others to be happy practice compassion; and if you want yourself to be happy practice compassion’” (O'Brien).



## AUTHOR BIO

Kayleigh Schauseil is a senior (class of 2022) with a double major in professional writing and creative writing with a minor in women and gender studies. She is from Chillicothe, Ohio, and something that makes her happy is her cat, who she says is “the cutest thing ever.”



# Self- reflective

We've learned what happiness is, now it is time to apply that definition to your own life. What makes you happy? Dive into this section and read about what happiness means to other people, and along the way, you might discover what it means to you.



# Happy place

JULIA HASTINGS

Do you have a happy place?

A place in your mind where you can go to escape the challenges of daily life?

A happy place can be anywhere or anything, just so long as it puts your mind at ease. It does not have to be a real place, or even a place you have been to, but it has to be somewhere where you can close your eyes and feel as though you are there.

If you have never thought about your own happy place, this is your invitation to do so.

I'll go first:

My happy place is my childhood backyard. Not the way the yard is now, but how it looked and felt when I was a kid.

## THE BACKYARD

The backyard was expansive and seemingly boundless for little feet. My siblings and I could run around the yard endlessly and never run out of energy. The grass was soft enough for bare feet, and it stayed damp in the very back of the yard along the creek. The grass would stick all over our legs, but it never bothered me the way it would now.

A long line of willow trees ran alongside the creek. Their long, downtrodden branches would sway gently in the wind. The tips of their branches would skim the surface of the creek, and many times, we would use these branches to swing across the thin body of water to the other side. Of course, we did not always make it across without falling into the shallow water. My brother somehow always managed to take the plunge, leaving my sister and I to laugh and vow that we would never try it again (even though we would).

I deemed this line of willow trees my magical hotspot. I would read under the shelter of their boughs and collect the fallen branches, using them as a weapon to chase after my brother. I darted between their trunks and ran the opposite direction when it was my turn to face the wrath of a sibling.

Attached to one of the oldest of the willow trees was a rope swing with a hard plastic seat attached to its end. We called it “the circle swing,” and for good reason. We took turns on the swing, getting pushed by one another into dizzying circles. When it was my turn, I would spin so fast that all I could see was a blur of green from the grass and the bright splotches of blonde hair from my siblings on the ground.

## THE YEARLY CYCLE

In the spring, dandelions would come in hordes, much to my father’s dismay. I would pick my favorites—the fattest and most symmetrical—and weave them into mediocre flower crowns. I did not agree with my father’s opinion of them as weeds. For me, they were wildflowers that brightened the yard and became the perfect decorations for my hair and my willow trees.

In the fall, the leaves from the cottonwood trees came down in multitudes, covering the entire yard. My parents would sneakily enlist our help with raking leaves by having us rake them into squares and creating a “leaf blueprint” of our imaginary house. My siblings and I would rake large piles of the leaves into perfectly straight lines and stack large piles for our “beds.” We would play in our imaginary leaf homes until we got bored, and eventually, our groups of leaves could be easily picked up into barrels.

In the winter, the yard turned into a vast expanse of white. My mother would layer us up with coats, scarves, and gloves until we looked like marshmallows and sent us outside to “burn off steam.” We made snowballs, snow angels, and snowmen until we could no longer take the cold. The yard would be covered with a million footprints by the time we were done—our own little masterpiece.

## VISITING YOUR HAPPY PLACE

When I mentally take myself to my happy place, I feel the joy of being a child, the softness of the grass, the smell of dandelions, the sound of my sibling’s laughs, and the spiritual connection I feel to the place and the people within it. My happy place is made up of memories and feelings more than anything physical that may be implied by the word “place.”

My happy place slows down the never-ending flow of thoughts from my brain and reminds me of the little things that make me happy. It helps me stay afloat when I feel like I am drowning.

The harsh reality is that life can be unkind. Daily tasks seem trivial and sometimes there is no end in sight to the struggles of everyday life. It can be easy for the stress and futility of it all to take over completely, leaving you to feel hopeless and stuck where you are.

As corny as it sounds to “go to your happy place,” sometimes a mental escape into a better part of your life or a place where you feel at home can be therapeutic.

It may be impossible to go to the place that makes you feel happiest throughout your daily life. For me, my childhood backyard does not exist like it did when I was growing up. However, this is the joy of a happy place; it does not have to be viable. It can be a feeling, a person, or an imaginary world. As long as you can take yourself there when you need to go, who cares if it is metaphysical?

I encourage you to take some time to think about your own happy place and what that place means for you.

Be mindful. Take care of yourself. Go visit your happy place sometime. :)



## AUTHOR BIO

Julia Hastings is a senior (class of 2022) with a double major in English literature and professional writing. She is from Huron, Ohio, and some things that make her happy are sunsets, Mexican food, road trips, snorkeling, and her family.



# A personal examination on self-love and happiness

ALLISON HAEGER

Happiness, as something we can manifest if we desire to, is tricky. Self-love is tricky too—or maybe slippery is the right word? You get the point—self-love and happiness are both difficult to acquire. Once you have them, though, they can be a challenge to sustain.

They're kind of like fractions. The pairing of self-love and happiness looks the same as the elementary school fraction practice of deciphering how many possible combinations can come from mixing all the different colored marbles. Or maybe that would be percentages? Who knows—I've never been very good at math, and I love that about myself.

Anyway, self-love and happiness: you can have both of them, or one, or none. From there, the effects of the combinations also change. I don't completely understand it, but self-reflection is an essential piece to finding self-love and happiness, or one, or the other...or none.

The world of self-love and happiness is dark and full of terror. Let's go.

## YOU ONLY HAVE HAPPINESS.

1. Freshman and sophomore year weekends were designated to wearing as little clothing and as much makeup as possible, surviving on dining hall scraps and vodka lemonades, and finding guys to dance with at bars. Every weekend was a race to have as much fun as anyone could and make as many memories as anyone could—and we did. Although, everyone was so worried about how they looked all the time that I'm not sure anyone had any fun at all—at least I didn't.
2. Nowadays, I walk to class and take in the calm air from each breeze that passes through my hair. Back then, every subtle movement led to a quick tuck of hair behind the ears and out of the eyes, pants pulled up and up so they cover my stomach more, sickly-sweet lotion coating my skin, and my squeaky shoes making me think everyone is staring at me when no one really is. I forgot my inhaler in the dorm and, instead of focusing on how to breathe, all I can think is can my classmates hear me wheezing every time I walk in the door?
3. Every day I stumble through class and can't wait to get back to my dorm, cozy up in the comfiest bed I've ever had, and watch *The Good Wife* the entire night (or whatever other show I am currently cycling through). Streams of movies and TV and music prolong each hour; taking up so much space in my head that the good tunes and dramatic plotlines fool me into believing my joy, even as I hide from every single other person at this school under my twin XL comforter.

Happiness without self-love is often fleeting and the origins are typically clouded. Happiness without self-love really reminds me of a simulation; it seems we're all characters in a dystopian novel trying to play our parts.

Repeat.

## YOU ONLY HAVE SELF-LOVE.

1. Kroger taco seasoning fills the air as I sprinkle it over sizzling ground turkey. Grease pops and jumps out of the pan like a last-ditch protest from the bird; didn't you ever learn to treat others how you'd like to be treated? I shake extra seasoning over the smaller pan housing faux meat that looks quite...faux. There are minimal protests from this pan of grease; instead, the unidentifiable substance whines loudly under the heat, a constant complaint.
- I'm cooking meat and non-meat and heating up beans and rice and corn and setting out tortillas and plates and serving spoons not seven feet away from the doll-sized table where I, my roommate, and our friend sit, and yet I couldn't feel farther away. My roommate, MJ, chats our friend's ear off as I jump into the conversation every now and again, only to be met with more sizzling pans.
- MJ's gaze was always sharp and critical, but this was one of the first nights its judgment focused on me, or maybe it was just one of the first nights I caught on.
- I stir her faux meat and she whispers unkind words to our friend that she doesn't want me to hear. I can't hear what they say but it doesn't matter, I've observed MJ's gossipy tone and excluding body language a number of times before I felt her bad vibes radiate towards me, even as I cook her food.

1. It's been a while since I've had the chance to be a passenger on a car ride and I take advantage of the privilege happily. White lines drag by the bottom side of the window and the spring drive towards Hamilton looks like an entirely new world than what we'd see if it was winter. MJ shows off her fancy new rental car on this mission to gather yarn from the nearest-not-so-near Michaels. It's probably been at least a week since we spoke for longer than a short run-in, and now we get to sit in a car together while I try to think of how to tell her I don't want to be friends anymore because she's just like my last bad friend who MJ compares herself to (I now realize suspiciously often), or think of how to convince her to try—I never had much hope for this one.
2. "I'm sorry," MJ soothed. "Sometimes I just can't listen to your stories because they're so boring."
3. MJ and I used to laugh and laugh about everything nonstop. We laughed so much I can't even remember what we laughed about, we laughed so much I started to stop seeing the world with such dark-tinted glasses, we laughed so much I learned how to love myself and the mind I had, we laughed so much that maybe she got tired of hearing my laugh, we laughed so much it took me a second to hear the hidden sneers underneath her laughs towards the end. Besides a high-pitched, customer-toned hello from the other day, I haven't spoken a word to her in five months.
4. I'm happier than ever.

Loving yourself doesn't always lead to making the happiest decisions. I was never elated that I needed to end my friendship with MJ, but the depletion of my self-worth that followed the interruptions, snide comments, condescension, and desire to pit me against my friends wasn't worth the occasional laugh we'd get on Taco Bell runs. Sometimes you have to make unhappy choices to prioritize your self-love and worth over happiness; no number of laughs is deserving of a friend treating you as their inferior.

## YOU HAVE NEITHER.

1. Yikes.
2. I feel lucky to say these days are now few and far between.
3. Depression days still come every once and a while though. Consider: going on a walk, journaling, color in a coloring book, meal prep, wash one load of laundry, shower, water the plants, watch a documentary, schedule lunch with a friend, go on a hike, sit at the beach, sit in a hammock, talk to a friend, eat ice cream, get some tears out, fold clothes, write to-do lists, make an iced chai, do a face mask, light a candle.
4. [Click here to submit suggestions for maintaining a state of distraction.](#)

## YOU HAVE BOTH SELF-LOVE AND HAPPINESS.

1. Humming on walks to class, shoes squeaking and all.
2. The plan was to go hammocking on my birthday, but it started to rain as soon as we were ready to leave. "Why don't we just light candles on the front porch and hang out there," I suggested to my roommates. We gathered all the candles from the house, at least five or six, and lit them around our pallet on the porch. Very witchy and very peaceful. We sat and talked and listened to the rain and had the best night.

Self-love and happiness feel like trusting every ounce of your being. Self-reflection is essential to sustaining a happy and self-loving life, though, and willingness to accept your wrong-doings is key. Take time every day to think about how that day unfolded and recall the moments you appreciated.

I turned 22 and told my friends I felt more symmetrically aligned with the universe. Maybe you feel like a constant in your place on Earth, it's empowering. Maybe you just feel happy without a reason.

Contentment with yourself doesn't translate to linear progression and if you don't expect some regression, you're not giving yourself enough grace. Take each day one at a time.



Take a moment to appreciate the sky next time you're out.

## AUTHOR BIO

Allison Haeger is a senior (class of 2022) with a double major in media and culture and professional writing and a double minor in film studies and creative writing. She is from Gahanna, Ohio, and loves going on walks when the sun is setting so she can take plenty of pictures of the sky.



# Recipes for happiness

SKYLAR BOTSHON

Happiness can mean something different to everyone. To me, it means being content with where I am in life, being with people I love and care about, and doing something that brings me joy. In the pursuit of happiness, one can never truly be happy if they are always thinking about what they can do to be happy. If everything you do is in hopes that it makes you happy, then you can never actually be happy in the moment. Instead of pursuing happiness, I try to be with people I care about and do things that bring me feelings of joy. This ranges from backpacking trips, to petting every dog I see, to cooking with my family.

Cooking and food create some of the most powerful connections for people. The taste or smell of a food can take someone back to a specific memory: cranberry stuffing on Thanksgiving, hot chocolate on a snowy day, your favorite dinner on your birthday, or cooking breakfast in bed for Mom on Mother's Day. Some of my favorite memories from the years growing up can be linked to cooking with my family, friends, or even by myself. It was my goal to try to bring back some of these favorite memories for those around me. I interviewed several people to get to the root of core memories of the purest form of happiness for them as recalled through a favorite recipe.

## FAUXSTESS CUPCAKES

"Happiness is a labor of love. Although this recipe is an all day adventure, my children absolutely love this dessert, along with every other person who tries them! The all day adventure is worth it when they come into the kitchen and see me baking; it is even more worth it when they ask to join in. And the running joke of 'you promised to make these like 4 years ago' always makes me giggle. Even better, though, was when my children made them for me this past summer as a surprise for my wedding. Our shared love for this recipe that acts as an all day adventure became my wedding cake—a perfect symbol for love, adventure, and the joys of baking." - Maureen M.

Fauxstess Cupcakes, a vegan version of Hostess Cupcakes, have long been a staple in Maureen's household. She described happiness as being "a labor of love," and this recipe is a symbol of just that: love. Being able to bake them with her family makes the act of baking, in general, that much more enjoyable. The fact that the dessert also became her wedding cake furthers the feelings of love and happiness that are associated with the Fauxstess recipe.

## GINGERBREAD COOKIES

"This recipe is just so fun. The memory of happiness that it makes me think of is Christmas Eve cookie decorating with the whole family and the neighbor's kids. We would create the wackiest cookies, never staying with just standard gingerbread men. We would use a whole tub of cookie cutters ranging from mushrooms, to moons, to barnyard animals, and more! Our cookies ranged from sweet, to ugly, to even horror show gingerbread. It was a free-for-all and it made my whole family so happy from start to finish. We always laughed and smiled our way through baking these cookies." - Ann D.

Gingerbread cookies, a staple in most households during the holidays, is what made Ann think of happiness. She described her whole family and neighborhood friends getting together on Christmas Eve to be creative and laugh their way through the day. To Ann, happiness is about laughter with the people she cares about.

## ITALIAN SAUSAGE PASTA

"This dish reminds me of the love I felt when my girlfriend first made it for me. It was the first meal made for me in a very, very long time. She spent the evening teaching me how to cook it, which then allowed me to make it for my friends. The act of both loving me and teaching me brings me the feeling of happiness." - Peter B.

Peter's happiness, in the form of a recipe, is about the love behind the cooking. His memory of the act of kindness that goes along with cooking for someone is tied to the happiness felt in the moment. Happiness for Peter is about caring for someone, taking new steps in a relationship, and learning to love new things.

## BUCKEYES

"One of my all-time favorite desserts would have to be buckeyes. Before my sister left for college, she would always make us the best buckeyes. She would complain about how long it takes to make them and about how I could make them myself, but then she would take me to the store to buy the ingredients, lay them all out on the counter, and dance along to music in the kitchen while making them. Once the filling was made, she would call me over to taste test, always saying how someone had to test the product before they went out to the family. Even though she would complain about making them, I am pretty sure that she secretly loved to do it. Making buckeyes reminds me of happiness because it is when my whole family is together." - Taylor A.

Joking around in the kitchen, making someone's favorite dessert, and the act of going together to the store to buy ingredients all combine to make Taylor's happiest memories. He says that this recipe makes him happy because it reminds him of when his whole family gets together. Within the buckeye recipe is the sentiment that cooking with your loved ones is what makes the act of cooking so great.

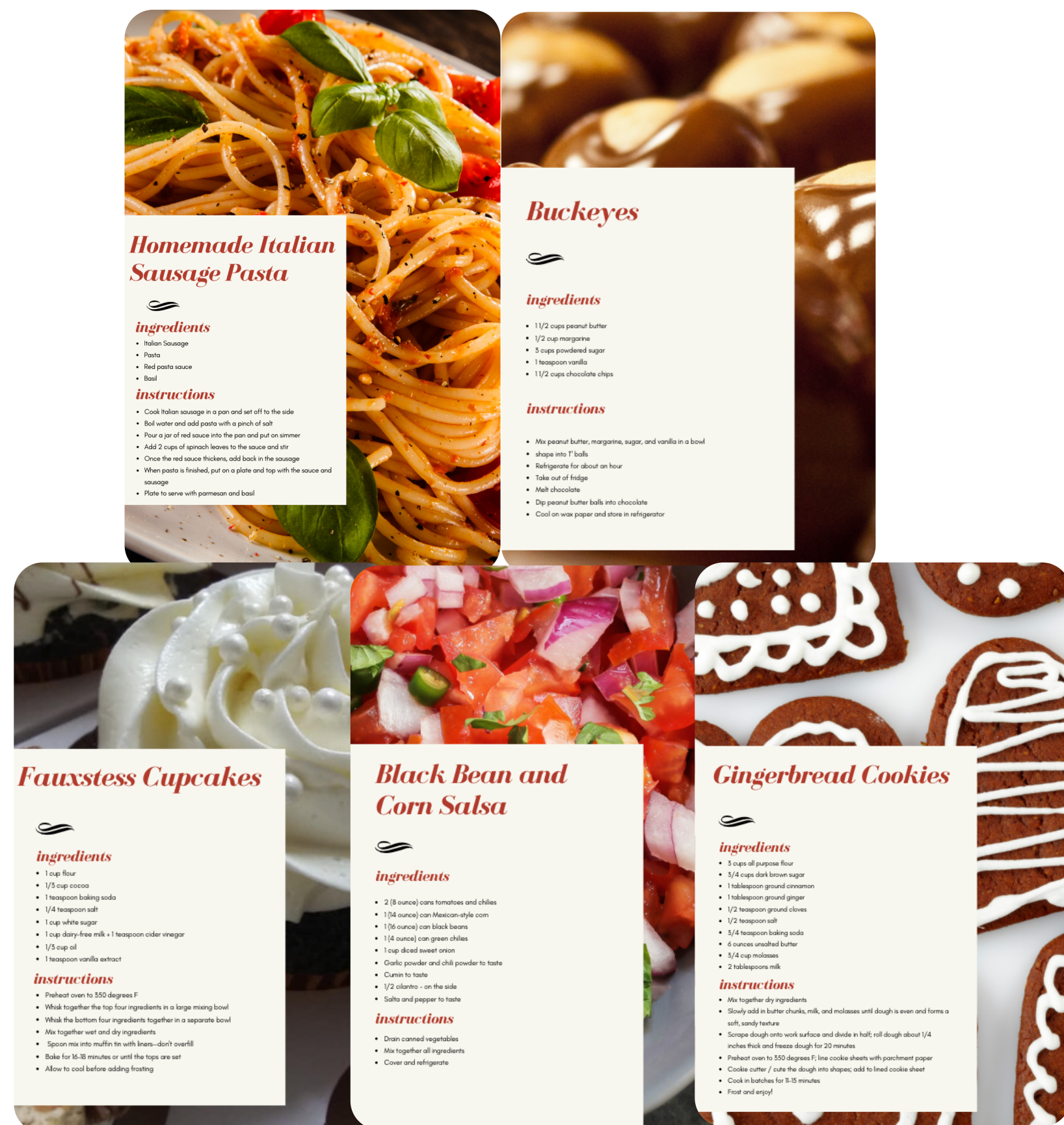
## BLACK BEAN AND CORN SALSA

"I love this recipe because it reminds me of my daughter. She was so happy to bring it home after learning it at a summer camp. She wanted to run to the store immediately to buy all the ingredients. Of course, it makes me smile to have 'cilantro on the side' because she hates cilantro! The colors in this recipe are fun and festive, just like she is." - Brooke B.

A core memory for Brooke is making salsa with her daughter. She reminisced on how the salsa made her smile and laugh because of how simple it was to make, and how it brought her daughter so much joy. To Brooke, happiness is about the little things in life that bring a smile to your face just by thinking about them.

## SO, WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

A common theme within all of the interviews conducted was how feelings of happiness were surrounded by family members or friends. It seems that people are happiest when they look back on a memory and can connect it to love, family, and times in their life that bring back good feelings. When thinking about something makes you smile or laugh, connects back to a core memory of joy, or makes you excited to do something—either for the first or hundredth time—that is how you know you were happy in the moment.



## AUTHOR BIO

Skylar Botshon is a junior (class of 2023) with a double major in marketing and supply chain & operations management and a minor in rhetoric. She is from Springboro, Ohio, and something that makes her happy is telling bad dad jokes.



# Happiness

CRYSTAL SHAO

## A PERSONAL WORK-IN-PROGRESS ABOUT HAPPINESS

As a child of immigrants and someone who struggled with mental health as a young adult, the concept of happiness always felt...elusive to me. What exactly is happiness? My upbringing has been the blending of two cultures: Chinese and American. While American communication is direct, individualistic, and low-context, Asian culture is the opposite. Asian communication is high-context, and much more is shown through actions than words. I didn't grow up hearing my family talk about how they're "happy" or what makes them "happy." That doesn't mean they weren't happy, though: they showed it rather than speaking it aloud. But then as I grew older, people started tossing around toxic positivity more and more (eventually, my nuclear family followed that as well), saying, "don't worry so much, just be happy." Well, what does that even mean? What's the definition of happiness? It always felt like everyone's definition was different.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines "happy" as "feeling pleasure and enjoyment because of your life, situation, etc." However, I personally define "happiness" as something more akin to simple contentment. When people around me discussed happiness, it felt like it was meant to be a state of being, this long-term feeling. But my experience of happiness has been small pleasures, fleeting moments of joy, or moments of contentment.

In accepting my own version of happiness, I have learned to enjoy the smaller, simpler things in life that bring me joy, no matter the length of time that feeling lasts or how small and insignificant it may seem. Those small things in combination culminate to form a sense of happiness and cultivate gratitude in my life. So, in honor of my own personal journey of discovering happiness, I want to share a list of my favorite small pleasures in life in hopes that it resonates with someone else.

## WATCHING MY DOG LEARN SOMETHING NEW

Around Christmastime last year, my boyfriend and I adopted an adult dog. Her name is Sadie and she's a German Shepherd mix with a whole lot of mutt in her. It became clear very early on that she was terrified of her unfamiliar surroundings and all the new people. We have no idea what her backstory is; our assumption was that, based on her behavior, she likely had been a stray.

Our time with her has been filled with lots of patience and care as we've tried to acclimate her to pet life. Her quirks include not understanding non-stuffed dog toys, sleeping on her back when she's comfortable, groaning and talking a lot, and not fully understanding the game of fetch. Watching a dog adapt to her new life has been very rewarding. Even more so, watching her learn new things has made me incredibly happy. I imagine this is akin to how parents might feel watching their small children discover the world around them. I was actually cheering when Sadie went to play with a toy for the first time. Raising this goofy dog has had its challenging moments, but Sadie has brought me so much light and joy in my life despite her occasional bad days.

## CARING FOR PLANTS

Taking care of plants is a relatively new endeavor for me. Growing up, my mother was consistently being gifted plants by family members, and we almost always had a vegetable garden in the backyard. I remember this one Christmas Cactus plant that I was always amused by, and I swear my family has had that plant for nearly as long as I've been around.

The concept of raising plants has always been fascinating to me, but also daunting—I always feared killing them. What if I water them too much? What if I water them too little? How much sunlight do they need? Why is that leaf turning yellow? There was so much to learn that I felt overwhelmed. But, in the last few months I decided to go ahead and experiment with them. If they die, well...sadly, they die. It's all a learning process. At least, that's what I tell myself. Maybe if my plants were sentient they would be mad at me, who knows?

I'm now cultivating a small forest in my apartment! Kidding. Sort of. I went from having two small succulents to having fifteen plants in total. I even learned to propagate a few and revived a basil plant that my parents brought me a few months ago, which started dying soon after they left. It's now thriving in a new pot of soil.

Learning to take care of a wide variety of plants has taught me a new skill and allowed me to chase a curiosity that I've always had but was afraid to go after. It also allows me to nurture something, which I've always found fulfilling, and it has helped me to reframe some of my ideas around the concept of "failure."

## A BIG HAUL OF COLORFUL FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

When I was in middle school, I discovered farmers markets when I was out in San Francisco with my aunt. Something about all the new things on tables and the lively crowd was so fun to me. My parents always drilled into the heads of me and my brother that healthy eating was really important. Of course, we rolled our eyes at their incessant nagging as children, but they were right. So we were always surrounded by mom's giant grocery hauls every weekend, and it became a childhood staple.

Maybe it's just nostalgia, but coming home with a bunch of really colorful fruits and vegetables always makes me a little giddy inside. I like when they're all set up on the counter to be cleaned and it's like a little edible rainbow in my kitchen. It's super silly, but I've always loved it.

## CREATING SOMETHING, AKA ARTS AND CRAFTS

My favorite class as a kid was art class. Making things has always brought me joy, especially if I learned something new. Children's art class, where we made sock puppets and painted things, turned into learning photography, sewing, knitting and other DIY projects as an adult. Artistic mediums like paint have never been my strong suit, but they're fun to do. Creating things frequently does not always serve a utilitarian purpose, but it's satisfying mentally and emotionally. Something about creating an object or project from beginning to end is really fulfilling.

Recently, I learned to crochet, and although I'm not great at it yet, I managed to make a few coasters. And those coasters have actually been very useful in my apartment, more so than I expected them to be. It's satisfying to have an end product, especially since big projects can feel overwhelming and daunting. Arts and crafts are usually much smaller, and the sense of accomplishment is nice.

## SMALL ACTS OF KINDNESS

Finally, committing acts of kindness makes me happy on days where I may be feeling a bit down or in my head too much. It doesn't have to be anything big—sometimes making an effort to give people genuine compliments throughout the day is nice. I like being able to make someone smile. It could also be as simple as sending over a few dollars as a pick-me-up to a friend who's having a hard time with school or picking up an extra donut for someone at the coffee shop.

I also love baking and cooking for people. Being able to nurture and feed someone is a great feeling. Whenever I test out new recipes, I like to get feedback from friends and family, and if it's something they particularly like, I store that information away for future reference. Doing small things for someone other than myself makes me happy, and hopefully makes people's days better as well.

There are plenty of other small things that bring me great joy in life, but these are a few of my favorite ones. Life can seem so long but feel so short. Moments and feelings are fleeting. Enjoying the small, simple pleasures in life is what I think it's all about. As they say, stop and smell the roses once in a while.



## AUTHOR BIO

Crystal Shao is a senior (class of 2022) with a double major in strategic communication and professional writing. She is from Northbrook, Illinois, and something that makes her happy is cooking or baking.



# The little things

MEGAN COPENHAVER

When you think of happiness, you may think of weddings, births, or other joyous occasions. But what about the little things? I've learned that happiness is everywhere; you just have to be willing to look. The places where I find it the most are the places I would least expect. The kind of happiness I'm talking about is that which often doesn't get captured in pictures, but that lives in your memories. These little things are characterized by their simplicity and subtlety, yet they stand out in my memories as the times that I felt the most joy. I hold them close to my heart because they never fail to make me smile.

## IN THE CANDLELIGHT

This happiness was unexpected, but still cherished. It was a few weeks ago, a Monday night, when the power at my apartment complex went out. It didn't take long for my roommates and me to notice, as we live in a world dominated by power and it was very hot out, so the lack of a fan was an immediate indicator. After diagnosing the problem, like the detectives we are, we headed outside to investigate if other buildings had also lost power. Among the crowd of college students standing outside scratching our heads, someone was able to figure out that a power line had been hit down the road. After cursing the person, like one does, for the loss of power in the middle of my episode of Survivor, we headed back inside to assess the situation.

The happiness came when we lit a dozen small candles and sat around talking. That's it. That's all we did, but it was so fun. There's something about being gathered around a fire, even a small one, in the dark that's so magical. Or maybe the magic comes from the people you're with. I've only known some of them for a year, others for only a month, but when we all went to bed that night, I felt that I had gotten closer to them. If only I had remembered to take a picture.

## LAUGHTER

I would have to say that the thing that gives me the most joy in this world is laughter. There are so many kinds of laughs: the seagull, silent, hearty, wheezy, and—who could forget—the classic snort. Some of my best memories involve laughter, the kind of belly-clutching, I-can't-breathe kind of laughter that makes your stomach hurt. There's a reason why so many people laugh when babies laugh. It's something about the purity, the vulnerability, and the contagiousness of laughter that never fails to make me smile.

I love to laugh; that's a fact. My dad says that I'm every comedian's biggest fan because I will laugh at anything. That's not true—I laugh at a lot of things, but not everything. I love making people laugh. My favorite sound in the world is my boyfriend's laugh. It's sonorous and I can tell it comes straight from his chest, from his heart. It makes me happy to know that he's happy, and that's why I could listen to it all day. There's a lot of things in this world that aren't funny, but I would argue that there's more things in this world that are. In fact, I'm pretty sure I laugh at something every day. Besides, who couldn't use a boost of serotonin?

## BOOKS

The happiness I get from books is not uncommon. You are not a book nerd if you don't love the smell of a new book or memorize the way it feels in your hand. Just the experience of going to the bookstore sends me over the moon. It's the atmosphere; a bookstore always smells like, well, books. It's distinctive. If they made a candle for it, I would be waiting in line to buy it. I love going to the bookstore or the library and tracing the spines of the books. It's thrilling to know that each one has a different story, and heartbreaking to know that I'll never be able to read every book published. It's the desire to read every book I can that brings me back to the bookstore time and time again.

There's nothing like the feeling of settling down with a good book and immersing yourself in the pages. When I get a house of my own, I want to have a little reading nook. A bench with a nice window, or one of those hanging chairs that I could spend hours reading in. I keep every book I've read, unless it's online or something boring like my management textbook, so that I can create my own little library.

It's plain to see that I've fallen in love with books, like most English majors, and my collection is my most prized possession. So, I guess that explains why it makes me so happy to cozy up with a good book and read: word by word, page by page. And the best part about books? When you finish one, there's always another one waiting for you.

## SINGING/MUSIC

Another small thing that makes me happy is singing. I've always been a singer. My mom says that I was always singing something; even as a baby, I would try to sing along with the radio. If I wasn't talking, laughing, or napping, I was usually singing. Our house was always full of music, because I was the record spinning around and around, singing my songs to the beat of my own drum. One of the best feelings is jamming to a song in the car with your friends. Music is a powerful form of expression; it has the power to bring people together, to say what someone doesn't know how to say. Anything that has the power to make someone get up and dance or put a smile on their face is something that shouldn't be overlooked.

I've always been a happy person—it's just who I am. Happiness is unique because it's entirely what you make it. It's versatile and that's why it's my favorite emotion. A life without laughter and happiness is not a life I want to live. If you sat down to make a list of all the things that make you happy, you might be surprised at how much you could come up with. Whether your list is long or short, your laugh a snort or chuckle, happiness is there. It's always there. In the absence of happiness, no matter how small, we would cease to exist.



When happiness is photographed, as demonstrated by this picture of me, it's guaranteed to make you smile.

## AUTHOR BIO

Megan Copenhaver is a senior (class of 2022) with a major in creative writing and a minor in general business. She is from Cincinnati, Ohio, and something that makes her happy is “the kind of breathless laughter that makes your stomach hurt, when you can't even speak because you're laughing too hard.” Megan would also like to include that she has the honor of being Editor-in-Chief of Happy Captive Magazine's Vol. 8 (Spring 2022) where she experiences happiness every time she reads a submission.





# Cultural connections

Happiness can be found all around, but one of the most prominent locations is in culture. Music is one of the most personal aspects of our lives, capable of making us feel new emotions and connections to different people and cultures around the world. To explore this idea further: read on, and maybe listen to your favorite song while you do.



# In defense of play

ELIZABETH BRUGGEMAN

## PIANO-PLAYING

The day I quit piano lessons, all I could think of was the power outage: the one about eight years prior, when a bout of thunder-snow took away the lights and any hope of TV or computer games for the night. In the deep dark of our living room, my little brother and I grabbed flashlights and, filled with childish adrenaline, ran to the upright piano. We couldn't name the notes—couldn't yet read music or understand the colors of the keys—but still we slammed our fingers down in the shape of mock chords and flourishing runs. The day I quit piano lessons, I remembered how my second-grade self had felt at home with her feet dangling from the bench. Delighted, she had tapped the keys one at a time, scaling the mountain of sound at her fingertips.

At fifteen, I was not much like that second-grader—and I was certainly not a pianist. One quiet afternoon, I helped my parents carry the heavy instrument to the storage room in our basement and cover the top with soft, pink quilts. In all honesty, I was relieved to see this mahogany giant finally disappear. Each time I would trudge past it on the way to my room—my backpack: a boulder of textbooks after school—I'd feel a familiar tug of sadness. Deep down, I knew I had never really wanted to give up piano; my fingers still rapped out table-top melodies, and my throat went tight every time Spotify's study playlists shuffled a slow concerto I once knew how to play.

So then, why had I quit? As is the case with so many adults, I got the idea that I needed to pick and choose among my interests: that I should dedicate time to my most useful pursuits. If I would never be a career-virtuoso—never sit in the singular, coveted piano bench in the pit of the orchestra—then why should I take lessons? If my piano-playing wouldn't win me scholarships and college acceptance letters, why invest the time? Now, at twenty two, I've learned the hard way that, too often, adults prioritize momentum over the delight of movement; jobs over joy; practicality over playfulness.

## PRIORITIZING PLAYFULNESS

Children, though, naturally seek out the wonder, sparkle, and dimension in life. Think of your childhood self—really picture them. How did they spend their time? Perhaps they invented games after school, imagining fantastic and perilous adventures; perhaps they had an assortment of hobbies, from team sports to tap dance to painting. While adults certainly have more responsibilities and less time for activities like these, children ceaselessly make their own joy—and are encouraged to do so! When this tendency toward play fades and disappears, we chalk it up to loss of the childhood imagination, a mental capacity that every last person is allegedly fated to grow out of.

But we don't have to grow into play-averse adults, and we don't have to see play as a childish concept. In fact, the term “play” can be replaced with any number of less contentious words: call it “stress-relief,” “creativity,” “escapism,” or “self-care.” No matter the name, play is a chance to get enjoyment out of everyday life. Too often in adult circles, “play” becomes synonymous with naivety, immaturity, or unprofessionalism. Consequently, many adults develop an aversion to play; understandably, they want to be taken seriously by other adults and see “play” as a quick way to lose respect. Even worse, however: play requires risk-taking and invention among a crowd of people who dislike risk. Despite these judgments, play is a worthwhile way to resist the impulse of productivity.

## IMPLEMENTING PLAY

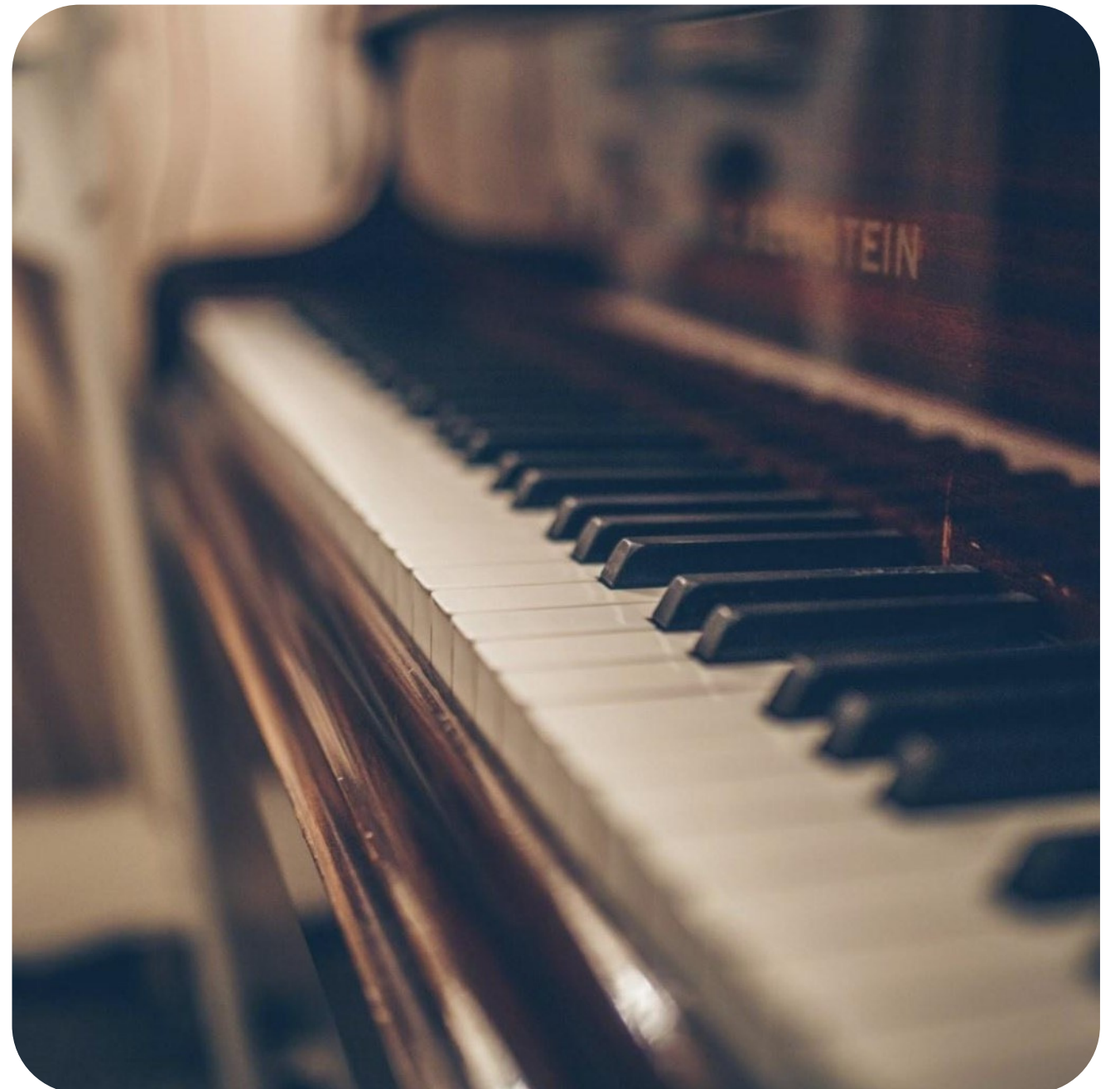
While a return to the days of recess and make-believe would be neither enjoyable nor achievable for many adults, there are plenty of ways to naturally translate play into adult life. First, you can give yourself permission to do activities that you enjoy because you enjoy them. Try not to think about the utility of these ventures or your level of skill—play is an end in and of itself. Take photographs of the beauty you notice: capture a steely sky after rain or a freckled doe standing still in your backyard. Don't worry about the composition, or color, or lighting—don't even think about the number of likes they would get on Instagram. T

Second, learn to be curious. This is essential for play, which is an inherently creative endeavor. Always look for opportunities to “mix-up” the routine you are comfortable in. Think of a child taking the stairs—so often, they find completely novel ways to move from point A to B, skipping steps or even sliding down the banister. Get comfortable with experimentation, and reinvent your routine.

This advice is particularly important for adults who try to incorporate play into their lives by transforming their singular passion into a career: writers who become journalists, athletes who find positions in sports management, and artists who oversee exhibitions as museum curators. This effort to marry joy and job shows an admirable commitment to play. However, it also combines the financial and emotional stressors of “making a living” with a treasured hobby; it can risk burnout on the very passion that once relieved stress. In cases like these, the play can be overshadowed by the work. Musicians: learn to play the songs you could never bring to a competition; poets: try a completely new form; artists: forgo your portfolio and paint a canvas for your bedroom wall.

Finally, allow yourself to be limitless. At whatever scale and in whatever setting, find ways to maximize your joy. Follow a dozen disconnected hobbies and passions; devote small pockets of your day to happy pursuits that will amount to nothing useful.

In my apartment just off-campus, I have a small, cramped room all to myself. The little keyboard in the corner barely fits between my bed and closet; its foam bench seat is split in some places and well-worn from use. Each morning, I strain my shoulder to reach the sweaters hanging just past its blocky frame. I have no intention of ever moving it.



## AUTHOR BIO

Elizabeth Brueggemann is a senior (class of 2022) with a double major in professional writing and creative writing. She is from St. Louis, Missouri, and she feels most happy when she's writing or spending time with her brother.



# My happiness found in k-pop

## 케이팝 속에 찾는 내 행복

TRACY COLLIER

### K-POP AND ME

Whenever someone asks me to tell them something about myself, one of the first things I mention is K-pop. In 2015 I found my first group, GOT7, and ever since then I've been hooked. K-pop isn't just good music, cinematic music videos, complex choreography, and gorgeous people. For me, it was a way to learn how to love myself. To have a reason to laugh and smile. It provided the much-needed escape from my life when things got to be a little too much. It gave me a way to deal with and show the emotions that I was bottling up inside. I'm thankful that K-pop has been something that has created an enormous amount of positivity in my life, but that's not the same for everyone.

### THE SAD TRUTH

The sad truth about K-pop is that idols aren't viewed as normal people. Not by their company, nor their fans. They are expected to always give 100%, whether they have it or not. Their struggles need to be buried because their struggles aren't important, not when they have a comeback soon and fan meetings coming up. God forbid they find someone who makes them happy and they announce they're in a relationship. The hold that Korean entertainment companies and fans have over idols is outrageous. Why aren't they allowed to be happy when they make thousands of people happy? Why do they have to drive themselves to the edge just so we can fangirl over another music video or live performance? When will they get a chance to have a happy moment like we get to have all the time?

Though K-pop created a lot of positivity, I wasn't always happy, even when I listened to their music. I was good at hiding my emotions and burying my problems. On top of that, I didn't think too highly of myself. If I had a quarter for every time I thought negatively about myself, I would've been able to pay off half of my student debt. I can almost imagine Namjoon, the leader of BTS, shaking his head at me. BTS was the group that taught me how to love myself and reminded me that it's okay to not be happy all the time.

### LOVE YOURSELF

In 2017, BTS released the first album of their "Love Yourself" series titled Love Yourself: Her. The series sought out the enlightenment of self-love through a narrative sequence: beginning, development, turn, and conclusion, known as 기승전결 (giseungjeongyeol) in Korean. The two albums to follow, titled Love Yourself: Tear and Love Yourself: Answer, focused on turn and conclusion, while Love Yourself: Her, focused on development. These albums were a turning point for BTS, as they changed their logo and music.

For the longest time, I thought that they were living the dream, and they could never experience what I was going through because they were talented, successful, and good looking. During this series, I realized that I could relate to them more than I thought. They have struggles, they're not always confident in themselves, and there are times where they wish they could quit. The only things that have kept them going are that they love what they're doing, and they love making ARMYs, BTS' fandom, happy. The number of times I heard these seven people say that they love me, and how easily I could say it back, made me question why I couldn't say that to myself. Why was it so hard for me to appreciate myself? To love myself?

After the last album was released and the promotions were over, I constantly made the joke that I didn't have to love myself anymore because BTS wasn't telling me to do it. Soon I realized what was wrong with that statement. I shouldn't love myself because someone tells me to; instead, it should be because I truly love myself.

Around this time, the news had come out that some idols were dealing with depression because of all the stress and expectations that were being put on them. This once again showed me that these idols weren't living picture-perfect lives, and our happiness was being achieved at the expense of theirs. My thoughts, at this time, were that everyone should be happy. Happiness shouldn't be something that only a few people can have. And to make others happy, we shouldn't have to sacrifice our own happiness.

### HAPPINESS

One of my happiest moments with K-pop was in May of 2019. Earlier that year, I had convinced my mom to buy me a ticket to see BTS in concert. BTS is my ultimate group, which means that when it comes down to it, they're always going to be my first pick. I was so excited because all I've ever wanted to do was see them in concert, but I quickly learned how hard it is to get tickets for a K-pop concert, especially for a big group like BTS.

Before the concert, it was raining almost all day in Chicago. That wasn't going to stop me from going to the concert. I did not wait four years to let rain stop me. Luckily, the rain stopped before the concert and caused Namjoon to say, "The rain stopped because of you." Getting to see the seven of them perform was like a dream come true; I couldn't believe I was in the same place as them. I spent almost three hours screaming, crying, cheering, chanting, and singing along.

Moments like this are the ones that keep me going. When the negative thoughts get too much, I think of times like this. Throughout the six years that I've been a K-pop fan, I've learned to deal with my problems and work through my feelings. I've determined that happiness isn't something that can be constant, it's impossible—and that's okay. Just like how the sun and moon trade places when it goes from day to night, other emotions and happiness need to do the same. For me, I now know that another term for happiness is self-love and appreciation. Once I fully accept myself, flaws and all, I know that I will achieve the happiness that I want. Until then, I'll be happy with the little moments, like watching a BTS concert or seeing one of my favorites getting the recognition that they deserve.



### AUTHOR BIO

Tracy Collier is a senior (class of 2022) with a major in professional writing. She is from Cleveland, Ohio, and something that makes her happy is learning new K-pop dances; she is currently learning Korean because she wants to move to Korea in the future.



# Thank you for the music

CAROLINE CRUISE

## FINDING MY VOICE

Music has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. According to my mother, I started singing soon after I learned to talk. She enrolled the two of us in Kindermusik classes when I was a toddler, and I would run around our house singing “Frère Jacques” for anyone who would listen. I started taking piano lessons when I was five years old, and I even had a brief stint playing the clarinet when I was in middle school. Between myself and my two younger brothers—who also played musical instruments—our house was never quiet.

When I was in middle school, I joined a church choir and took singing lessons on and off. My old voice teacher moved away during my freshman year, and she connected me with a new teacher, Stephanie, who completely changed my life. When I came into her studio my freshman year, I wanted to get into my high school a cappella group; when I left four years later, I wanted to be a professional opera singer.

Stephanie introduced me to many styles of music—including art song, jazz, musical theatre, and sacred music. She taught me the value of preparation, and scared me straight if I didn’t put in the work before our weekly lessons. She played a large role in developing the work ethic that I have today. She also fostered my love for languages and helped me understand and appreciate the deep history within classical music. But most importantly, she showed me how fun performing could be. Before I took lessons with her, I rarely sang in front of people by myself. I was painfully shy, and the thought of being the center of attention terrified me. Despite my introversion, my teacher saw a lot of potential in me and encouraged me to perform. In her eyes, singing was a gift to be shared, and she thought that I was doing a disservice to myself by allowing my fear to get in the way.

My first performances were small; I sang in the ensemble in my first school musical, and I performed in Stephanie’s annual studio recital. She encouraged me to focus on the message of the song I was singing instead of the audience. Immersing myself in the music and concentrating on the text alleviated my fear and got me out of my head. Little by little, I started to feel more comfortable performing. When I was on stage, I wasn’t a singer who was prepping a high note or trying to remember the words to the next phrase: I could be anyone I wanted to be. Performing wasn’t terrifying anymore—it was a way for me to express myself. I looked forward to my performances, and I practiced meticulously to ensure that I would do my best. I was working hard, but it never felt like work. I sang at my church, at my school, and at local competitions—and I loved every minute of it.

As my junior year began, I started thinking about what I wanted to do after high school. I knew that I wanted to go to college, but I had no idea where I would go and what I would study. Around this time, I saw my first opera and fell in love with classical music. My mom and I saw a production of Bizet’s Carmen, and I was fascinated by the beautiful singing and the drama, elegance, and glamour of the show. That. That is what I want to do, I thought to myself.

During my senior year, I applied to and auditioned at nine schools for vocal performance. My mother and I traveled around the Midwest during December, January, February, and March, which was no easy feat. My parents were so encouraging and supportive, and they were with me every step of the way. After my hectic audition season, I ended up getting into every program I applied to. My college application process was filled with stress and uncertainty, but the end result justified my decision to pursue music. My mind was made up; I was a singer through and through.

## THE COLLEGE YEARS

I connected with one of the members of the voice faculty, and I knew she would be a great mentor and foster my love for singing and performing. Two weeks after the school year began, she told me that she was retiring at the end of the school year. I thought I would study with her for four years, but I would only have her for one. We worked together during my freshman year, and I tried to make the best out of a less than ideal situation. I performed in my first opera, joined a vocal ensemble that I loved, and made it to the final round of a national voice competition. My love for performing grew, and the music got me through the ups and downs of my freshman year. At the end of the year, I decided to transfer to Miami University. I loved my old school, but it simply wasn’t worth it without my voice teacher.

Transferring schools was harder than I thought it would be. I missed my friends and my old voice teacher, even though I knew that transferring was the right decision. I eventually adjusted to Miami, but then everything grinded to a halt as the COVID-19 pandemic began and I went home for the semester. Like everyone else, I felt really anxious and I missed spending time with my friends. These emotions translated into my singing and practice habits, and I knew that my new voice teacher wasn’t happy with how I sounded. My voice type also changed during this time—I went from being a coloratura soprano, the highest voice type, to a mezzo. I resisted this change at first, and I felt really frustrated because my voice wasn’t doing what I wanted it to do. So much of my identity up to that point was tied to being a singer, and experiencing these challenges really made me question who I was if I wasn’t succeeding in my singing. Music used to be a way for me to forget about the world, but it was turning into a reminder that I was never good enough.

I knew that if I wanted to be happy with who I was, I needed to step back and re-evaluate my goals. The grind of being a professional performer didn’t appeal to me anymore. After seeing performing spaces shut down for a year, I knew that I wanted a career with a little more stability. But I also realized that music could still be a big part of my life—even if it wasn’t what I did for a living. Taking different classes in college helped me find my love for reading and writing, and it made me realize that being a singer didn’t have to be the only part of my identity. I thought that I needed to be a professional singer to be happy, but simply being able to enjoy music was more than enough.

I also learned that to enjoy singing and performing, I needed to separate my voice and my singing ability from my self-worth. This is really hard to do when you’re a singer, because your instrument is you. At the end of the day, I can’t pack up my voice and set it aside, like I could with a violin or guitar. But I slowly taught myself that I didn’t have to be the most successful singer to enjoy singing. When I stopped putting so much pressure on myself to succeed, singing became less stressful, and I started to have fun again.

## ENJOYING THE JOURNEY

Last year, my voice teacher told our studio that every student is on their own singing journey. It sounds cheesy, but it’s true. Each person has different goals, different technical problems they want to fix, and different music they like to sing. My singing journey has been unconventional, to say the least. I never thought that I would grow to love performing, or even consider doing it for a living. Over the past four years, my goals for my singing have drastically changed. But the bigger picture is more important. Singing has played so many different roles throughout the course of my life. It introduced me to opera, made me a more confident person, taught me how to deal with adversity, and gave me some of my closest friends. But most importantly, it made—and continues to make—me happy.



## AUTHOR BIO

Caroline Cruise is a third year (class of December 2022) with a double major in vocal performance and professional writing. She is from Columbus, Ohio, and something that makes her happy is spending time with her family and friends.



# Replay that happiness

KATIE DEACON

## THE POWER OF MUSIC

Picture this: you've had a rough day, actually, the roughest of all days. You slept through your alarm, dropped your coffee on the way out of the house, got a bad grade, ruined your favorite pair of shoes, fought with a friend, and at the end of it, you find yourself sitting in your kitchen staring at your empty fridge, wondering when life is going to get better. Then, suddenly, your overwhelming sadness is met with immense happiness because the radio plays that one song. That one song you haven't heard in a while, or the one you remember singing at the top of your lungs with your siblings growing up, or one that you're hearing for the first time. The second that sound hits your eardrums, your once unattainable happiness surfaces again.

But why? Why do we feel such a strong bond with music? The consensus is that music allows us to release the chemical known as dopamine. Dopamine is the chemical in your brain that "improves your mood, reduces anxiety and helps in the production of the stress-reducing hormone cortisol" (Tozzoli, 2018). While scientific proof shines a bright light on the importance of music and the influence it has on your happiness and stress levels, there is a personal connection that is often found between music and listeners. Listeners often draw on memories or thoughts in connection to the music. Some songs can act as a reminder of a time they heard it, or a person they learned it from, or a place they listened to it. Music acts as a bridge between emotion and person.

## MUSIC TODAY

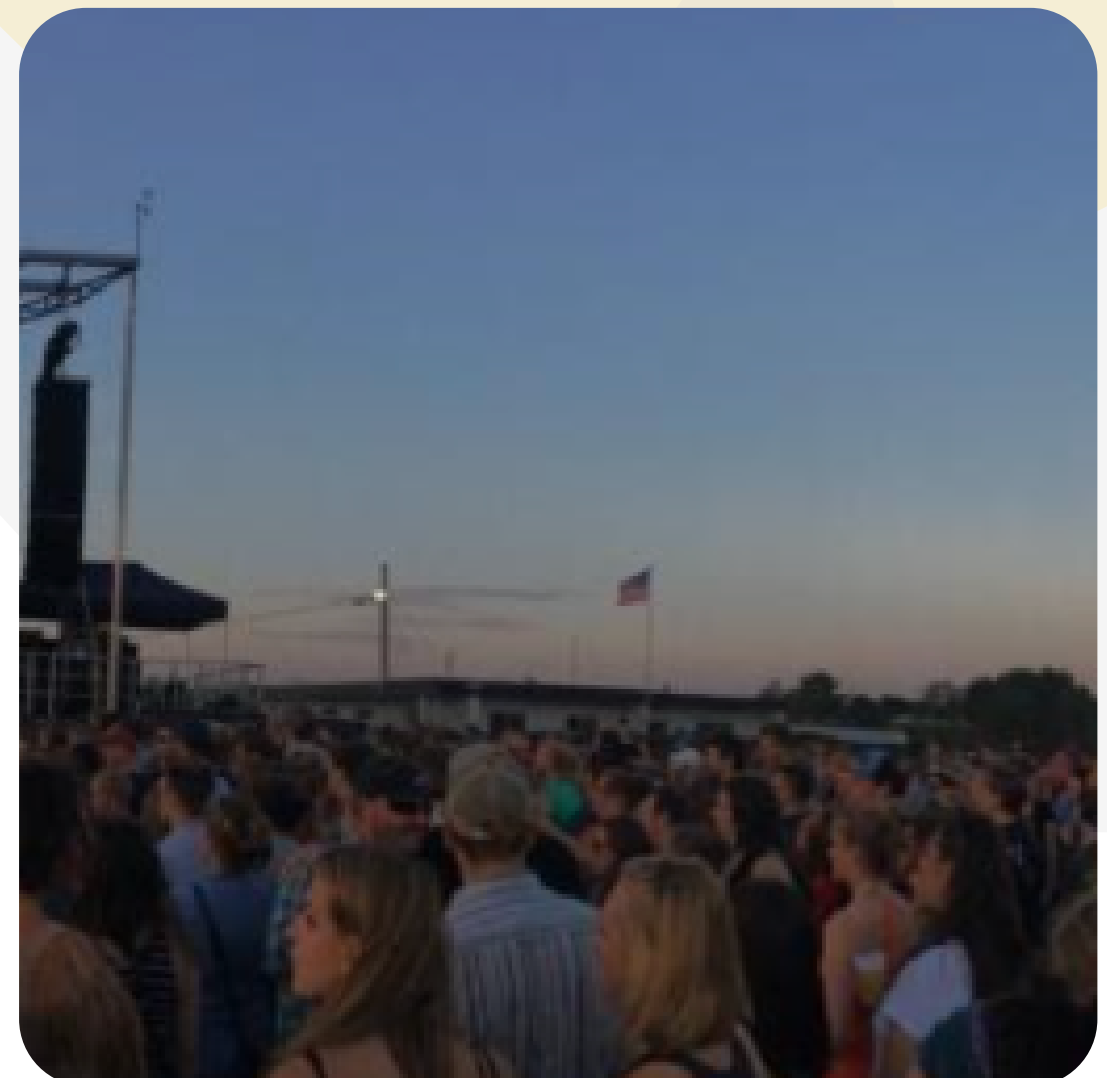
As time has gone on and society has changed, we have been introduced to a plethora of new genres of music and artists. The development of sound aids the development of us. A contemporary example of this theory is Adele. Adele is an English singer-songwriter that is notoriously one of the world's best-selling music artists. She is known to title her albums after the ages in which she wrote them, literally recording her musical and personal development overtime. While she can do this in a literal way, listeners, like me, are able to do this as a follower. When a song comes on from her 21 album, I am instantly taken back to when I was a kid going on mother-daughter shopping trips. My mother, being from the United Kingdom, originally had a strong connection with Adele's music. Through my mother's love, I also loved. This memory is something that is constantly thought of when I hear that album. See, scientifically there is a chemical being produced when I hear those songs. But I think of the light in my mother's eyes when she's singing at the top of her pitchy lungs to "One and Only."

In the same sense, we can talk about what music is in a literal form. Music is "vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion" (Google Dic.). It is created in a way to connect with its audience. The ultimate reason for the connection is through the words. The simplest and oldest way of communication is through spoken word. Add a little background sound to those meaningful words and you're golden, happy. People often correlate the lyrics of songs to experiences or feelings they have towards those lyrics. An example of this for me is the lyrics to the song "Sleep on the Floor" by The Lumineers. The lyrics of this song, much like the rest of their songs, tells a story. This story is about a girl escaping her current life because, if she doesn't do it now, she never will. While I don't have a direct connection to the story of the girl in the song, I have this sense of escapism that needs to be obtained in my life. Escaping my normal daily routine, or the town where everyone knows me, or my responsibilities. For 3 minutes and thirty-one seconds I can imagine a different life, one where I'm flying down an empty highway going toward who knows where. Music allows us to feel like a different person, imagine our lives differently, and connect with the unknown. Music is a feeling. That feeling is happiness.

## KEEP ON LISTENING

Music is mostly an intangible thing; that is, if you're not a record collector or stuck in the 90s. Our music listening habits can be tended to on a frequent level due to the development of streaming services. Streaming services give us the opportunity to listen to any artist, song, genre, playlist at the drop of a hat. With our changing emotions, we can switch the genre of music we wish to listen to. While this option has been the pure source of my never-ending happiness when listening to my music, nothing beats seeing your favorite artist live. Live music gives the artist the opportunity to bring raw emotion to their performance. The opportunity for the audience to literally feel the music coming from their instruments through the speakers. The feeling of overwhelming happiness is so apparent in those moments. The moment when you realize you are standing in front of the artist that makes the music that is bringing you an immense amount of happiness is a life-changing experience. When people tell artists that their music has saved their lives, I believe them, and vice-versa. There is an unspoken connection between people who feel the same feelings when listening to or singing a song. Standing in a large crowd listening to The Lumineers in Portland, Maine, singing my favorite songs, surrounded by other people that loved them as much as I did, felt unbeatable.

Music brings people together. Music brings happiness to a somewhat dull world. Music brings a smile to my face. So, my advice is: replay that song; replay that happiness.



## AUTHOR BIO

Katie Deacon is a senior (class of December 2021) with a double major in professional writing and strategic communication. She is originally from Wales but currently lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, and something that makes her happy is music.





# Seeking happiness

## how to find it

Now, the big question: how do I find happiness? Finding happiness looks different for everyone, but incorporating strategies into your daily life can help immensely. In this final section, discover different ways that our contributors have found happiness in their own lives, no matter the circumstances.





# Finding happiness in a new place

JULIA LAGINESS

Moving to a new place, where you are living in a new home, surrounded by new people, and at a new job or school can be both exciting and frightening. Moving to a new location also presents you with an opportunity for a fresh start, but it can cause you to worry about how you will feel at your new home and if you will be happy. How do you find happiness in a new location? Below are some helpful tips that can help you make your moving transition easier!

## LEAVING A COMFORTABLE PLACE

Leaving a comfortable place can be extremely difficult, even if you weren't very happy there. Moving to a new place can lead you to feel extremely nervous about what's to come, and leaving somewhere that you loved can be difficult. This may be leading you to question your decision to move. One way to help you shift your nerves to excitement is to ask yourself the question: why am I moving? Did you move because you have a new job opportunity, want a change in location, need to be closer to family, or some other reason? The reason for your move may be impacting your levels of excitement or apprehensiveness about moving to a new place. Whether you are moving to be closer to loved ones or to tackle a new job opportunity, try focusing your attention on the possible positive new experiences that you are about to have. If you are having trouble focusing on the exciting experiences that you may have once you move, try listing out reasons as to why you are looking forward to moving. For example, when you find yourself worrying about your move, remind yourself that you are excited to be closer to your family or are looking forward to your new job. Even though you may not have loved where you were living prior to your move, you may still have felt extremely comfortable living there. Leaving a place that was comfortable to you may cause you to feel unhappy about living somewhere else. Try to remind yourself that you will feel comfortable and “at home” at your new home in time. It is also important to remember that change can be a good thing. Change can present you with new opportunities that allow for self-growth and happiness!

## MAKING A PLAN BEFORE YOU MOVE

Moving can cause you to have a lot of anxiety and stress about what is to come. You may be asking yourself: where will I make friends? What will I do in my free time? How will I handle the transition to a new work, or school, environment? You can't answer all of these questions before you move, but you can help prepare yourself for the transition. Having a general understanding about the environment that you are moving to can help you feel more prepared and confident in how you will adjust to your new environment. Try researching some activities, restaurants, and stores in your new city that interest you. Finding places or activities that you want to go to can give you something to look forward to doing, and encourage you to be excited about in your new town or city. It can also be helpful to list out some times and dates that you have available to go try out these new places. This can allow for you to make sure that you do not overlook trying new things in your area that could possibly bring you happiness. Going to places that excite you can also lead you to meet new people and form new friendships with people of similar interests!

## SHIFTING YOUR FOCUS

When moving to a new place, it is important to put yourself in situations that give you the opportunity to find happiness. You should avoid sitting at home and thinking about how much you miss where you used to live. While looking back on fond memories can bring you some happiness, it is not going to be beneficial in helping you create new memories where you are now. If you find that your focus on your past is inhibiting your ability to live in your new environment, try thinking about what brought you happiness where you used to live. List some things that made you happy where you used to live, and ask yourself if you are able to find these things where you live now.

## ADJUSTING TO YOUR NEW ENVIRONMENT

When moving to a new place, you may be worried that you are not going to be happy in your new area and that you will long to move back to your old home. When you feel this way, it can be good to acknowledge that it is okay to not feel 100% comfortable or happy immediately after moving to a new place. You are going to want to give yourself time to adjust and get comfortable in your new city. Try not to compare your new city to your old city right away. Giving yourself time to get settled into your new job or school, make new friends, and learn the area will help you better evaluate how you like where you live. Creating a place where you feel comfortable and “at home” can also be a great way to begin settling into your new environment. Whether it is your bedroom, apartment, or home, try to create a living space that you enjoy being in. This can be done through decorations, family photos, or any other personal touches. Creating a comfortable living space can provide you with a sense of being “at home,” and help you avoid feeling out of place.

## IF...THEN STATEMENTS

If you find yourself continuously being worried about your move and focusing on worst-case scenarios, then you should try creating “if, then” statements. These statements can help to calm your worries about a situation that is causing you stress and unhappiness. To begin creating an “if...then” statement, start by stating the situation that is causing you fear. Then, you want to follow that statement with your solution to that outcome. These types of statements help you address what you will do if you are not happy in a situation and how you will go about fixing the problem. One example of an “if...then” statement is, “If I end up disliking my new job, then I will begin looking for a new one.” These “if...then” statements will help you focus on positive outcomes, rather than negative ones.



## AUTHOR BIO

Julia Laginess is a senior (class of 2022) with a double major in strategic communication and professional writing and a minor in fashion. She is from Dartmouth, Massachusetts, and something that makes her happy is the beach.



# A journey to sustainable happiness

WILLIAM GREGOR

## MISCONCEPTIONS

Everyone has their own definition of happiness with a personal metric they use to understand how happy they are. Some people measure their happiness through their bank balance, based on the number of friends they have, and with their grades. These, of course, are simplifications of someone's personal evaluation of happiness, but they're still factors, nonetheless. These metrics change to accommodate the short-term goals at a given point in someone's life, but they generally have a quantifiable aspect.

Broadly, I felt that happiness was a goal that could be attained through a series of calculated life decisions. I thought it was getting into the right school—whatever that means, doing well in class, finding a moderately prestigious job that pays well, unrelentingly working, and finding a life partner to start a family. Within each of those major goals came a different way to gauge my happiness. When I'm in school, I'll measure my GPA; when I'm working, I'll measure my hours and my salary; when I find a life partner, I'll measure the balance of good times and bad times. If I drop below an arbitrary threshold then I must be doing poorly in life and am, therefore, unhappy.

This kind of thinking is ridiculous. Happiness is not quantifiable and it has nothing to do with a set of culturally accepted goals. Anyone can be happy whether they attend college or immediately enter the workforce. You don't need to have a prestigious job to enjoy life. People also change and move on with their lives, so it is okay to be alone sometimes. Happiness should be seen and accepted as a platonic ideal that can be striven for but never truly achieved. Happiness is making connections with people who will be with you in the great times and, with just as much vigor, when things are going sideways. Happiness is cultivating new experiences and sharing them with those around you. Happiness is also being at peace with the fact that sadness is inevitable and arguably a far more pervasive force.

## ACCEPTANCE AND DISTRACTION

Everyone is experiencing their own personal struggle, no matter how relatively great or small it may be. Much of my personal struggle revolved around finding purpose for my existence and goals. This issue left me in a depressingly existential state of mind for a few years and is something that I still think about regularly. My current solution to this problem is to throw myself into life without question. There will be unavoidable times where that painful and persistent question, "Why?" will resurface, but at this point, I'd rather not stress about it. If I had the ability to answer this question, then so could hundreds of millions of other people.

Because of this unanswerable question, some people opt to stay distracted from it during day-to-day responsibilities. Constantly wondering about ideas that are impossible for humans to comprehend is debilitating. It is easier and more productive to sink into the padded societal framework that deals with human issues on a human scale and in human terms.

Once I understood that I needed some distractions to keep myself from getting lost in existentialism, I started experimenting with ways to better fill my time outside of school or work. I started with entertaining activities like spending more time with friends and exercising. Both were clear sources of positive chemical stimulation, but I didn't have the rest of my life in order. This is because it was harder to feel the immediate reward from other important, but less gratifying, tasks. I had to rewire my brain to reward myself when I finished organizing or cleaning a space. Once I felt that way, I also felt a much more intense desire to clean and organize when my space wasn't being taken care of. Finding pleasure in the smaller tasks that keep your life in order is one of the best ways of staying happy because it keeps you distracted in a way that will provide long-term rewards. Of course, there are many other ways to give your life purpose, and one of the most popular is through religion.

## RELIGION

Until this point, I've been speaking from a religiously agnostic perspective. There are many people in the world that do not wonder about the purpose of human existence because it has been answered for them. While I do not personally agree with organized religion, I can see that it is a great way to find purpose, community, and in many cases, forgiveness. All these benefits can contribute to someone's ability to be more regularly happy. The faith necessary to believe in religion, and the community that comes with religion, can remove a portion of life's weight from an individual. This can allow them to pursue their passions and dreams with less stress, with a caveat. To be a part of a religious community you must believe in the teachings and philosophy of the religion. While this is not a problem to many, religious beliefs are traditionally conservative due to the ancient sources of their philosophy. I personally have a problem with enough of the worship traditions and philosophy that I feel that I cannot find community through those practices. To those who do find peace in religion, I envy you and hope it is a fulfilling experience.

## SUSTAINABLE HAPPINESS

In the end, I've realized that having a positive ratio of happiness in life results from finding a supportive community, accepting the mysteries of the universe as generally unanswerable, focusing on personal development through a positive association with constructive but generally dull tasks, and developing lasting personal relationships. People can find different ways to achieve happiness that have nothing to do with these conclusions, but from my experiences, this is what seems to be the most gratifying way to direct my life.



## AUTHOR BIO

William Gregor is a junior (class of 2023) with a major in botany and a minor in rhetoric & writing. He is from Yellow Springs, Ohio, and some things that make him happy are having stimulating conversations with his friends and solving problems.



# Making your own happiness:

## Getting yourself through your darkest days

RENEE SMESTAD

People are often under the impression that you can only be happy organically. But when life is tough, it can be hard to find an external source of happiness. It's during these times that it's important to remember that happiness can come from anywhere. Manufactured happiness is just as important, if not more important, than happiness that comes from an outside source. Here are some tips to help you manufacture your own happiness when the world won't give you anything to smile about.

### MAKE A LIST

Make a list of all the things that make you happy. This could be anything: from something small like listening to your favorite song to something bigger like traveling to a new place. No matter what it is, if it comes to mind, write it down. Then, on the days when you can't think of anything that will put a smile on your face, return to that list. Sometimes it's hard to find the things that make life beautiful, but having those little things written down can help you remember why life is worth living, even when it might not seem like it is.

### DON'T SET EXPECTATIONS

This might sound counterintuitive, but it's true. In today's world, we often tend to set our expectations for ourselves, and for others, far too high. Setting expectations is a recipe for disappointment, which is something you don't want to experience, especially when the world's already got you down. It's important to accept where you're at and celebrate the little victories you have each day, but don't put too much pressure on yourself to attain something that, more likely than not, is unattainable.

### MAKE CHOICES

Being intentional is one of the most important things to keep yourself going when nothing else will. When faced with a decision, we often look back and regret not making a different choice. So, when faced with a decision, be intentional in your choice and make that choice confidently. Pretend as though there's no going back once the choice is made. Even if you're unsure about your decision, make it anyway. Moving forward without regret, and without wondering about the other option, will make you happier in the long run. So make your choices and don't look back.

### DO THINGS POORLY

Yes, really. It has been said that anything worth doing is worth doing poorly. That might make absolutely no sense at first glance, but it's true. When things get dark and you hit your lowest point, it can be nearly impossible to keep up with your daily tasks and responsibilities. But it's important to keep doing them, even if you do them with absolutely no effort. Maintaining habits like brushing your teeth, doing the dishes, etc. can mean the difference between moving forward or falling into a fully-fledged depression. So wash those dishes, even if it takes you two hours to wash two plates. The important thing is that you do it and keep doing it.

### CELEBRATE LITTLE VICTORIES

Tying into the previous point—celebrate those two dishes you washed today. Celebrate getting dressed in the morning and brushing your teeth and doing the bare minimum. Be proud of the little things you've accomplished instead of beating yourself up over the things you didn't. It's okay to not be as productive as you might be on a better day. Celebrate every little victory, because sometimes, just getting out of bed in the morning can take all that you have. And on the darkest of days, even the smallest victory can keep you going.

### MAKE EACH DAY SPECIAL

Sometimes the days become dreary and repetitive, and you can find that you have nothing to look forward to. Even if it's something small, give yourself something to look forward to each day. Listen to your favorite song when you wake up. Treat yourself to a nice cup of tea at your favorite local place. Do something to make each day worth going through. Even if it's just one thing each day that makes you feel a little less dreary, it's worth doing.

### PRACTICE SELF-CARE

Self-care isn't just putting on a face mask and taking a bath. It's intentionally doing something for yourself—for yourself, and no one else. Self-care can be something as simple as taking a five minute walk outside, sitting down and watching a movie, or even going to bed early and getting a good night's sleep. Self-care is an important thing to practice regularly, as without it, burnout can creep up. Sometimes, taking five minutes for yourself, even when you've got a million other things on your mind, can help to make your day, your week, your month, or even your year better.

### DON'T BE AFRAID OF WHAT YOU'RE GOING THROUGH

Feeling down is a normal part of life. The world can be a scary and overwhelming place, and it's normal to feel down about it sometimes. Know that you're not alone in the way that you're feeling—nearly everyone goes through this at some point in their life. It might not seem like it right now, but the way you're currently feeling will pass. Brighter days will come, and you'll look back at these days as a distant memory.

### LEAN ON OTHER PEOPLE

Whether it's from a friend, family member, or a professional, it's not weak to get support. In fact, it takes immense courage and strength to reach out and ask for help—that first conversation can make all the difference. So when you're having trouble finding a reason to smile, look to other people to help you find a reason. You might find that you're not as alone as you thought.

Life is tough. Sometimes, it can seem like too much to bear. In the hardest times, happiness can seem like a distant memory. Taking control of your life and reclaiming your happiness can make all the difference—even if it means you need to force a smile. Making your own happiness is an essential tool to keep you going, and hopefully these tips can help you become a master of manufacturing happiness.



### AUTHOR BIO

Renee Smestad is a senior (class of 2022) with a triple major in interactive media studies, English: creative writing, and professional writing, with a minor in digital innovation. She is from Massapequa Park, New York, and something that makes her happy is drinking chai lattes.



# Choosing happiness

HANNAH ROACH

## WHAT IS HAPPINESS?

Happiness is different for everyone—we all define and experience it differently. It's such an abstract idea, I thought it would be beneficial if we were all on the same page—generally.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines happiness as: “the state of being happy,” which isn't very insightful. However, branching from this, the definition of happy is: “feeling or showing pleasure or contentment.”

If you want to wrestle with the idea further, philosophically, look no further than Aristotle who believes life and humans act through exercising reason. Having this outlook, Aristotle defines happiness as an “activity of the rational soul, conducted in accordance with virtue or excellence” (Stanford University, 2020). Basically, if you're acting through reason and excelling in activity, you should find yourself experiencing happiness.

Looking through all of these denotations and lenses for happiness, I think it's safe to say that happiness is an emotion, a feeling, or a state of being. Happiness doesn't come naturally, it isn't a character trait, and it isn't a constant—it can come and go. The root of it all: it's whenever you feel like life is good.

## THE PROBLEM: OUTSIDE FACTORS

If we know what happiness is—an emotional feeling or reaction—then the problem lies with outside factors that cause sadness or a general state of unhappiness.

And I mean, we've been in a global pandemic for the past year and a half—almost two years—while continuing to pursue higher education. On top of that, we are amidst the chaotic transitional period of going from Student to Professional during a declining economy. That's a lot! I would definitely argue in favor of these drastic, new norms, and sense of isolation stemming from the pandemic, in addition to our attempt to transition, causing a state of unhappiness. There's a lot to consider personally, educationally, professionally, nationally, and globally—finding the good and finding happiness through all of this can definitely fall away from our line of sight.

## A POTENTIAL SOLUTION: SELF-AWARENESS & INTENTIONALITY

Knowing that happiness isn't a character trait, and acknowledging that lately a lot of things have been working against our communal sense of happiness should bring a sense of ease. No, it's not just you—sometimes life flat-out sucks. But for those times when things are heavy, we can work on our mindset. Sometimes happiness relies on living with intentionality and a peppering of self-awareness. It's like the psychological notion that when you're looking for a red car, you see them all over the place. When you're looking for happiness, finding it can become a lot easier.

A happiness centered mindset begins with self-awareness; notice how you talk to yourself, what is happening when you're having a bad day, and what is happening when you're having a good one.

Don't get me wrong, it is so easy to be your own biggest critic. We inherently know all of our flaws, what's going on underneath the surface, and the mistakes that lead to the success that everyone else sees. But there is an undeniable, positive impact from changing that approach, changing your outlook, and, instead, becoming your biggest and loudest cheerleader. A piece of advice I love to pass along is, “if you wouldn't say it to your best friend, don't say it to yourself.” Sometimes, that little saying helps to put things back into perspective for me when I get caught up on the negatives.

It might sound silly, and it'll probably feel even sillier when you start, but beginning each morning with positive self-affirmations can set the tone for the rest of your day. Did you know that it takes five compliments to replace a single insult or negative comment? Math is not my strong suit, but even I know those aren't great odds. So, if you stay fervently committed to finding your flaws and critiquing yourself, that's a lot of labor outsourced to those around you to make up for your negativity—five times over.

Research has proven that looking yourself in the mirror and repeating the same five compliments, or self-affirmations, every day will alter your mindset and increase your confidence (Psychology Today)! It basically implements the concept of “fake it 'til ya make it” in accordance with the notion that we learn best through repetition; if you hear something enough times, you'll start to believe it's true—even if nothing else changes.

## EXECUTION: A STARTING PLACE FOR LIVING WITH INTENTION

If you're already being the weirdo who champions themselves every morning in the mirror, even if you've not mastered it, you can also start living everyday intentionally. Intentionality and choosing to seek happiness can help unbury it from the rubble of life's daily stressors. Oh, and ya know, the global pandemic and unrelenting feeling of loneliness—can't forget those.

Similar to the daily self-affirmations, searching for gratitude can help the happiness to snowball. Before your day truly starts and you're at work or in class, make a point to note something you're grateful for. This sense of gratitude can be as small as, “I'm grateful I didn't wake up late today,” or as big as being grateful that you've started to show up for yourself regularly.

We can't ignore or deny the importance of showing up for ourselves. Sometimes that can also look like self-care, another concept that can mean something different for everyone. For some, self-care looks like a bubble bath and Netflix, for others, it might be a night out with friends. Self-care is even in your small choices: saying no to plans that you don't actually have time for (don't confuse your free time with availability to fill another time slot), taking a mental health day, or eating your favorite foods—even if they don't meet the restrictions of your current diet. Self-care can mean so many different things; do with it what you will, just don't skip it.

Another way you can intentionally seek out happiness is by making time to interact with your friends. Yes, we are living in a global pandemic with social distancing, and everyone is becoming more busy, consumed with their own life and responsibilities. In spite of this, even taking the time to call or FaceTime with your friends can shed light onto your day. It still counts! Studies have shown that having low social interactions, leaving room for increased loneliness, negatively impacts your physical health (Verywell Mind). Restricting yourself socially has shown itself to be the equivalent of smoking fifteen cigarettes a day and creates health risks at twice the rate of obesity. Moral of the story: talk to your friends; it will help you experience more happiness and increase your physical health—and it's much easier than hitting the gym.

## MAINTENANCE: PRACTICES TO KEEP HAPPINESS AROUND

Intentionally pursuing happiness can also create a shift in your priorities. What I mean by this is to recognize and be mindful of what is important. Don't get me wrong, I love shopping as much as—probably more than—the next person. Nevertheless, research shows that people are generally more happy when they choose to spend their money on experiences instead of objects (Daniel B. Block, MD). The reason for this is because when you have an experience, you leave with a memory that you can keep hitting replay on after the fact. This replayability reinforces the longevity of happiness. As we know, happiness is an emotional reaction that can come and go. So do it for future-you, and invest in an experience you can relive instead of buying another new pair of shoes—at least sometimes.

Along the same train of thought as investing in events instead of things, you can also try spending your money on others instead of on yourself. People generally agree that this sense of giving is more rewarding than continuing on with overconsumption. Whoever you choose to invest in will have happiness, and so will you.

Other easy ways to reinforce happiness and make it more frequent than not is through small acts of kindness. Small, random acts of kindness don't just make the recipient happy, it's also known to leave the provider with a sense of contentment and joy, too. Here are a few ideas to get yourself started, if nothing immediately comes to mind:

- Hold the door open for someone behind you, especially if they look frazzled, like they are having a day, and might be running late.
- Compliment a stranger. We all love it when someone random comes up and gives us a compliment in passing, so do that for someone else. Be a day-maker.
- Say “thank you” to a service worker you encounter. Here's the catch, you need to mean it when you say it—that will make all the difference for you and for the worker.
- Donate clothes, goods, or food to a local shelter. Giving back to your neighbors and your community doesn't have to be time-consuming to be rewarding.

My final note on how to keep happiness around is simple: immerse yourself with other happy and positive people. As the saying goes, “you are who you hang out with,” and if you're wanting to be a happier person, start hanging out with other happy people. The cliché “misery loves company” is a cliché for a reason: it's easier to fall into. Let's live in spite of that cliché and intentionally seek out fellow positive happiness-seekers.



## AUTHOR BIO

Hannah Roach is a senior (class of 2022) with a double major in strategic communications and professional writing, with a digital and technical focus, and a miniMBA. She is from the suburbs of Cincinnati, Ohio, and something that always makes her happy is puppies.



# CONCLUSION

Happiness makes the world go around. Without it, life can quickly turn grim and mundane. We hope that this book has helped you learn more about happiness, what it means to you, and how you can find it in your everyday life. And hey, if nothing else, we hope that at least one chapter in this collection made you smile :)



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