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|  | **HAPPINESS**  **22 April 2015** | **200-2015-07** |

**The United States Declaration of Independence was mostly written by Thomas Jefferson and approved by the Second Continental Congress on July 4, 1776. In this document, it states that “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that include Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” It's interesting to note that the Founding Fathers, in all their wisdom, didn't claim happiness as a right, only its pursuit.**

**Apparently, there are a lot of Americans out there who can’t find it! A recent nation-wide survey shows that only 53% of American citizens are happy. A decade ago that percentage was 68%. As a country, the United States has dropped to number 10 on the list of the happiest countries in the world. Faith in our government is at an all-time low. American people are sick and tired of the long Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. Terrorist attacks are still happening and the threat of terrorist attacks is high. The fiscal cliff, the sequester, high unemployment, low paying jobs, federal government shutdowns, the large number of homeless people and the embarrassing roll out of Obamacare are some of the other reasons there are many unhappy people here in the U.S.**

**So, I know you are wondering, who’s the happiest countries in the world? That distinction goes to countries that enjoy peace, freedom, good healthcare, quality education, a functioning political system with plenty of opportunity:**

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|  | **#1 Denmark**  **#2 Norway**  **#3 Sweden**  **#4 Switzerland**  **#5 Finland**  **#6 Canada**  **#7 Netherlands**  **#8 New Zealand**  **#9 Australia**  **#10 United States** |

**Okay, I know you are wondering, what countries are the most miserable, saddest, unhappiest, and least prosperous? These are generally the war-ravaged countries under the thumb of bloodthirsty terrorists and/or greedy leaders, where freedom of expression is limited, education nonexistent, and where violence is the norm.**

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|  | **#1 Syria**  **#2 Iraq**  **#3 Chad**  **#4 Congo**  **#5 Central African Republic**  **#6 Afghanistan**  **#7 Yemen**  **#8 Belarus**  **#9 Nepal**  **#10 Ukraine** |

**There are very few happy people living in these countries with the exception of the ISIS terrorists who seem to enjoy killing and beheading people. We are very lucky to live in a great country like the United States where we are given the freedom and the opportunity to be successful and live a good life.**

**The dictionary defines “Happiness” as the state of being happy. Are you a happy person? Is there mostly happiness in your life? Below is a little “Mood” test. Go ahead and select (check or circle) the moods or traits below that best describes you.**

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| **Calm**  **Cheerful**  **Content** | **Ecstatic**  **Energetic**  **Grateful** | **Happy**  **Hopeful**  **Humorous** | **Joyful**  **Jubilant**  **Optimistic** | **Peaceful**  **Relaxed**  **Romantic** | **Satisfied**  **Sympathetic**  **Thankful** |
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| **Angry** | **Cranky** | **Frustrated** | **Irritated** | **Mad** | **Sick** |
| **Bitchy** | **Crazy** | **Gloomy** | **Jealous** | **Moody** | **Stressed** |
| **Confused** | **Depressed** | **Grumpy** | **Lonely** | **Sad** | **Tired** |

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|  | **I hope you selected more of the moods in the yellow section. If you did, you are probably happy most of the time. There are a few people who don’t think that I’m a very happy person, but I selected 15 of 18 in the yellow and only three in the light green “unhappy” section. Although I don’t walk around with a big smile on my face all the time, I do consider myself to be a happy person.** |

**Okay, let’s face it, nobody is happy all the time. We all experience many of the “not so good” moods listed above. But, as we all should know, living a mostly happy life is much better than being grumpy your whole life.**

**What makes you happy?**

**I was thinking about this the other day and come up with the following list of things that makes me happy or would make me happy. (In no specific order)**

* **Playing sports (Basketball, pool, ping pong, golf, and bowling).**
* **Playing with and hanging out with my dogs.**
* **Having a few good friends to talk to and go out for beers occasionally.**
* **Having a few cold ones to unwind after work.**
* **Living in a safe, quiet town and neighborhood.**
* **Playing games on the computer (mostly games I programmed).**
* **Visiting my family and friends in Utah.**
* **Playing cards and other games with my family.**
* **Going fishing.**
* **Trips to Las Vegas and Wendover, Nevada.**
* **Visiting other countries like Korea.**
* **Watching Jeopardy!, NCIS, Criminal Minds, and sports on TV.**
* **Going to the University of Hawaii football games.**
* **Having family over to the house for swimming and a barbecue.**
* **Learning new things and writing about them.**
* **Going for daily walks to get some exercise.**
* **A little hanky-panky now and then.**
* **Writing computer programs and accomplishing jobs at work.**
* **Staying healthy.**

**I think that always having something good or fun to look forward to doing is the most important thing in my life that has led to my happiness. But as you can see by my list and pictures below, it doesn’t take much to make me happy.**

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| **Playing Pool in Fairbanks, Alaska** | **Fishing the Provo River in Utah** |
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| **Playing Basketball at Fort Shafter Gym** | **Playing Softball at Bellows Beach** |

**Now let’s find out what the Psychologists and other so-called experts have to say about finding “happiness”. They say humans seem the happiest when they have:**

* **Pleasure (tasty food, warm baths, sexual relations, etc.),**
* **Engagement (the participation in an enjoyed yet challenging activity),**
* **Relationships (social ties are an extremely reliable indicator of happiness),**
* **Meaning (a perceived quest or belonging to something bigger), and**
* **Accomplishments (having completed a job or realized tangible goals).**

**I agree with the above list but after reading more than a dozen articles on happiness, the general consensus is a little bit different. So, anyway, here are the factors that make us happy and what you can do to increase happiness in your life: (The first 10 are listed in order of most importance)**

**1. Family and relationships**

**The happiest people spend time with those they love including family, partners or friends. Intimacy with others fulfils two basic human needs – the need for social connections with others of our kind, and the need for personal growth which makes us feel fully alive.**

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**2. Meaningful work**

**We are happiest when engaged in activities that make us forget ourselves and we lose track of time. This can be achieved when making music, gardening, playing with children or dogs, playing sports, or doing research and writing about various things. We experience a sense of fulfilment when using and developing our skills, talents and abilities. When we complete a challenge or task that we are pleased with, we achieve a peak experience of self-realization and are happy with our achievement.**

**3. Positive thinking**

**Positive thinking is a mental and emotional attitude that focuses on the bright side of life and expects positive results. A positive person anticipates happiness, health and success, and believes he or she can overcome any obstacle or difficulty. If you believe in yourself, you will have more happiness in your life.**

**4. Gratitude**

**Think of anything—big or small—that exists in your life, whether it is a relationship, a job, a particular flower, or your morning coffee. Now, if this thing were to disappear tomorrow and be gone forever, would you miss it? If you would, it is something to be grateful for today—because it is here in your life right now. Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you. If you make it a habit to count your blessings, you will have more blessings and experience more meaning in your life than those who don’t. Grateful people are happy people.**

**5. Forgiveness**

**Few people fully realize the huge impact the ability to forgive can have on their happiness, nor do most people think of this as a skill that they need to teach and practice with their children. But important it is - forgiving people tends to make us happier and healthier. The inability to forgive, on the other hand, tends to make us into those people—we all know a few—who can't seem to stop plotting revenge or ruminating about how they've been wronged. Unforgiving people tend to be hateful, angry, and hostile—which also makes them anxious, depressed, and neurotic. Those who cannot forgive become angry and depressed over time, and suffer poorer health due to the physical reactions to these negative emotions.**

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**6. Giving to others**

**Remember that every single thing you do and say makes a difference. You are an intricate and vital part of this world, so do not discount the profound effect you have on the people around you, as well as those you don’t even know. If you say something that helps someone and that person goes on to help another with those same words, you have made a difference. Many people testify that what lifted them from depression was helping others. Whether by volunteering at a homeless shelter, holding the hand of a terminally ill patient, raising funds for charity, or tutoring children from poor families, all forms of giving takes us away from thinking only about ourselves and sets us back on the path to happiness.**

**7. Religion**

**A person’s specific religions belief or denomination does not matter as much as the fact that he or she believes in something. Religion provides social contact and support, a personal creed, and a direction in life. Most religious people engage in behaviors related to good health such as less substance abuse. It also enhance one's ability to deal with stress, and helps with psychological factors such as the "reason for being here." It gives us a sense of purpose that contributes to a person’s well-being and happiness.**

**8. Personal freedom**

**What Does It Mean To Be “Free”? While everybody needs freedom to varying degrees, some people simply cannot be happy unless they determine their own fate and are left to make their own choices. I look at freedom as being able to live the life I want to live – plain and simple.**

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|  | **9. Good health**  **The absence of good health makes us unhappy but its presence often tends to be taken for granted. However, with everything else being equal, if you are happy and satisfied with your life now, you are more likely to be healthy in the future. Yes, it is a proven fact that positive emotions and happiness benefit your long-term health.** |

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| **10. Meditate**  **Studies show that meditation improves happiness. Consequently, activities like meditation, yoga and practicing mindfulness will boost your level of happiness and satisfaction. Meditation allows you to put your problems in perspective, or the clarity achieved by the process, combined with a sense of mindfulness, will allow you to better appreciate things in the world around you that you may have taken for granted.** |  |

**11. Solve Problems**

**Understanding a problem allows people to keep things in perspective, to understand whether something is really worth getting upset about. It prevents giving in to self-pity and instead represents a more proactive approach that allows for finding a solution and moving on to other concerns.**

**12. Simplify Your Life**

**There's a tendency, especially in the United States, to try to do as much as possible. We multitask incessantly, as evidenced by the smart phone and iPad crazes. But a good day can also mean making a trade-off between doing many things and a few meaningful ones. Think about what's important and what you can do away with. You may be able to get rid of some possessions, or you may be able to eliminate certain stressors. Start by turning off your smart phone at night.**

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**13. Exercise**

**The mind-body connection is often cited as an integral component of happiness. Keeping the body fit through exercise has measurable effects on the mind, too. People who exercise generally have lower levels of anxiety and depression.**

**14. Accept emotions (Positive and Negative)**

**Accepting emotions of all types, including frustration, sadness and disappointment, helps to create a more realistic worldview. By accepting these feelings as normal, it's easier to respond to them constructively. It also allows you to keep your expectations in check and to gain perspective about life.**

**15. Spend Time in Nature**

**Most people claim to have an instinctive attraction to nature and a desire to preserve it. We want to protect the rain forests, clean up pollution, and if possible, live by the sea or a nice park. And despite much of the world's population living in urban areas, we can interact with nature in many ways such as having domesticated animals as pets, taking walks in the park, going to the mountains on vacation, going on a picnic, going camping or going fishing.**

**16. Buy Happiness**

**If that's Possible – Regardless of what you have heard, people with money are generally happier than the poor.**

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**17. Play and have Fun**

**Don’t take life too seriously. Although we all have responsibilities, there’s no reason why we can’t approach some parts of our lives in a playful manner. In fact, those who play and have fun will undoubtedly be happier.**

**18. Be Curious**

**Constantly search for new ways to be happy. Keep a look out for new ways to approach life and to have fun.**

**19. Learn to like or love yourself**

**The truth is that you must first love yourself before you can love another. To love others and to be loved by others is a key component of happiness.**

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**21. Live in the present moment**

**The only moment in which we can truly be happy is the present moment. The only moment over which we have control is the present moment. So be happy now! Because if not now, then when?**

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**22. DRINK BEER**

**Many of my most happy times occurred while or as a direct result of drinking beer. I’m a firm believer that beer has played a big role in me being healthy and happy during my life time.**

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|  | **Beer was the first alcoholic beverage known to humans. The ancient Chinese were the first to brew a beer-like substance known as Kui in 4000BC. A little later in ancient Mesopotamia, clay tablets indicate that brewing was a fairly well respected occupation and that the majority of brewers were women. Early pictures show a lot of women drinking the beer they brewed. This was really a great invention!** |

**Scientists have finally proved what I have known all along. Merely a taste of beer can trigger a rush of pleasure in the brain! This means you don’t have to get drunk in order to feel this distinctly pleasurable sensation. Yes, beer has been helping people to be happy for thousands of years!**

**Drugs like cocaine, heroin and meth are different. What makes people happy is the satisfaction these substances can give them. They enjoy the effects and may return again and again to the substance in order achieve that high. People think they are happy at the time of taking these substances, but, this shouldn’t be confused with happiness - this is addiction. It is about escaping and creating artificial happiness. Endorphins are, essentially, a drug fix that sets off a chemical reaction in the brain. Yes, sure, at the time, we might feel happy, but remember that this is not really happiness – this is a chemical reaction.**

**23. Get a dog or two**

**More than any other animal, dogs have evolved to become acutely attuned to humans and our behavior and emotions. While dogs are able to understand many of the words we use, they’re even better at interpreting our tone of voice, body language, and gestures. And like any good human friend, a loyal dog will look into your eyes to gauge your emotional state and try to understand what you’re thinking and feeling (and to work out when the next walk or treat might be coming, of course!)**

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| **Monty** | **Patti** |

**My dogs (pictured above) are a big part of my life. They get me up every morning at 4:30AM so they can go outside and do their business and then get something to eat. I take them for a walk (Monty trots and drags me along) or a ride in the truck every day. In the evening, me and the dogs stay outside and play ball, eat, and watch TV in the patio area. By 8PM, me and the dogs are ready for bed.**

**There are many joys that come with sharing our lives with canine companions. There are also physical and mental health benefits that can also accompany the pleasure of playing with or snuggling up to our furry friends. The American Heart Association has linked the ownership of pets, especially dogs, with a reduced risk for heart disease and greater longevity.**

**Studies have also found that:**

* **Dog owners are less likely to suffer from depression than those without pets.**
* **People with dogs have lower blood pressure in stressful situations than those without pets.**
* **Playing with a dog or cat can elevate levels of serotonin and dopamine, which calm and relax.**
* **Pet owners have lower triglyceride and cholesterol levels (indicators of heart disease) than those without pets.**
* **Heart attack patients with dogs survive longer than those without.**
* **Pet owners over age 65 make 30 percent fewer visits to their doctors than those without pets.**

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**Dogs improve your mood, your health, and** **teach you everything you need to know about how to enjoy life.**

**Summary**

**Let’s see, what have we learned about achieving happiness in our lives? If you really want to be happy, get a dog or two and drink lots of beer. Don’t laugh – it works for me.**

**Special note: This is the 200th article I have written since I started on this endeavor back in June 2006. I have learned a lot of things and I’m happy that I’m still writing at my advanced age. I do wish my family and friends the best health and the most happiness possible in your lives.**

[**bigdrifter44@gmail.com**](mailto:bigdrifter44@gmail.com)