

RANDOM REFLECTIONS: Happiness Is ...

By Kathryn Wishlow

Recently I overheard a person at a 60th birthday party ask someone they had not seen in a long time, "So, have you been happy?" Those words lodged somewhere in my brain, and kept looping around like the words to a song that won't leave. I believe they call them "ear worms".

Of course as the lover of words that I am, I had to look up the meaning of "happiness" in the dictionary the next day. "Happiness" means "good fortune, prosperity, a state of well being or contentment plus a few other things like gladness, joy and being pleasant. Wow! I had no idea that the primary meaning had anything to do with abundance or prosperity, although winning a lottery would certainly introduce an intense state of "happiness" to anyone I know.

For the next few days, I explored the "meanings of happiness" to those around me as well as myself. I was certainly very happy when the five baby robins left their nest under my back porch roof. Yahoo! No more worry about walking out the door and startling mother robin. No more white splotches on my car. But that was only a temporary gladness, as a week later, she was sitting back up on her old nest working on a hatching a second batch.

A visit to my son's house, demonstrated an almost two-year-old's idea of happiness. It had to do with the joy of accomplishment as she carefully climbed up the ladder to her slide, sat down at the top, and slid to the bottom, landing perfectly on her feet. She clapped her tiny hands in joy, with a grin as wide as her face. And I remembered how small things like that once brought me the same feelings.

There was an item on the news a day later that astonished me at the timing of it. Apparently, you can take a course at Yale called "Happiness". It is hugely popular, and the woman with the Doctorate running it, had a chart showing the average human's happiness scale. It starts off higher when you are young, then dips downward from your late twenties, until your forties. Then it starts to turn upwards again, slightly surpassing your youth in your sixties. It continues upwards the older you get. Interesting!

That made me think about, how much more time I have nowadays, to take pleasure from small things, despite my physical aches and pains. A phone call from a friend. A new bird at the feeder. A beautiful sunny day. My favourite steak on sale at the grocery store, or a 'buy

one, get one free" ice cream cone at Kawartha Dairy. Certainly, an unexpected deposit in my bank account of some government carbon tax rebate, fulfills the "good fortune and prosperity" form of happiness.

Gratitude seems to be something that is so much easier to recognize and express as we age. It seems the more I appreciate even the smallest things, the more good things come my way. My friends and I believe that our "ATTITUDE is EVERYTHING". We noticed years ago, that when we are down or depressed, things seem to get worse ... or bad things amplify. From our collective experiences, every tiny positive you can extract from a challenging situation helps. It is true that the illumination from one tiny candle defeats a whole room full of darkness. So I have discovered that I am the most happy, when helping another person be happier too!

(Kathryn Wishlow belongs to White Pine Writers Inc., a local group of like-minded authors who encourage and support all facets of writing and publishing literary efforts. Follow them on FaceBook or www.whitepinewriters.ca)