

Self-Empowerment

Summer 2004

The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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CHOOSE TO BE HAPPY

How happy are you? Would you like to be happier? Maybe the team of Foster and Hicks have something that could add to your happiness quotient.

Rick Foster and Greg Hicks were corporate consultants who spent years solving “problems” between people in the workplace. After doing that work for some time, they recognized that fixing problems was only a temporary respite until the “next problem” surfaced. It was then that they began to notice something interesting. There were a few unusual people who stood out from the crowd. They describe them this way: “Regardless of the problems swirling around them, they moved through life with grace, warmth and an elegance that was both alluring and mysterious. There was only one way we could describe them: extremely happy. And we were fascinated with them.” That’s when they shifted gears from problem solving consultants to doing the research that would lead to figuring out the secret of happy people.

After extensive research, interviewing hundreds of people, they uncovered a most amazing thing – despite the vast differences between their backgrounds, financial situations, race, marital status, or age, they all had something in common – *they each created happiness by making the same nine choices.*

This resulted in the development of workshops and the writing of their book, *How We Choose to Be Happy: The 9 Choices of Extremely Happy People – Their Secrets, Their Stories.* Their book shares personal stories of people who came from very difficult circumstances, yet made decisions which led them to living with profound, enduring feelings of contentment, capability and centeredness, not just a superficial imitation of phony bliss. Happiness, they say, is a “rich sense of well-being that comes from knowing you can deal productively and creatively with all life offers – both the good and the bad”.

What these two authors are calling happiness, others might call peace and/or joy. Regardless of which word you use, the emotional strength of those who practice these nine components enjoy life in a deep and satisfying way.

Let’s take a glimpse at the nine components practiced by happy people. Do these nine components of happiness show up in your life?

9 Components of Happiness

1 – *Intention* includes both a strong desire to be happy and the commitment to take action. It is the fully conscious decision to choose happiness over unhappiness. Do you

actively intend to be happy?

2 – *Accountability* is the choice to assume personal responsibility for your actions, thoughts and feelings instead of blaming people and circumstances for making you unhappy. Do you assume personal responsibility for your reactions to circumstances?

3 – *Identification* is an ongoing process of looking within yourself to identify what makes you happy. Do you ask yourself which choices would lead to happiness?

4 – *Centrality* is the happy person’s non-negotiable insistence on making that which creates happiness a central activity in life. Happy people don’t “wait to retire” to be happy, or put off that which gives them the greatest joy. Do you do what makes you happy today?

5 – *Recasting* is the choice to turn everyday problems into opportunities and challenges and to recast extreme trauma into something meaningful, important and a source of life-giving energy. To what extent do you recast problems by learning from them? Do you allow yourself to feel unhappy emotions deeply, and then move through sadness by converting it into new insight and meaning?

6 – *Options* is the decision to approach life by being open to new possibilities and taking a flexible approach to life’s journey. In your own life, are you aware of opportunities? Do you take risks? Are you flexible enough to jump into the unknown for the experience of trying something important or new?

7 – *Appreciation*: Happy people actively appreciate their lives and the people around them. They revel in each moment and transform that which is ordinary into something wonderful. Rather than thinking about the past or worrying about the future, are you aware of the moment and appreciative of your life?

8 – *Giving*: Sharing one’s self with friends, community and the world at large without the expectation of a “return on investment” is a hallmark choice of happy people. Do you give richly of yourself to others?

9 – *Truthfulness*: Happy people “speak their truth” in an accountable manner, enforce personal boundaries, and will not conform to those whose demands violate their personal belief systems. Their truthfulness becomes a contract they have with themselves, and, most important, it is a way to check their thoughts and actions against their own internal, personal code. Are you truthful with yourself and others?

Opportunities abound to deepen your peace, joy,

and happiness each day. Learning about ways to notice your habits and make some changes could result in a new and happier you. Check out Foster and Hicks' book and visit their website www.ChooseToBeHappy.com.

In this issue there are two personal stories of men whose spiritual faith and acceptance of emotional support contributed to their happiness despite challenging circumstances.

May you continue to nurture the happiness, peace and joy that is your birthright.

Blessings, Love and Hugs!

Your fellow traveler, *Rev Jill*

The next two stories are from the April 2004 issue of Guideposts Magazine, a monthly inspirational interfaith nonprofit magazine. Articles written by people from all walks of life help inspire readers to achieve their maximum personal and spiritual potential. Consider subscribing to Guideposts for the nurturing of faith and a positive outlook. *Guideposts: True Stories of Hope and Inspiration*. www.guideposts.com Guideposts, 39 Seminary Hill Road, Carmel, NY 10512. Tel: 800-431-2344

EXTRA INNINGS

By Hal McCoy

The first time it happened was an August night in 2000. I was walking up to the press box in St. Louis' Busch Stadium, where the hometown Cardinals were playing the Cincinnati Reds, the baseball team I've covered for the *Dayton Daily News* for the last 31 years. Suddenly everything went blurry in my right eye. No pain, but I couldn't make out the people next to me. I rubbed my eye, figuring the blurriness would go away.

It didn't. I managed to report the action that game using just my good eye. But I was worried. Think of me as a kind of theater reviewer. I watch games and explain to readers the Reds' performance: who played well, who didn't, why the ball club won or lost. To do my job, I had to see everything that happened on the field, from the swagger after a home run hitter's swing to the spin a pitcher puts on his deliveries. Back home my wife, Nadine, took me to an ophthalmologist, Jay Kelman – an old friend of ours. He's always upbeat and talkative, but once I got in the chair he grew quiet. Real quiet.

"You've had a stroke of the optic nerve," he finally said. "I'm sending you to a specialist."

"There's good news and bad news," the specialist said after examining me. "The bad news is, the vision in your right eye is never going to get better. The good news is, there's only a fifteen percent chance of it happening in your left eye."

It's amazing how quickly your body adjusts. My left

eye compensated for the right one – immediately. It completely took over. Though I'd lost 50 percent of the vision in my right eye, I barely noticed. I went on watching and reporting on ball games, driving my car, playing tennis five days a week. By the end of the season I had all but forgotten my problem.

Two years passed. Good years. My three boys were fine men. Nadine and I were as deeply in love as two people can be. In December 2002 I learned I would be inducted into the writer's wing of the National Baseball Hall of Fame – the highest honor a baseball writer can receive. *Lord, how fortunate can a man be?* I wondered.

"I'm going to enjoy this," I told Nadine. January is my slow time. In a few weeks I would be headed to Sarasota, Florida, where the Reds would begin training for the coming season. For now there were no games to cover, no players to interview. One morning I took my time getting up. The only thing on my mind was my morning coffee.

Downstairs, Nadine was getting ready for work. She teaches math at a Catholic school. I got to my feet and headed toward the bedroom door. Everything was dark and fuzzy. *Oh, no.* I felt my way down the hallway stairs and into the kitchen. Nadine was a blur. I picked up the newspaper sitting on the table. I couldn't read it. "Honey," I said, my voice quivering, "it's here."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I got it in my left eye too." I started sobbing.

Nadine tried to console me, but all I could think of was, *My career is my life. I can't cover baseball anymore. What am I going to do?*

Nadine drove me straight to the ophthalmologist. My old friend Jay gave it to me straight. "Look," he said. "You have your wife, your sons and you're in good health otherwise. You're strong enough to handle this, Hal."

I wasn't so sure. We left the doctor's office and headed to the *Daily News*. I had to tell the sports editor, my boss, Frank Corsoe, that I was through.

I had worked in that office for most of my adult life. Yet I could hardly manage my way around. "Watch those steps," Nadine said, gripping my arm as we navigated between the desks. "Look out for those boxes." Amazing, all the little things you avoid without thinking about it when you can see.

We walked into Frank's office. I handed him the doctor's report. "I'm going to have to retire," I said. Frank read it quickly and looked up.

I started to say goodbye. But Frank stopped me. "Don't let this thing beat you," he said. "We'll help you. Go down to Sarasota with the team next month. See if you can do it."

How? The next few weeks my eyesight kept getting worse. I couldn't drive. I didn't go anywhere without Nadine. A few nights before leaving for

Sarasota, I called Tony Jackson, the baseball writer for *The Cincinnati Post* – one of my competitors. I told him about my condition and asked if he could chauffeur me from my condo to the games. “Don’t feel obligated,” I told him.

“You helped me out when I was new on the beat,” he said. “I’ve never forgotten that. I’ve got you covered.”

My first day in Sarasota I went directly to the ballpark. I knew the Reds clubhouse like the back of my hand. Most of the players I’d covered for years. I looked around. Now the players were just fuzzy shapes. I stood in the doorway in a daze. Aaron Boone, then the Reds third baseman, came over to me. “What’s wrong?” he asked.

I told him. “I can’t do my job,” I said. “I can’t see. I’m going back to Ohio tonight. I have to quit.”

Aaron grabbed me by my arm and led me to his locker. “I don’t want to hear you use the word *quit* again. You love this job,” he said. “What you’ve told me is not a good enough reason to quit. The guys in this clubhouse will help you any way we can. But you’ve got to help yourself. You can’t quit.”

I hardly knew what to say. I agreed to stick it out a few more days. It wasn’t easy. I would walk through the clubhouse and knock over a trash can. I fell down an escalator. One day I walked right past a friend I had known for years. Nights I called Nadine and poured out my frustrations. “Things are going to get better. You just have to believe,” she assured me.

But they didn’t get better. The Reds played day games in Florida. The sun came streaming into the press box. I couldn’t see where the ball was hit or the print on my computer screen. One day it took me seven hours to write a story that normally would have taken me about two hours to bang out.

I called my editor. “I want you to promise me something,” I said. “If my writing isn’t up to snuff, tell me. I don’t want to be carried.”

“You can do this, Hal,” Frank reiterated. He arranged to get me a laptop computer with enlarged type onscreen.

One of my colleagues, Bob Nightengale, wrote a story about my battle. I started getting email from readers, strangers who said they were praying for me. They begged me not to quit, said that without my stories their mornings wouldn’t be the same. I can’t tell you how those people lifted my spirits, especially their prayers. I thought a lot about those prayers and how much my situation must matter to people if they were willing to pray for me.

But doubt and depression were never far away. Near the end of Spring training I went to Tampa. The Reds had a night game against the New York Yankees. We

got there late in the afternoon. I headed toward the clubhouse entrance and felt my way inside. I interviewed some players and then walked onto the field. The late afternoon glare was blinding. A *New York Post* writer, Kevin Kernan, had to lead me upstairs to the press box. I looked at the field. All I could make out were shapes moving around.

I bowed my head. *Help me, Lord. Can I do this anymore? Help me see the truth.* I looked up. The sun set. The glare disappeared, and the stadium lights were on. I couldn’t believe it. For the first time since coming to Florida, I could make out the players on the field and the words on my computer screen. Not well, but enough to get by. Well enough to do my job.

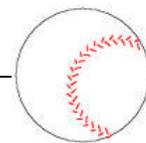
Then it struck me: The Reds play most of their regular-season games at night under these same arc lights. I would soldier through the first few games played in bright sunshine. My press box colleagues would help. I grabbed a phone and called Nadine. “I can do this!” I said.

At the end of spring training the Reds returned to Cincinnati to start the season. My editor arranged for a driver to take me to the ballpark every game. “Your work has been great,” Frank said. I thought at first he said it to encourage me, to make me feel better. But I’ve come to believe it too. Sometimes I think my reporting *has* gotten better. Losing my eyesight has made me a better listener. I am more attuned to what players are feeling and to the subtle rhythms of the game. Early in the season I broke a story about some possible player trades. It was big news.

Last July I was officially inducted into the hall of fame. As I stood at the podium, about to begin my acceptance speech, I thought, *Maybe God is showing me there’s a purpose in this.* So I told the audience what my setback brought home to me, what I still tell people now: “Don’t ever give up on yourself. Don’t ever give up on something you love.”

That’s what everyone had been trying to tell me in those bleak days of spring training when I was ready to quit the press box – my doctor, my editor, the Reds players and especially my wife.

I haven’t ever stopped loving Nadine just because I can’t see her as well as I used to. Same with baseball. I still get to write about the game, do what I love most, every single day. How blessed can a man be?



ONE MORE DANCE

By Rolf Garborg

Arthur Murray Dance Studio, the sign on the door read. This was the place. I said a quick prayer, grabbed my wife Mary's hand and walked inside.

The receptionist introduced us to the owner of the studio. "Hi, I'm Jesse Smith," the young man said. The walls were adorned with awards and photos of him and his wife, Lynda, who were two-time Open Professional Ballroom Champions. "Welcome to our studio. Is this your first time?"

Was our inexperience that obvious? "We don't know how to dance," I said. "At all."

"Well, it's never too late to learn," Jesse said. "There's no reason to be nervous."

Yes, there was. Good reason. Mary and I had never danced a single step in our lives. Not at our high school proms, not at parties, not even at our wedding. Never.

We'd both been raised in conservative homes where dancing was forbidden. When my third-grade class was going to learn square dancing in P.E., my mother pinned a note to my shirt: "Please excuse Rolf from dance class. He does not believe in it." I sat alone in the bleachers and watched the other kids do-si-do around the gym.

Even as an adult my parents' beliefs were so ingrained in me, it never occurred to me to try to dance, though I had no objection to others doing it. In fact, I liked to watch folks dance. When our daughter, Lisa, told us she was getting married she said, "Dad, I want to dance a waltz with you at the wedding reception. It's tradition."

I didn't want to let Lisa down, so Mary and I talked it over. "This is our only daughter's wedding," Mary said. "Maybe we should give it a shot?"

That's what brought us to this studio.

Jesse ushered us into the main ballroom. Different kinds of music drifted from each corner. Couples glided across the gleaming wood floor, their steps synchronized so they moved as a single fluid unit. Women twirled in their partner's arms, skirts billowing in the air.

I wanted to turn and run. *We're never going to be able to move like that*, I thought, clutching Mary's hand even tighter. *Lord, there's no hope for us.*

Before I could persuade Mary to hightail it out of there, two instructors came over. They explained the step we would be doing – a simple box step – demonstrating in time to the music. The male instructor took Mary's hand and practiced with her, while the female instructor worked with me. Then they stepped aside. "Okay, now the two of you try it."

We stumbled through. I had to count out loud in order to stay on beat. Really, I was more marching than dancing. Slow, quick, quick. Slow, quick, quick.. Yet holding Mary in my arms, I couldn't help but marvel: After 30 years of marriage, we were having our first dance. I felt like a kid.

Twice a week Mary and I went to the studio. We'd say hi to Jesse and head to class. By the time Lisa's wedding

came, I was ready. I took Lisa's hand and led her onto the dance floor. In front of almost 400 people, we danced. Nothing too fancy, but I was leading her on the beat. I was dancing with my daughter at her wedding. Later that evening, much to my delight, I even danced with my 88-year-old mother.

By this time, Mary and I had caught the dance bug. Group classes, private lessons, Tuesday and Thursday night parties...we were at the studio at least three times a week. It was a hoot, meeting new people, learning new dances. Mary and I even mustered up the courage to enter competitions.

"Rolf," Jesse said one day, "it's time Lynda and I start preparing you and Mary for competitions." Waltz, tango, fox trot, rumba, mambo, cha-cha and swing – they were masters of them all. Dance lessons from them were like learning how to hit a jump shot from Michael Jordan.

Their moves were flawless, fluid. I could hardly believe two people could be so in sync. How did they do it and make it look so effortless? One night it seemed as if Lynda had wheels on her shoes, the way Jesse swirled her so quickly and smoothly from one end of the dance floor to the other. The routine ended in a dip – Jesse swooping forward, cradling Lynda's head and shoulders just inches above the floor. It left me breathless.

"Okay, Rolf, you're up," Jesse said.

"You've got to be kidding," I said, laughing. "There's no way these old hips can move like that."

Jesse put his hand on my shoulder. "Rolf, think of how far you've come. You could barely keep a beat, right? But now you've got wonderful command of your body and solid timing. We'll take it step by step. You're going to get this routine."

Boy, I thought, maybe I should have listened to my parents after all. I took my wife's hand and led her through the first few steps. "Sorry," I said as I fumbled the first spin in the turn pattern.

"That was a great start," Jesse said. "It's only going to get better from here." By the end of the night we were doing most of the moves. Maybe not as gracefully as Jesse and Lynda, but we were getting through the routine. And it was a far cry from the slow, quick, quick box step where we started.

We worked up quite an appetite. The four of us went out for a bite. Before we dug in I asked if I could say a blessing. We all bowed our heads.

"Lord, thank you for this fine meal. Mary and I also thank you for bringing us to Jesse and Lynda. We treasure their friendship and guidance. Please bless them with your grace."

"That was really nice," Jesse said, lifting his head. "I'm not used to such personal prayers. I guess I've always been more of an observer than a participant when it comes to faith."

"It's like,..." I said, trying to think of a way to explain. "Can you imagine your life without dancing? Just watching other people dance?"

He shook his head. "No way."

"Well," I said, "that's how I feel about my relationship with God."

Jesse gave me a long searching look. From then on, our talks went beyond dance. In the studio and at competitions, Jesse worked with me – critiquing my form, developing my technique, encouraging me to challenge myself. And likewise, when he would ask about my faith, I would try to respond in kind, with patience and encouragement, but letting him find his own way. Once I said that a relationship with God was like a relationship with a good partner on the dance floor, completely in sync. "He leads, and I follow," I told him. Jesse understood that.

One night before a lesson, I noticed Jesse talking to another instructor for a long time. Then they hugged each other. Jesse didn't seem himself. *What's wrong?* I wondered. We soon found out. Jesse told us, "I just had my first chemotherapy treatment today. I have Hodgkin's disease."

"Oh, Jesse," Mary said, and hugged him.

For once I didn't know what to say or do for my friend, who had opened up a whole new world for me and brought me a joy I'd never known before.

"C'mon, big guy," Jesse said, sounding like his usual upbeat self. "I'll be fine. Hodgkin's is treatable. Don't even think this is going to get you out of your lesson. You've got a competition coming up. I want you two in peak form."

But I was worried. Not about the competition. About Jesse. How would he get through this? He had been interested in my faith, but I didn't know if he had found his own or not. Yet that was the answer, wasn't it? I would pray for Jesse.

Mary and I prayed for Jesse and his family. At home, at work, at church, even on the dance floor, I asked, *God, I know Jesse is strong. Please give him your strength too. Help him. Protect him. Heal him. Surround him with your love.*

But Jesse had treatment-resistant Hodgkin's. The doctors told him he'd have to undergo a series of grueling procedures, including a stem cell transplant where the disease cells – and immune system function – have to be completely wiped out before healthy cells can be transplanted.

The news hit Jesse and Lynda hard. They took a little time off in Hawaii. When they returned, Mary and I met with them.

"On the beach, Lynda prayed with me and we asked Jesus to come into my life," Jesse said. "Except I can't help but wonder, is it right that I'm only turning to him now that the chips are down?"

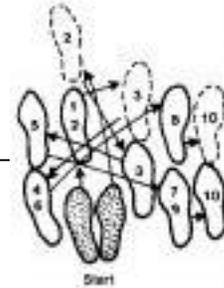
"Remember what you told me the first day we met," I said. "Was it too late for me to learn how to dance, even after fifty-four years of never dancing?"

"No," Jesse said, "it's never too late to learn how to dance."

"Well, it's never too late to turn to God, either. Never." After all, hadn't he brought Jesse and me together so we could help each other take those first steps that would turn out to mean so much in our lives?

Jesse continues to battle cancer. "I think it's a blessing," he told me recently. "It's brought me to a personal relationship with God."

Only God knows what the outcome of Jesse's battle will be. But I know one thing for sure: Sometimes we are brought together with other people in ways we could never have foreseen, our lives meeting in a kind of swirl, like a beautiful dance.



Daily Word

*I am joyful because I trust God and
because I appreciate life!*

I create a space for joy in my heart when I trust God with all cares and concerns. And I created joy that fills my heart when I choose to appreciate even the smallest of life's blessings. Turning my attention toward the most obvious and apparent good in my life, I can't help but notice that there is always something to be grateful for. My gratitude is the key that allows me to recognize even more of the good that is all around me.

My life is joyful not because of what is happening in it, but because of who I am. I choose to see things positively. Like a hopeful child, I have a natural tendency to expect positive outcomes. What I give my attention to increases in my life, and I am happy to increase the joy I experience and share with others.

The Daily Word, Unity Village, MO 64065. One year subscription \$10.95. Customer Svc: 1-800-669-0282.

The mission of Agape Interfaith Ministries is to encourage, support and inspire a deepening conscious relationship with Divinity for the greater experience of wholeness, abundance, love and peace. We serve to elevate consciousness through individual and group educational activities, and community service.

Introduction to Enneagram course

Rev. Jill Sabin Carel leads an introduction to a very rich spiritual and psychological system. Through the study of nine "points of view" we gain access to mental and emotional patterns which are at the base of our human personalities and motivate our behavior and defenses. Insights from Enneagram study lead to greater understanding, compassion and forgiveness of ourselves and others, as well as the potential to loosen the hold of our habit patterns. The Enneagram is a useful tool for counseling and coaching. Course includes lecture, workshop exercises and resources for further study. This promises to be fun and interesting. Join us for this one day intro.

Date: Saturday, July 24, 2004

Time: 9:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Location: Circle of Miracles, Wycombe, PA

Cost: \$70 tuition, plus \$5 materials fee

Registration required: Circle of Miracles

215-598-8002 www.CircleOfMiracles.org

WRITE A THANK YOU LETTER TO YOUR PAIN

At a recent workshop at The Center for Conscious Living in Moorestown, NJ (www.NewThoughtCCL.org Phone: 856-722-5683) Rev. Dr. Rainbow Johnson (www.RevRainbow.org) led a delightful workshop. One powerful exercise was to select a difficult experience from our past and write a thank you letter to it. Following is the letter I wrote. (Consider doing such an exercise with one of *your* difficult memories. It is great practice in *recasting* as described by Foster and Hicks.)

Dear Abandonment,

Thank you for showing up in my life periodically. Sometimes you peek in and sneak in, but other times you swoop in and yell "Ta Da! You're alone!"

Because you did that over and over, I had a chance to see you differently and change my mind about whether I could really be alone or not.

I found out several important and valuable things: I like myself and I can savor alone time. / I like my company and I can feel my own lovability no matter what person seems to leave what they *think* is me. / I am never alone. / I am surrounded by a love that is so enormous that I couldn't see it before – because there are no visible edges – there is no end to it – it is eternal and infinite.

So, dear Abandonment, you have been a figment of my imagination to help me to wake up to the Truth of my absolute lovability.

Thank you. There is no you. There is only Love, waiting patiently to be received.

Love, Jill

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Agape Interfaith Ministries on the Web

Visit the Agape Interfaith Ministries website at www.AgapeInterfaith.org for updated information about classes, workshops and study groups, and other supportive information.

A Course in Miracles study group

Open your mind and heart to the consciousness and experience of miracles. Share in the peace and joy that result from changing your perceptions.

When: 1st & 3rd Sundays, 7:30 - 9:00 pm

Where: 1100 Friendship Street

Corner of Friendship Street & Algon Avenue,
4 streets south of Cottman Avenue (Route 73)

Cost: No fee

For info call Rev. Jill Sabin Carel at 215-742-0552.

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Many thanks for your continued support!

Great summer reading

How We Choose to Be Happy: The 9 Choices of Extremely Happy People – Their Secrets, Their Stories by Rick Foster & Greg Hicks. © 1999
A Perigee Book, New York.



