

Happy? Happy! Happy. By John Leonard

A few minutes stand in front of the magazine rack in any airport in America will reveal our national obsession with our being "Happy". More sugary crap is hard to find outside the cereal aisle at the supermarket.

And from a group of assembled world travelers, it appears to be an almost singularly American pursuit.

Mr. Ben Franklin said "the pursuit of happiness is guaranteed by the Constitution, but you do have to catch it on your own." A cogent point, in my view, both in Ben's day and in our own.

Now adults in this great country of ours are free to obsess and over-analyze whatever they want, but the real damage comes when this nonsense is passed on to children.

Happy, according to the magazines, is when everything is laughter and light and sunshine and complete and utter bliss..with your family, with your mate, with your job, your 2nd job, your 3rd job, your avocations and your "interests".

And THAT is supposed to be the goal and objective of all of us.

What utter cow poop. (no pun intended).

I doubt that those hearty pioneers who pushed and pulled their wagons across this vast country, trying to kill Indians faster than the Indians killed them, gave much thought to all that laughter and light concept. But I suspect that the SATISFACTION level of their life, as they lay dying in their final days, was immense, particularly if they were surrounded by friends who outlasted the Indians and the illness and the backbreaking work, and their children. It wasn't about "happy" (that was incidental) it was about "Meaningful". "I raised kids in this stressful world, who then have raised kids in a stressful world. Good Job!"

My point is this. In today's modern life, the question should not be, (for many of us) "are you happy? " but it should be "Have you lived a satisfying and meaningful life?"

Though the daily grind of our jobs may at times be frustrating, difficult and challenging (pick your adjective) the results of that labor may be in the highest possible way, the ultimate in satisfaction...knowing that you have contributed significantly to another person's life. I personally cannot imagine anything more utterly boring than endless and mindless "joy". It's the contrast that makes the good stuff exquisite.

In my work with teenage swimmers, I frequently find myself muttering under my breath (or even a little louder) "cranial-rectal insertion syndrome" CRIS. By this I mean the tendency for each of us as teenagers or adults with occasional retarded development, to be so focused on ourselves, on our inner state and the dark and gloomy, (not to mention smelly) that we manage to make ourselves miserable by convincing ourselves that our lives are awful and we're terribly "unhappy". While this is a common trait in teen years, it typically decreases in adult years (though it does not disappear as sometimes we re-engage in this in small "pity parties" for ourselves.

Why does it go away gradually? Because as we age, we are forced in most cases to engage more with the world and the people around us. The "Cure" for CRIS is simple...find someone else who has real problems and help them to either overcome them, see them in a different light (reframing), or see their issues with greater balance and realism.

Not getting the use of Mom's car for a Saturday night date doesn't seem like a miserable life when compared with a teenager who doesn't have a parent to help make sure they have a roof over the head and food to eat.

Help someone else and magically, CRIS is gone. Focus on the world, not on your internal, never-ending, small minded strife.

It will make a better world, I think, if we all focus on the ability to live a "meaningful and rewarding" life, rather than whether it's all laughs and giggles. It won't be L&G all the time anyway. But every day, those who chose to, can contribute to humanity and their fellow travelers on the planet, and live a fulfilled life.