



Choose Happiness

I'M JUST NOT HAPPY ANYMORE," A COLLEGE FRIEND told a group of us over drinks, as she casually mentioned her plan to end her nearly ten year marriage. "My life is too short for me not to be *really* happy." As she reached across the table for another olive, she smiled as if she had told a funny story and not just totally bulldozed the landscape of her life, "I just want to be, you know, really, *really* happy," she said, leveling her gaze.

Pharell sings about it, and everyone longs for it, but from where do we get that happiness? Turn on any TV show, log onto Facebook or pick up any magazine –yes, even this one – and you'll see all sorts of suggestions and ideas of what happiness looks like. In these arenas, everyone seems to be living a life of incredible happiness, but often, that doesn't match the day-to-day lives we live.

Perfectly photoshopped and airbrushed bodies stare back at us from screens and pages. Smooth, toned and tanned, they are literally glowing with happiness. Popular people are photographed at galas and events, gathered in groups, laughing and celebrating as if they don't have a care in the world. When you see those images and compare them to your day of never quite making it to the shower, between the nine loads of laundry you tried to plow through and the stack of bills you paid, or the afternoon spent not on the golf course, but gutting the pond's pump in your backyard, it is pretty easy to start to feel dissatisfied and unhappy.

When your friends are sharing their vacation pictures from another spring break in Maui, and you read about celebrities jet-setting around the world, the day trip to Coeur d'Alene that you managed to squeeze into your schedule begins to feel unfulfilling.

It's so easy to begin to believe that having or achieving the shiny

things we see waved before us will bring us happiness, and that the day-to-day events and moments of our lives are not good enough for us. I catch myself falling victim to it to. I have always been pale. Growing up, my best friend was golden and I looked like a sheet of notebook paper standing next to her. People made thoughtless "Whoa, get some sun!" comments that would roll off of their tongues never to be thought of by them again, but were filed away in my mind, and pulled out whenever I would see my pale reflection. I was convinced I would be happier if I were tan.

One summer, I made it my goal to reach a golden state. I had enough experience to know this wasn't going to happen if it was left to just the sun and me, as I simply don't tan, so I enlisted the help of Jergens Natural Glow Moisturizer. Despite the slightly soy sauce smell of it, I diligently followed the directions and applied the lotion with great care, so as not to end up with the streaks and orange tone, so often sported by those who use similar products in excess. My hardwork paid off. After several days of use, I gradually began to develop a - as the name implies - natural color. No Oompa Loompa orange, just tan.

I thought for sure this would make me happy. I would feel like everyone else who stared up at me from the pages of the magazines, and the TV and computer screens. This was what I had been missing.

Stopping by my sister's house one morning, I walked into her living room. She turned and looked at me. "You look ... tan," she said, looking me over. "Does it look orange, or funny?" I asked, looking at myself in the mirror. I had really thought I would feel happier with my new golden glow than I did. "No, it doesn't look orange at all, it just ..." her voice trailed off. "It just doesn't look like *you*, anymore."

She was right. It really wasn't me. And it didn't make me suddenly happy. It just made me the same color as every one else, compliments of a full body covering of chemicals I could not pronounce. I abandoned the applications, and the color faded over the next week, returning me to my natural lily-white color.

Lesson learned for me on a small scale, but it is easy to see it amplified on a larger scale. Our happiness does not come from looking a certain way, shedding enough pounds or achieving a particular title. Accumulating the right clothes, cars or designer purses, won't guarantee it either. Stashing more cash in our accounts, and achieving the picture perfect life, free of any sturggles, obstacles or hints of boredom won't make us happy, nor will earning enough accolades or having enough adventures. All of these things can certainly enhance and add to happiness, but there has to be a base of true happiness to begin with. Tans develop and fade, those in our lives both delight us and disappoint us, our retirement accounts grow and dip, and we experience great adventures mixed in with mundane moments, but we can still be happy, in the everyday. But how?

Happiness is a choice; a decision, anchored in something deeper. It cannot be based on things that come or go, it must be anchored on a solid and real decision to always look for the good, to be determined to live happy before you feel happy.

True, life is too short for any of us to be unhappy. The good news, though, is that whatever may come, being "*really, really* happy" is a choice we can make right now, not a destination we arrive at when we've or eliminated the struggles and collected or achieved enough.

Choose happiness. The rest of those things? Those are the sweet extras.

Happy reading!

Blythe