

the Happiness Project

My book, [THE HAPPINESS PROJECT](#), is a memoir of the year I spent test-driving the wisdom of the ages, the current scientific studies, and the lessons from popular culture about how to be happy--from Aristotle to Martin Seligman to Thoreau to Oprah. [THE HAPPINESS PROJECT](#) hit the shelves in December 2009 (Harper) and, happily, was a [#1 New York Times bestseller](#). As one of the hundreds of happiness experiments I conducted during the research and writing of the book, I started this blog. Here, I recount my daily adventures in pursuit of happiness. – GRETCHEN RUBIN

"Cycling, Writing, Walking -- and Living in the Right City."

Happiness interview: Richard Florida.

I became interested in the work of economic development expert [Richard Florida](#) when I read his fascinating book, [The Rise of the Creative Class](#). He has a new book, just out, [The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity](#) Richard writes a lot about the how community, place, work, and the economy interact to affect people's happiness and career satisfaction. I was curious about how he thinks about happiness in the context of his own life.

What's a simple activity that consistently makes you happier?

Cycling. I loved it as a child and I love it even more as an adult. By my late thirties, pursuing an academic career, I was getting out of shape and knew I had to start exercising. So I asked myself what was the physical activity I liked most as a kid. I was a visiting professor at Harvard's Kennedy School and I went over to a great bike shop, Belmont Wheelworks and bought a road bike. I lost 40 pounds in a couple of months, because I was having so much fun. Cycling still gives me the same feeling of pure joy I had as a boy. It's pure happiness.

What's something you know now about happiness that you didn't know when you were 18 years old?

I never thought writing could bring so much pleasure. Yes, the old adage about all you have to do is sit down and the keyboard and "open vein" captures some of the initial pain and hesitation. But once you get into it, get into what the psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls flow, it becomes quite enjoyable - that total focus, the sense of being inside your own ideas, and of course it's always much, much better when you see the finished product.

Is there anything you find yourself doing repeatedly that gets in the way of your happiness?

Yes, of course, I'm doing it right now. Typing away on my computer. I spend much too much time writing, sending e-mails, composing blog posts, on my twitter feed, reading and searching online. I'd love to be out biking or spending more time with my family.

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Is there a happiness mantra or motto that you've found very helpful? (e.g., I remind myself to "Be Gretchen.") Or a happiness quotation that has struck you as particularly insightful? Or a particular book that has stayed with you?

I've read a lot of the happiness literature. For me it's all about where you live - the city, the community and the neighborhood. Finding the best place to live for you is something that resonates with me and stays with me all the time. As I explained in my book [Who's Your City?](#), the place we choose to live in the single most important decision we make. It has a profound impact on the jobs we have access to, our career path, our social networks, the people we date, family and lifestyle choices and ultimately the wealth we accumulate as well as our overall happiness.

If you're feeling blue, how do you give yourself a happiness boost?

Cycling, going for long walks in Toronto's amazing ravine system with my wife Rana or grabbing an espresso.

Is there anything that you see people around you doing or saying that adds a lot to their happiness, or detracts a lot from their happiness?

There are three happiness killers - doing work you do not love and are not passionate about, surrounding yourself with people who you do not really like (someone who just fills time), and living somewhere that does not let you be you. Just stop it. Life is far too short. Also, materialism. We know that experiences matter so much more to happiness than material goods, stop the madness. That's why your place, community or neighborhood is so important - it is not just where you live. It is the center-piece or should I say center-place of your experiences.

Have you always felt about the same level of happiness, or have you been through a period when you felt exceptionally happy or unhappy – if so, why? If you were unhappy, how did you become happier?

I try to never feel sad; I don't know why. I always try to find something in each and every day to make me happy. I am a very weather-dependent person. I simply cannot stand grey, gloomy, cold days. So I try to get to Miami Beach with my wife Rana as much as we can in the winter. We love Toronto, and our work here, but winters can be brutal. They always have been for me, and it just gets worse and worse as I get older. As much as I am a thinker and writer, I need to

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be active and outdoors to be happy. That balance is really important to me. So I need to be able to get out on my bike, to go for a walk with my wife, to get into the water, or just to drink a coffee or eat a meal outside. For me it's key to my sanity. I also think being active all year round, helps keep the pounds off and keeps me healthier.

Do you work on being happier? If so, how?

Yes, each day, every day. Someone once asked me, "What is my perfect day?" Every day I try to have one. It starts with having coffee and reading the papers with my wife Rana. Then I write for a couple of hours (I'm doing that now). Then, we go for a walk, in the ravine in Toronto or along the bay on Miami Beach's Venetian Causeway. Next is lunch. I'm an Italian American so lunch, in fact all food, is a big deal. After lunch I'll write some more, tool around the web, read email, write blog posts or send stuff out on my twitter feed. Around 2:00 or 3:00, if it is nice out, I will take a 30 to 35 minute ride on my road bike. After my ride, I will usually work for a few hours. Then, maybe around 8, we will start getting ready for dinner, maybe have a glass of wine. I love to barbeque. For me it's just amazing, especially on cool crisp nights to stand in front of that fire - something incredibly primal. Dinner always stretches on for a couple of hours. Then maybe watch a movie or some television and get to bed around 11:00 p.m. Perfect day.

Have you ever been surprised that something you expected would make you very happy, didn't – or vice versa?

Each and every time, it's material things. They pale in comparison to the simplest experience like taking a walk.

** May is almost over -- which means it's almost time for me to send out my monthly newsletter. It highlights the best material from this blog and the [Facebook Page](#), it's free, and about 43,000 people have signed up for it. If you'd like to add your name, click [here](#) or email me at [grubin \[at\] gretchenrubin \[.com\]](mailto:grubin[at]gretchenrubin[.com]). (Sorry to write in that odd way; trying to thwart spammers.) Just write "newsletter" in the subject line.*