

Happiness, Two...

Randy J. Heller, PhD, LMFT, LMHC

Last spring I wrote an article for the Wellness magazine about “being” happy. In that article I suggested that happiness is not a destination, but a journey to enjoy along the way. To my mind, the idea of *postponing happiness* until one reaches a certain point in the life (i.e. getting the right job, meeting the right partner, making the right amount of money, achieving the right degree) wastes precious time and opportunity.

As a doctoral student of Family Therapy at NSU, I am in the midst of the dissertation process. On my journey, I have heard tales of woe from students at this stage in their academic careers; stressing over the demands of proposing, researching, writing, and defending a dissertation. They speak about it being a “means to an end,” “what they must do to get their degree “and“something that they will soon” be done with.” For me, thinking about it in that way would be a wasted opportunity to “be” happy, now. Making a decision, now, to enjoy each interview I conduct, each step that I take, each chapter that I write, enables me to experience the joy that I feel on this path that I have undertaken.

When I walk around the NSU campus, I notice that there are some people who exude a spirit of happiness. I wanted to explore what happiness means to them. I spoke with people working at all levels in our university community from the office of the President to the Dean’s office and places in between.

President George Hanbury, Ph.D, seemed to share my notion of making a decision to be happy. He suggested that “happiness is a state of mind that does not come about by happenstance.” Dr. Hanbury suggests that “achieving happiness requires creating a plan for what you want and enjoying the benefits of the journey as you work at achieving it.” He adds, “it takes time, and in order to carry out that plan, one must be mindful of what they must do to accomplish their goals.” Further, Dr. Hanbury points out the importance of establishing priorities which requires self discipline and balance. He says, “You’ve got to be your own personal trainer...and keep going at it with perseverance and integrity.”

From the beginning of my academic career at the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS), I have been struck by the way in which Dean Yang smiles every time we cross paths. To me, his smile conveys the message, “I am happy to see you, and happy to be here; I am a happy man.” I was curious about what it is that he does to create that happiness.

Dean Hongang Yang, Ph.D., a Chinese American who grew up outside the U.S culture and came to the U.S. in 1986, brings his Eastern philosophy to his life and work here at NSU. He said that for him, happiness is not about any one thing or person. He stated, “Happiness is about defining oneself in interrelationship with family, friends, peers, colleagues, and the environment...happiness is relational and is a complex idea that varies across cultures, is subjective, and individually defined.” Dean Yang pointed out that happiness is fluid. For example, one might say they are a morning person and are

happier in the morning, or, "I feel better when I'm outside rather than inside." With this example, Dean Yang seemed to imply that one can do something different in order to change their state of mind and "be" happy.

Tammy Graham, Assistant to the Department of Multidisciplinary Studies at SHSS is another person who I notice has a perpetual smile that brightens the halls of the Maltz building at NSU. When I asked her about her understanding of happiness she said, "I am basically a very happy person as negativity doesn't accomplish anything." Tammy went on to say, "I don't think about the fact that I go around with a smile on my face; it's just there." Tammy stated that when things get tense she giggles, which allows her to refocus on the fact that she'll get through. She went on to say, "It is very rare that your whole world falls apart at once... if you focus on what's going well, you don't spiral down." After facing illness and the loss of her husband a few years ago, Tammy decided, "You don't know if you're going to have tomorrow, so why allow your last memory to be unhappy?"

In closing, I wonder, what will you do...?