

Hailey Banh - 30/01/2023

*To be Happy*

“What does it mean to be happy?” I ask myself.

Waiting for the bus gives me a lot of time to think. I dig my hands into my pockets and release a cloudy breath into the atmosphere.

“Hell if I know.”

I turn my head towards the growing rumble of car tires and see a faint orange light coming my way. I stomp out the dart in my hand and toss it in a nearby trash bin.

The 91 Bayview arrives and the driver flashes a toothy grin as I climb on. I smile back.

*“Maybe it’s to be kind?”* I think to myself.

I rest with my arm on the window, thinking back on ways kindness has improved my life. Returning a lost item to a stranger, paying a random girl a compliment, and being patient with the children I babysit. Looking back on such fond memories never fails to fill me with warmth. It’s hard to believe an action that made no difference to me meant the world to somebody else.

Just then the bus comes to a screeching halt, causing the arm I was resting my head on to slip.

The moment I smacked my head on the window seemed to knock the idea out of my head. Many happy people act like the center of the universe. Maybe happiness is more selfish than that.

I grab hold of the headphones resting around my neck and slip them over my ears. With noise canceling on, I slip into my own world.

*“Can I find happiness without depending on other people?”*

Music is a good start. Music has comforted me countless times, I probably wouldn’t be here without it.

I open Spotify and scroll through my endless playlists, one for each emotion, and scenario, and more songs than there are stars in the sky right at my fingertips.

There are times when I can’t articulate my feelings, times when a human touch just won’t do, and times when I’m too smart to consume substances. A good song will always be there to help me through it all.

“Next stop, Bayview and Carville,” calls an automated female voice. I snap my head to the front of the bus as I am forcibly dragged out of my thoughts and back to reality. Hurriedly, I step off the bus and make my way to the plaza where I work.

I still have some time to kill before my shift starts but it’s too cold to loiter. I think back to my near-empty bottle of facial cleanser at home.

“Ah... Shopper’s Drug Mart it is.”

I am greeted by blinding fluorescent lights as I step onto the linoleum floor. Pacing the cosmetics aisle, I ponder other sources of happiness.

*“Coral, peony, red, maroon, plum.”*

The different shades of makeup invade my mind.

*“The pursuit of beauty... Is that what makes me happy”*

The fresh feeling of stepping out of the salon chair, mastering a makeup look, and trying on a perfectly form-fitted dress. Turning heads in the hall and racking up likes on social media. The bursts of dopamine that comes with being adored are addicting. Who doesn't love being fawn over? But beauty is so fleeting, so superficial. Should true happiness be something so fragile?

I make my way through self-checkout and brace myself for the frigid air. The moment I step out of the store, the wind jumps at the chance to bite my skin. Burying my nose into my scarf, I quicken the pace towards my workplace.

I let out a relieved sigh as the neon open sign comes into view. Stepping through the door, the smell of fried chicken and tap beer fills the air.

As I settle into my post at the bar, I let my coworkers in on my dilemma.

“I’m writing a piece on what happiness means.”

“And what have you thought of so far?” Says the other bartender, placing clean glasses on the drying rack.

“Not much,” I lean back on the counter, crossing my arms. “Kindness, beauty, music. What else is there?”

“Maybe working?”

Our conversation is interrupted by an incoming phone call. I push off the counter and answer the phone, preparing to take the order.

After a few minutes, I hang up the call and slowly turn to face my coworker. We share a knowing glance before erupting with laughter.

“It’s definitely not working.”

A few hours pass and my shift comes to an end. I hastily pick up my things, wish everyone goodnight, and make my way home.

Sluggishly, I pull my work uniform over my head and toss it onto the floor. Plopping myself face-down on the mattress, I pull out my phone and aimlessly surf the internet.

*Ding!*

“What are you up to?” My friend asks.

“Trying to finish this philosophical piece about the meaning of happiness that I started earlier today,” I text back.

“Whatever you write, there is no wrong answer in philosophy!”

“Of course, of course. How could I forget?”

“Have you figured it out yet?”

I stare at the words on my screen for a few minutes, then up at the ceiling. After pondering all I have written and searching tirelessly for an answer, I realized that “throughout the paper, I talk about different things that make me happy, but none of it feels like that *one* thing, you know? So, I conclude that it’s a mix of things and that experiencing the little joys in life amounts to true happiness.”

“Yeah, I agree with that. I don’t think there is one thing that makes someone happy.”