

Happiness: The Art of Living with Peace, Confidence, and Joy

Douglas A. Smith

White Pine Mountain (Jan 2, 2014)

Softcover \$15.95 (192pp)

978-0-9860708-0-8

The actionable advice that Smith presents in this part memoir, part guide is bolstered by his clear, vivid writing style.

Baby Boomers will find guidance when looking to make sense of their lives in Douglas A. Smith's autobiographical journey toward happiness. The brief prologue presents obvious or not so obvious facts: "Everyone wants to be happy" and to gain a skill set that will lead to contentment. *Happiness: The Art of Living with Peace, Confidence, and Joy* is written in a level-headed and heartfelt manner, explaining that while the skills of happiness can never be fully attained, with happiness, "we have better physical and mental health."

The structure of *Happiness* starts in the present with Smith's musing while watching a sunrise from a mountaintop, being present and thankful. His life changed when he was diagnosed with cancer, and his emotional devastation was neutralized by the support his wife, family, friends, and doctors. This support helped him live beyond the prognosis and find a new purpose in life. The following chapters return to his earlier life, sharing personal anecdotes that catalog his missteps, material successes, and growing self-awareness.

Thirteen chapters under group headings cover his journey through growing emotional awareness of people and the world about him. For instance, he begins showing gratitude and acknowledging people that once were invisible to him, like thanking washroom janitors for keeping things clean. Quotes from researchers and experts are used throughout *Happiness* to support Smith's observations.

It is refreshing to read a book on awareness that is free of new-age jargon or references to precepts from ancient belief systems; this is a twenty-first century *Walden*. Set in Middle America, Smith's story is well told, cherishing what he has and remaining aware of the natural world. On the personal side, without being preachy, he suggests scheduling a colonoscopy.

Common experiences, worries, vulnerabilities, and Smith's responses to them are well written. The writing is focused, flowing, and free of grammatical errors. The rustic-style woodcuts of natural scenes match the tone of Smith's writing.

An appendix offers a list of skills that can lead to happiness by helping people cope with the past and present and prepare for the future. It's followed by a skills summary that uses boldface to emphasize subheads, making it easier to find important information. Smith's personally developed acronym, FOFO (Faith, Optimism, Flexibility, and Openness), helps him look to the future. These skills are ones everyone can learn, and, with practice, they can lead to happiness.

MARK LAIOSA (February 17, 2014)

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