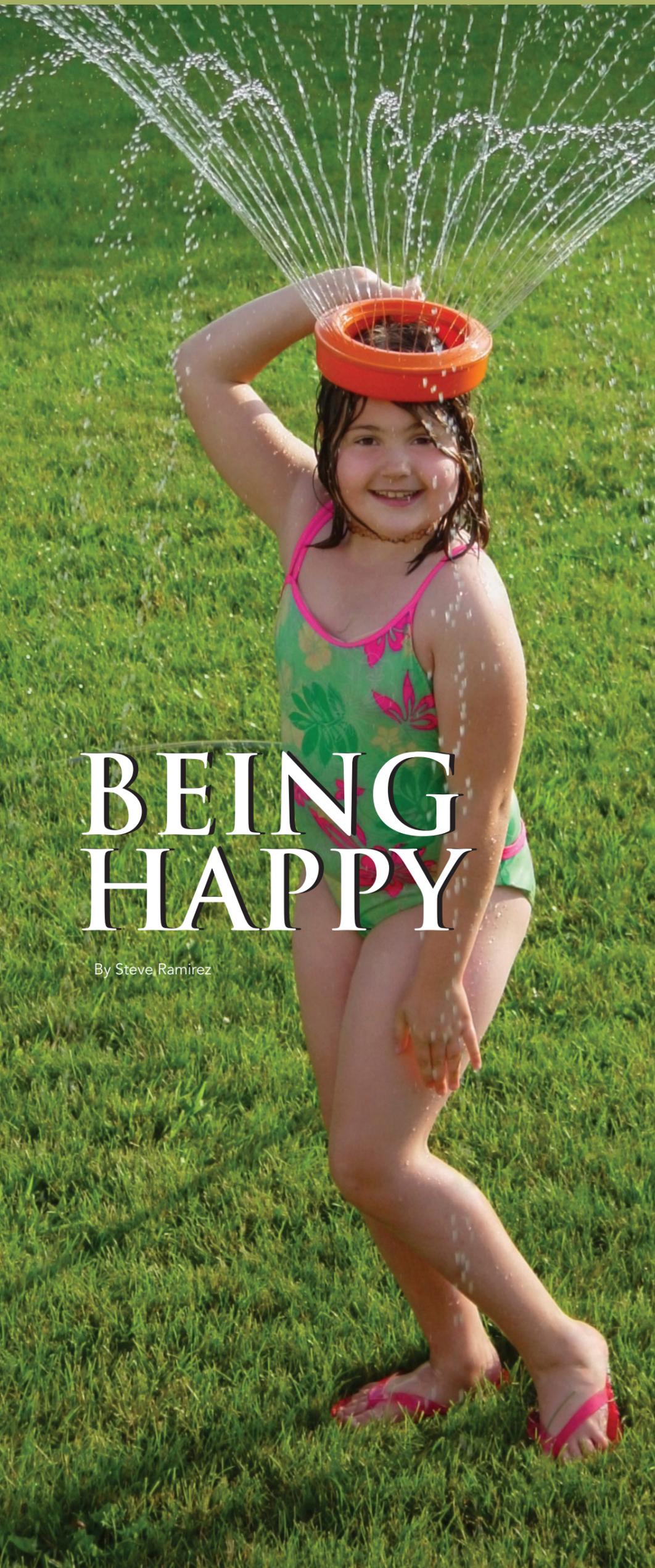


TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

CHRONICLES



BEING HAPPY

By Steve Ramirez

I just love to be happy. It beats the hell out of being sad. Even the word sounds better. Who in their right mind would want to be sad, miserable, depressed, gloomy, negative, pessimistic, grumpy, frumpy, or dumpy? I don't want to catch any of those things...and they are catchy. Instead, I want to be happy, joyful, exuberant, positive, buoyant, cheerful, hopeful, optimistic, and brimming with laughter! See, don't you feel better already just reading about it? I know I do.

I am happy to say our founding fathers were a smart bunch of guys. They knew that it was going to be a case of, "the pursuit of happiness" for all of us. They knew that being happy is not something that you are going to be all the time; it is more of a goal. When they wrote the Declaration of Independence, they were smart enough to put that in there because when you try to turn a rabble into a country, you need a common goal. Even back then, they knew, we wanted to be happy.

I try to avoid people who do not want to be happy. As I said before, misery is catchy. My grandmother used to tell me to be careful of the people I hung around because eventually I would end up being like them. Knowing she was a smart old gal, I decided to take her advice.

In order to avoid that type of person I checked out *A Field Guide to Unhappy People*, by Seymour Putzes. As I flipped through the pages of the guidebook, I noticed that unhappy people are widely distributed. I checked out the pictures of some common varieties and recognized quite a few of them. In order to arm myself with knowledge, I looked up some common traits for contagiously miserable people. The first thing I noticed is that when asked how they were, people who hate happiness tend to say things like, "hanging in there," "fair to middling," "not too bad," "no use in complaining because nobody would listen," or "life sucks, how about you?" The second thing I learned is that unhappy people hate to see other people happy and seem to feel it is their public duty to put an end to such nonsense immediately. Finally, the field guide warned that those who hate happiness are always quick to point out the dark cloud attached to any silver lining. I closed the book, and made a choice to avoid these folks as much as possible. After all, there currently is no vaccine for this illness. You pretty much need to let it run its course and hope your spiritual immune system can kill it.

So now here I am, determined to avoid the negative and pursue happiness. How do I pursue happiness? A friend of mine once told me, "Happiness is like a butterfly. If you pursue it, you will never catch it; but if you just stay still, it might land on you." This may be true, but it sounds too much like a greeting card. The problem with greeting card slogans is that they are like romance novels; they always end at the beginning. Besides, it seems somehow un-American to sit around hoping happiness lands on my nose.

In Buddhism and other eastern philosophies, we are told that suffering comes from expectations. We place values on things and conditions that are based on preconceived notions of permanence. This is referred to as the principle of "eachness and suchness." For example, "sunshine is good, rain clouds are bad." If our happiness depends on eachness and suchness, we do not have a chance at achieving it. The truth is, some things may be true, but few things are TRUE, and nothing is permanent. The truth is sunshine is not so good if you are dieing in the desert, and rain clouds are great if you are a farmer with a thirsty field. The truth is my happiness cannot depend on impermanent conditions that are beyond my control. My happiness depends on me.

Being happy, is my choice. Sometimes it is an easy choice, and sometimes it is a more difficult one, but it is always my choice. Somehow, choosing to be happy seems so much more American to me that sitting around waiting for it does. I know that I cannot control what happens to me. I can control my reaction to life's trials and triumphs; and that seems to be a triumph itself. I am working hard to choose to be happy. To that end, I went out and got a copy of *A Field Guide to Happy People*. It is unfortunate that we are not as widely distributed in the world population. I found that when asked how we are, happy people tend to say things like, "couldn't be better," and "great to be alive," and "outstanding!" Finally, I checked out the representative photos of happy people. We were all smiling. I just love being happy. X steve@hillcountryexplore.com