

# The Hunt for HEROES, HEAVEN and HAPPINESS

by Pamela Teaney Thomas, M.Ed.



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“The secret of happiness is not doing what one likes  
but in liking what one has to do.” —Unknown

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A little boy quietly came to answer the door.

Outside stood a salesman, “Is your mother here?”

President Abraham Lincoln stated,

“People are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.”

“Yes,” whispered back the little boy.

“May I talk to her?” inquired the man.

Still in a whisper, the boy answered, “She’s busy.”

“How about your father, is he here?”

“He’s busy too.”

“Well, is there anyone else here?”

“Yes, a fireman and a policeman.”

Frustrated the salesman asked, “What are they all doing?”

Quietly the boy answered back, “They are all looking for me!”

How many times do we go looking for something we want — only to look in the wrong places — when all along it was right under our noses!

In 1979 as a young high school teacher, I had hopes of inspiring young people to look for success in their lives. I soon discovered many of our youth walking into the dead end trap of violence, drug and alcohol abuse — destroying their dreams. Reaching out to help them, I began wondering what factors would lead some people to use and abuse and others not. Why were these young people searching for happiness in physical beauty, money, fame, power or drugs?

In America the number of books on happiness has quadrupled in recent years. The therapy industry has tripled, and anti-depressant prescriptions have increased five fold. Cosmetic surgeries are rocketing each year. Half of all Americans dream of becoming rich. Baby boomers (born between 1946-64) assume they should be happy and are four times more likely to say they are not satisfied with their lives than their parents’ generation. Incidence of psychological depression is ten times what it was pre World War II. Following in their parents’ footsteps, a recent survey in our community revealed that over 42 percent of our high school students felt sad or depressed most of the time. Why, when we are the wealthiest, healthiest, most educated generation in our nation’s history?

I am Here to Say That Happiness is Over Rated!

We have become a generation rearing another generation to feel entitled to good looks, money, fame, power and feeling happy almost all the time. The new hit television reality and extreme makeover shows whet the appetite for these misguided goals. Sandwiched between the shows is a mountain of drugs advertised for every ailment. We have created a pill for every ill.

When our expectations (*what we think we deserve*) are higher than what we have, we become unhappy. For example, when we see gorgeous women or brawny muscular men, we compare ourselves to them and become unhappy.

We play the game. “I’ll be happy when I lose 50 pounds, when I win the lottery or when I get a car.” Even when we get the car, we are only happy momentarily. Then we desire one with mag wheels, or with this or that. The list gets longer. Never being happy or content with what we have.

We need to put on different glasses in order to truly see ourselves; glasses that help us view our world in a

positive and grateful way. This does not mean that setting goals and reaching for excellence is wrong. However, if we are to find happiness, we must count our blessings, be thankful for who we are and what we have along the journey. If our expectations are closer to what we have, then joy can abound.

Happiness is about the process, not the end. We cannot just arrive at it. Too many people are waiting to “arrive at happiness” before they can enjoy life. The essence of happiness is pausing to savor the gift of the present moment. We find it not in the big things, but really in the small events along the way. For example, we can find happiness while at lunch with a close friend, reading a bedtime story with your child, on an evening walk with your spouse, or curling up by the fire with a good book. The old adage, “Take time to smell the roses” is still viable. President Abraham Lincoln stated, “*People are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.*”

The hunt for heroes has taken a similar voyage with the help of Hollywood. In John Wayne’s day one needed friends to help get the job done and be a hero. Then along came Rambo and the Terminator showing us that we only need ourselves, a dose of anger and revenge to be a hero. Action figures like the Power Rangers do not even have a mouth to speak with, yet they were heroes through acts of power. More recently many young people looked to movie and rock stars as their heroes since they had the ultimate goals of fame, fortune, and power at their fingertips.

On September 11, 2001, our country had a paradigm shift in thinking regarding what a true hero was. For the first time in decades, people saw the common person — firemen, policemen and common citizens — doing their job well, putting others before themselves and showing the power the “will” has over their thoughts and emotions. These true heroes were serving and saving others. These people were elevated back to being the true heroes through their actions of being unselfish, caring, and giving. Even at Halloween, many children were excited about fireman and policeman costumes.

We can look in our own lives for the everyday heroes who are caring, giving, unselfish and are serving as mentors to us. A mentor is like a hero — only better. You can idolize and admire a hero from a distance. On the other hand, a mentor is part of your life offering new ideas; changing the way we look at the world and ourselves, and helping us discover latent abilities and talents. Take time to thank the mentors in your life and strive to become a mentor yourself.

If we, in the helping profession, can use the national experience of 9/11 to help people understand the power of the mental shift in thinking that took place, we can help them to see the power the “will” has over our thoughts and emotions when stuck in a destructive thought process. The “will” can override any emotions or thoughts we have. A simple example of the “power of the will” is experienced each morning when the alarm goes off and we think we are still too tired and do not feel like getting up. Nevertheless, the will takes over and we get up! This same “power of the

will” can be used in choosing to see our self and the world through positive glasses. The “will” can be used to change the mental talk in our brain, thereby, changing the feelings. (Even though we did not feel like getting up, once the “will” changes and we get up; the feeling changes with the action). Life is a series of problems that can be seen as obstacles or opportunities. We can use the glasses to see the world as Heaven or as Hell.

Humans have three levels of being — physical, mental and spiritual. Americans have put too much emphasis on the development of the physical and mental over the years. Spirituality and good character have been sadly missed leaving a void in our lives. This void within has led many people to try filling it with drugs and alcohol in pursuit of heaven and happiness. The new 9/11 heroes have also brought back to mind the importance of good character and spirituality. When we take time to develop our relationship with God and value good character traits within ourselves and others, we see the world and our expectations in a totally new light that is not based on physical looks, money, fame and power. Our expectations of what we think we deserve become — what can we do to serve others? We become unselfish, caring and giving which are ingredients for becoming a mentor and a true hero. When all three levels of being (physical, mental and spiritual) are in balance, there can be peace, joy and happiness. Over 2000 years ago King Solomon said, “*As a man thinketh so is he.*” Proverbs 23:7. ▼

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**Put your “Will” to work:**

- Live beneath your means and within your seams
- Do not make excuses
- Stop blaming other people
- Admit it when you make a mistake
- Be kind to kind people
- Be even kinder to unkind people
- Cultivate good manners
- Let someone cut ahead of you in line
- Take time to be alone
- Reread a favorite book
- Be humble
- Pray
- Find a mentor
- Thank a mentor
- Become a mentor
- Do not sweat the small stuff
- Count your blessings and name them one by one!
- Dance like there is nobody watching!
- Sing like there is nobody listening!
- Live like this is heaven on earth!

Art Unfilled by Richard Gallagher Courtesy of MRRSAD