

HOW TO  
HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

or...

what I learned while living  
with the happy “poor” people  
in the islands & jungles  
of Middle America

LAURA LABRIE

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# DEDICATION

To my children, Sarah, Michael, and Thomas, for their great support and understanding while their mother wandered around the islands, jungles, mountains, and rain forests of Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean.

To Sergio whose encouragement has been, and still is, priceless. And of course, to the people who live in those jungles, rain forests, mountains, and islands and who taught me (and continue to teach me) the secrets of happy living.



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# HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

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LAURA LABRIE

## WHAT IS HAPPIFY?

I LIVED WITH THE POOR IN THE REMOTE islands, jungles, rain forests, and mountains of Middle America with the hope of understanding the underlying reasons for the poverty there. But what I discovered was unexpected. The people whom I assumed had nothing, had something far more precious than gold.

They were happy.

So, I took notes, writing down everything I could about their daily lives. And what I learned is that the ancient, tribal secrets to happiness are concrete and easy for you to apply to your own life, no matter where you live.

So, in an effort to help happify the world, I am squishing as many of those secrets between the pages of this little book as I can.

With all love and joy,  
Laura

## DISCLAIMER

The stories and examples in this book are based on my experience living and traveling in Mexico, Belize, Costa Rica, and Panama. After spending hours trying to figure out what to call this geographical area, I finally settled on MIDDLE AMERICA. Central America does not officially include Mexico and Mesoamerica does not include Costa Rica and Panama. Latin America includes all of South America and that seems just too big. Middle America technically includes Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. While I did not spend any time in the Eastern Caribbean, I was in the islands off the Caribbean coast of Belize and Panama. I also spent a little time in Puerto Rico. So, I am sorry if you are not entirely satisfied with my geographical word selection, but it seems the best I can offer apart from saying “Mexico and Central America” all the time which seems a bit laborious. Anyway, the point is to enjoy the stories and learn from anecdotal evidence some of the keys to happiness as demonstrated by the lovely people in this area of the world.

So Middle America it is...

Enjoy!

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# PART ONE

finding happiness in an  
unexpected place

# HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

## A SACRED CHOCOLATE FOREST

THERE IS A VILLAGE IN THE TALAMANCA mountains on Costa Rica's Caribbean coast that is accessible only by a swinging bridge strung over a deep ravine. A narrow river, home to caimans and the occasional small crocodile, snakes through the forest far below. Howler and capuchin monkeys frequent the area and sparkling blue-morpho butterflies flit through the towering mango and breadfruit trees. The bridge has unevenly spaced wooden slats that require careful footing and the cable handrail bends and bows as you cling to it tightly while struggling to maintain your balance. It is not a comfortable crossing, especially when combined with the fact that the bridge is actually swinging.

The Bribri, who make their home on the far side of the bridge, are sometimes known as the "hidden people" because they live deep in Costa Rica's rain forest, remote and isolated from modern life. They have their own language and still practice many ancient ways and traditions. They are the original indigenous people of Costa Rica, small in stature with golden-brown skin, shiny black hair, and dark, almond-shaped eyes. Though they no longer wear the traditional clothing of their ancestors, most still live in traditional homes with pounded bamboo walls and densely woven palm-thatch roofs that are both beautiful and practical in the sweltering rain forest heat.

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When I arrived in the village, after successfully crossing the treacherous swinging bridge, I was delighted to find a sacred chocolate forest stretching out over the steep, surrounding hillsides. It was guarded by a stone crocodile and two stone warriors, the pupils of their eyes colored red with paint made from the seeds of the achiote tree. The Bribri are famous for their artisanal chocolate which they make from the seeds of the *Theobroma-cacao* tree. *Theobroma* literally means “god-food” and the people of the village tended the cacao grove in a manner close to that of tending a holy church. While I was there, I was privileged to see the men harvesting the deep yellow cacao pods and the women crushing the bitter seeds into a velvety, chocolate paste.

**There is something magical about being  
in a chocolate forest in the remote  
mountains of Costa Rica.**

It is a sacred place where trees drip with tangled Spanish moss and a thick dew waters the earth early each morning. It is a happy place where barefoot children chase puppies through the warm mud—laughing and getting unceremoniously dirty—while their mothers gather together in the palapa-roofed community kitchen to prepare for a day of assembling tamales and roasting open-fired coconut bread. It is a place where humans and nature meet in a dance that celebrates the rhythm of life and is toasted with a cup of steaming hot chocolate that is passed from one generation to the next. Tradition is preserved. Families are fed. The day is filled with sweet and simple joys.

I found myself intrigued by the happy productivity. I spent some time in the kitchen with the women and learned how to make the coconut bread. I followed several men down a path through the cacao trees where they showed me the ripening pods hanging heavy from the tree trunks.

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I even got to meet the village medicine man. He was dressed in jeans and a white t-shirt and wore an elaborate necklace of crocodile teeth, semi-precious stones, and cacao seeds. I asked him about medicinal plants in the area and he was quick to explain that, of all the rain forest pharmaceuticals, cacao was the most potent. He told me that his people drank 5-6 cups of raw hot-chocolate every day and, because not only was it considered the key to long life, but it was also used to unlock euphoric states, release negative emotions, and connect to pure heart energy, they reverently called it, “The Mother of us all.”

**Everywhere I looked, the village people were happily going about their day. Nothing seemed to trouble them. They were working hard, but also enjoying themselves immensely.**

Now, keep in mind that the Bribri people have very little in the way of personal possessions. By modern standards, they are very poor. No furniture decorates the single-room houses save a few hammocks and an occasional low wooden bench made from trees harvested in the surrounding rain forest. But despite the lack of comfy couches and colorful pillows, the simple indigenous homes have a beauty all their own. I admired how everything was swept clean and all the doors and windows were flung open allowing the fresh air to blow through. There seemed to be very little (if any) private spaces and the ebb and flow of human activity spilled easily from one building to the next.

It was an existence so very different from mine.

And I am sure, very different from yours too.

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

I stayed until sometime in the middle of the afternoon, enjoying the energy of the place and its happy people. I asked questions and chatted with the villagers because I wanted to become more acquainted with what life must be like for them on a daily basis. Surely, there must be more to life in the village than what I could see. But, where I looked for secrets, I found none.

Life was straight forward and uncomplicated. The Bribri enjoyed their days cooking and laughing and harvesting and gathering. They woke with the sun. They walked without shoes and felt the damp earth beneath their feet. They worked together to roast coconut bread and tend the cacao trees. They knew how to connect to the pure heart energy that runs through us all. And though, by modern standards they were very poor, I found them to be truly happy and content living on the far side of a swinging bridge in the middle of the rain forest.



## WHAT IF YOU'RE WRONG?

HAPPY. POOR.

These words have an interesting relationship. We have a tendency to equate happiness with goals fulfilled. I am happy because I finally got that new car I was dreaming of. I am happy because I got my dream job, my dream house, my dream vacation. And yet our pursuit of happiness is just that. A pursuit. A chasing. And even when we do get the dream job and the dream house and the dream vacation, we are still not happy. We feel good for a brief moment because we get a nice little release of dopamine in our brain and, when it wears off, we go looking for another goal to achieve.

There is nothing wrong with achieving goals. The problem is that we are never content. We long for something, but we are not quite sure what. We feel something is missing, and so we dream up another goal to pursue thinking that if we reach THAT goal, surely, we will finally be happy.

But it doesn't work. So, we go from one job to another, one house to another, one vacation to another, never finding that elusive thing we feel we are missing. And we are not happy.

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

So, what about those words? Happy & Poor.

Though the Bribri are very poor, they are definitely happy. I bet I know what you are thinking. You are thinking one of two things (or maybe both). You are thinking that because the Bribri live deep in the rain forest, they have not been exposed to materialism and so they simply don't know any better. Or, you are thinking that because they are poor, the Bribri had no choice but to learn how to be happy with nothing.

What if you are wrong?

The Bribri people in the village on the far side of the bridge understand materialism very well. The government of Costa Rica bought them all the building materials they needed to make fancy new concrete homes. But the elders of the village decided they wanted nothing to do with modernization. They told the government, "Thank you for your consideration, but we don't want your building materials."

The government responded by saying, "Well, we already paid for everything, so we are going to deliver everything to you. You can do whatever you want with it." And they delivered stacks of rebar and glass windows and metal doors and bags and bags of concrete across the swinging bridge.

**And then something very interesting happened.**

The building materials sat right there where the government dropped them, right at the end of the far side of the bridge at the foot of the small hill going up into the village. They sat there for a long time while the people of the village discussed what to do with the enormous pile of stuff. The elders did not like the idea of building concrete homes, but some of the younger people wanted to "embrace progress."

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Eventually the elders agreed that anyone who wanted to build himself a concrete home could do so at the bottom of the hill. So, several of the younger families built new concrete houses and moved to the bottom of the hill.

The results were stunning.

Now, when you enter the little village, you will find a ghetto at the bottom of the hill. Several concrete homes sit in disrepair. Plastic toys are strewn about the grass. Snotty nosed kids cry for their parents. Black mold covers the walls and porches. Broken and torn couches that were once comfy and had colorful pillows are tossed in the backyards. Couples argue. Candy wrappers and plastic bottles litter the ground. And up at the top of the hill sits the pristine village with buildings constructed of bamboo and palm thatch, everything swept clean, kids laughing, moms in the central kitchen cooking meals for the entire village and dads working together to tend the cacao grove and maintain everything.

It is as if there are two completely different towns.

# HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

## SOMETHING'S MISSING

SO, WHAT HAPPENED?

Well, the younger people became caught in the trap of wanting “stuff.” It started with building a new house and moved to buying things to fill the house. Think of the path they must have taken for all that to happen:

First, a young couple used building materials given to them by the government to build a new concrete house. When the house was built, they looked inside and decided they should have all the things that go inside a modern home. But, they didn't have any money to buy those things. So, they agreed the mom would stay home and take care of the kids and the dad would cross the swinging bridge, go into town, and get a job so they could have money to buy things. Obviously, it did not end well.

It is easy to see that the pursuit of stuff did not bring this family happiness. But there is something else subtle and important at work here. And this something is the key that you are looking for. It is the thing that is missing in your life. It is the thing that you cannot seem to find in your pursuit of happiness.

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## TOO MANY QUESTIONS

LET'S DO A LITTLE BIT OF REASONING. Sometimes when I want to understand something, I ask a question.

So, let's ask: Does accumulating more stuff lead to happiness?

Even though you may subconsciously be trying to acquire more things to make yourself happy, you consciously know that more stuff does not lead to more happiness or you would not be reading this book. However, my guess is that you ARE still trapped here, looking for something to fill the void. A new house, a new car, a cool vacation. It's hard NOT to do that when you live in a society that accepts the idea that "he who dies with the most toys wins."

I can imagine your frustration. Chances are, you KNOW the pursuit of things is not working for you, and you have been trying to move away from it. But, you don't have a *soul*-ution that is working for you, so you keep getting sucked back into the rat-race because the rats are putting pressure on you to conform and you don't know what else to do.

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Maybe you have even tried downsizing—going through your stuff and giving half of it away—pulling years' worth of things you thought you needed out of the dungeon you call your basement—or trying to sort through your closets that are so full you can get lost inside them and end up in another dimension.

It's good to get rid of stuff and the process makes you feel a bit better. But it isn't really giving you more than a momentary bit of peace of mind.

So, let's ask another question. Since the elders at the top of the hill had very little stuff but seemed very happy, let's ask: Does having *less* stuff lead to more happiness?

It is an interesting question.

There are some people who have decided that the pursuit of stuff is a bad thing. They have gone on kind of a reverse ego trip. They stand up tall, throw their shoulders back and declare, "I am not attached to things. I don't need any stuff to make me happy." They preach that a simple life is better, and they put pressure on the people around them to downsize. Funny, how we put so much pressure on each other, isn't it? Rats put pressure on other rats to be more-ratty.

**And, self-proclaimed non-rats put  
pressure on each other to be more  
non-ratty.**

We tend toward a herd mentality, don't we? We find comfort in belonging to a tribe. These people who proclaim they are not attached to things send out a vibe that feels full of judgement and attempts to make you feel like living in poverty is somehow more noble. They preach that if you let go of your need to satisfy yourself with stuff and simplify your life, THEN you will find happiness.



## Laura Labrie

While it is true that appreciating what you have is a good thing and pursuing stuff just for the sake of stuff leads to nothing but more stuff, there is nothing noble about being poor. I have lived with the poor. I have gone without electricity and running water for an EXTENDED period of time. Thinking that you are a better person because you wash your clothes by hand and haul water from a stream is ridiculous. While there actually ARE physical benefits to doing both things, there is nothing noble about really being poor.

Poverty itself does NOT bring you happiness and it can be devastating when people are forced to live in unhealthy conditions that breed hunger and disease. Yes, you can downsize and create a simpler life and it may help you clear your head. But, I'm sure you would agree that having basic things you need to make your life more comfortable—hot water, a bed, a refrigerator—is not a bad thing. Trust me, people who really live in poverty have none of these things. Making a CHOICE to give up a bunch of stuff is not remotely like actually being poor.

At this point your thoughts may have brought you around to the place where you are thinking, “Well, happiness is not really about stuff at all. Happiness is about what is inside of you.”

What if that is not entirely correct either? (Sorry to do this to you, but I am trying to get you to really think. OK, not sorry, because the thought process is an important one and I genuinely WANT you to find your happy!)

So, what does “*happiness is about what's inside you*” mean anyway? Does it mean that happiness is in no way connected to what is outside you? In other words, you can only be happy if you know how to be happy regardless of your circumstances? Are you nodding your head, yes?

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The only way to be happy regardless of your circumstances is to become completely disconnected from your circumstances. If you want to be happy regardless of your circumstances, you will have to become unattached. And I don't mean unattached from just your stuff. You will need to let go of everything. It will be very difficult because after you let go of attachment to your nice house, your nice car, and your nice job, you will have to let go of all the people you love. You will need to let go of your children and your family and your friends. You will have to let go of all the activities you enjoy too. And you will have to let go of your health. You will need to empty your life of attachment to anything at all and agree that you would be completely happy owning nothing, homeless, completely alone, unable to do anything you enjoy, and sick.

I don't think you really want that.

Ugg.

So, if happiness is not about having things (houses, jobs, vacations, people, health, entertainment) and it is not about *not having* things, and it is not *about becoming completely unattached* from everything, then what on earth is it about?

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## AN ANSWER

LET'S GO BACK to the Bribri for a minute.

Sometimes the answers to our questions are so close to us that we can't believe we missed them. Sometimes finding what we are looking for isn't about going looking anywhere at all. It is just about changing our perspective.

What happened when the young people in the village decided to use the government's gift and build concrete homes?

They moved down the hill.

# HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

## ISOLATION

THEY MOVED DOWN THE HILL AND they went inside.

They went inside, and they closed the door.

The mothers cooked in their own kitchens and the children sat on comfy couches and played with colorful plastic toys. The fathers no longer helped tend the chocolate forest. Instead, they went into town and got jobs at grocery stores. They worked for twelve hours a day, six days a week, because even though the building materials were free, now that they had modern houses they wanted to give their families nice modern lives.

So, they left.

They left their wives and children each morning before the sun came up and they came home after dark. They earned money hauling boxes and stacking shelves so they could buy gas stoves so their wives could cook in their own modern kitchens.

Alone.

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They earned money and bought their children nice new shoes and indoor toys—like dolls and Legos—so their children could play inside and keep their new shoes clean like nice modern children.

Do you see where this is going? Can you sense the separation? Can you feel the isolation?

The father is no longer tending the fruit-laden cacao trees. He is not breathing fresh air and watching brilliant blue butterflies flit through the forest and listening to howler monkeys announce the rising of the sun. Instead, he is stuck in the back of a poorly lit grocery store throwing out boxes of outdated, molding macaroni and cheese and washing slimy chicken goop off the bacteria-laden shelves of a deli no one in their right mind would want to buy meat from. (I know, I've been in that store!)

The children are no longer running through the wet grass, calling to their friends and laughing uproariously while chasing a pile of puppies through the warm mud. Instead they are sitting on a couch in a cement-walled living room, dressed in clean clothes and new shoes and breathing stale air and arguing with their siblings over who gets to play with a small pile of Legos and a plastic baby doll.

The mother is no longer husking corn in the big central kitchen while chatting with aunts and cousins about the best way to make salsa and laughing over bedroom stories whispered behind cupped hands. Instead, she is struggling to figure out how to use a new can opener and wondering when her husband will come home.

Can you feel the loss of connection?

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I'm sure you can identify with why the arguing started. He came home late, tired, stinking of rotten meat, and wanting nothing more than a cool shower and a hot cup of soup. She had been home all day trying to ignore a feeling of uselessness and trying to appreciate her fancy concrete home and new couch. Despite the fact that she had all day and not much to do, she could not seem to get her young children to stop fighting long enough to give her the peace of mind she needed to figure out how to use her new stove and make that soup.

She never would have guessed that having free time would lead to a feeling of insignificance. He never would have thought that earning money to provide nice things for his family would mean creating an environment perfect for breeding depression.

**The trouble didn't come from a lack of money, nor did it come from having it.  
It came from a loss of connection.**

When they moved down the hill and closed the door. She lost her connection to her family and friends. He lost his connection to his community, to the sacred, and to nature. She lost the earthy smell of the corn husks and the aroma of smoke from the open fire. He lost the powerful feeling of strength that came from climbing steep hillsides and the adrenaline rush that came from watching for snakes while using his machete to cut away the underbrush.

And what about the children? They lost the sensation of warm mud between their toes, the explosion of fresh air in their lungs, and the exhilarating rush of unbridled laughter.

What have we done?

# HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE



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## THE HAPPY LIVING LIST & THE SECRETS OF CONNECTION

IN OUR PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS, we have lost our connection. Our awareness of the air in our lungs and the blood pumping through our bodies has become faint and far away. We almost never feel the heat of the sun and the cool of the wet grass. We are missing our precious and deep connections with each other and we struggle to remember the comforting and reassuring feeling of being surrounded by the pure love energy that is in us all and holds everything together.

We are isolated. More isolated than we know. The change has been subtle and come over such a long time that we have hardly noticed it.

Over several generations we have stopped growing our own food and replaced it with pre-packaged food full of things we can't pronounce. We have stopped meeting our neighbors while walking to the market and instead we drive with our windows rolled up and our air-conditioning on inside the car. We have stopped playing outside and come inside to play computer games and watch TV.

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Even when we are outside, we have stopped looking at the beautiful scenery around us. Instead we look down, almost completely unaware of our surroundings, while we scroll through the feed on our cell phones. We have even stopped talking to people. We are uncomfortable having conversations or we simply don't want to be bothered. We message our friends and family and almost never hear the voices of those we love.

Do you see just how isolated we have become? It's the isolation that causes fear and anxiety and depression and anger and a myriad of other feelings we don't enjoy. We have become disconnected and the way back to happiness is through re-connecting. That's easy to say and pretty easy to understand on a general level. But how do you put the idea of "connecting" into practice? What does that look like?

While I was in Costa Rica and other remote places in Middle America, I paid very close attention to the way the happy "poor" people live. I made a list of specific things they do every day. Stuff like: spend a lot of time outside, cook over an open fire, wash your clothes by hand, nap during the day, wear a red thread on your wrist. I called it **The Happy Living List**. Then, as I studied it, I realized that almost *every single thing on the list in some way fostered connection*—from using all-natural building materials, to eating fruit in-season, to having parties for every occasion possible, to using candles when the sun goes down.

It was a revelation to me. No WONDER  
these people were so happy. They lived  
a life completely steeped in  
CONNECTION!

## Laura Labrie

Eating fruit in-season fosters your connection with the earth and the seasons and the rain and the sun. Having parties practically every other day allows plenty of time to connect with your friends and family. Wearing a red thread on your wrist is a symbol of good luck and protection and makes you constantly aware of your connection to the supernatural. And napping...? Who doesn't love to take a nap? It allows you to honor your body's natural rhythms and reinforces your connection to your authentic self.

Since the list was long, I decided to categorize it into four basic areas: **Connection to Your Authentic Self**, **Connection to Others**, **Connection to Nature**, and **Connection to the Supernatural**. Breaking it into categories made it easier for me to get a grasp on what was really going on. The more I looked at my list, the more I realized how very simple and yet very important the information was.

Being connected in these four areas is just so BASIC to human existence. Somehow, in our pursuit of materialism, we have LOST the depth of those basic connections. But, spending time in remote places where people were still living the old ways gave me a first-hand glimpse of what life can be—of what we, as a world society, can re-gain. And it is all so simple and practical!

### **The answer was hidden in plain sight!**

Poor little Asa, who ran around without shoes, was not so poor after all. He was **CONNECTING TO THE EARTH!** And poor darling William who only worked two weeks out of four was doing it **INTENTIONALLY!** Two weeks gave him all the money he needed, and he spent the rest of the time connecting to his **FRIENDS and FAMILY!**

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Wow, did my perspective change! Suddenly, everything became clear. I assumed that people living in the islands and jungles of Middle America would, if given a choice, want to live like me.

How wrong I was.

In fact, at one point, I met a “homeless” guy on a beautiful, remote beach in Bocas del Toro, Panama. I offered to pay for a night at a hotel for him. I thought he would be thrilled to take a hot shower and sleep in a comfy bed. BUT, HE TURNED ME DOWN!

“Why would I want to sleep in a hotel?” he asked as he swept his hand across the vista, directing my attention to the pristine white sand, lush palms, and turquoise waters, “I get to sleep here!”

I was a bit blown away by his answer and, while the view WAS amazing, I assumed he was using it as an excuse to justify pride and not accept my offer. Now, I know he was being completely honest. I found out later that he had enough money to rent a little apartment, but he CHOSE to live on the beach. In retrospect, who wouldn’t?!

So, I decided to do an experiment on myself. I completely changed my view of the way the “poor” people were living. I looked at each thing on my list as a CHOICE people were making. I saw each action as wonderful and positive, intentional and prized, consciously embraced. And, I started making space in my life for as many things on my list as possible.

Quickly, my life began to change.

## LAURA LABRIE

I intentionally took cold showers, and I washed my clothes by hand. I slept when I was tired and, little by little, I got used to happily allowing myself extra time to hang out on the beach or sit and talk to an old friend.

I felt more relaxed and happier, less stressed, less anxious. I started sleeping better and having more energy. I got a lot more accomplished when I was working, and I found more balance in my life by spending a lot more time just having fun!

In addition to that, things I had been wanting for a very long time started coming to me. I made amazing new friends. I had super-cool new opportunities. And, I got to DO the fun things I had been wanting to do forever.

The difference was (and still is) amazing.

I stopped pushing myself to get things done when I wasn't feeling well. I put my phone down and got off my computer. And I started seeing VALUE where I used to see poverty.

A beautiful, well-educated Costa Rican woman once said to me (very sweetly) “We think you Americans are very selfish.” I know, I was shocked too. But she was being so nice, so I leaned in a bit and really listened. “We really don't understand why you work more hours than you have to just to buy another TV when you already have one. Why don't you spend that time with your friends and family?”

Talk about a totally different value system. This lovely woman held time with friends and family in high esteem over material goods. She really could not understand why anyone would live any other way.

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Now, when I drive down a road with tiny houses, un-kept lawns, and restaurants sporting plastic tables and chairs, I REMEMBER what that lady said, and I look beyond the material things. When I do that, I see kids playing, people laughing, dogs sleeping peacefully, gorgeous overgrown flowering vines and coconut laden palm trees, couples holding hands and kissing in the street, old men sitting in the shade while slapping a table loudly and shouting excitedly as they play dominos, people peddling bicycles and carrying groceries and puppies in their old-fashioned bicycle baskets, street vendors selling thick cold-chocolate drinks and fresh sliced mangoes, and I think to myself....what a wonderful world.



As you go through the next chapters in this book, take time to let each of the things on the list really soak in. Remember, I have broken the list down into four different sections, or “points of connection” to make it easier to digest everything. You will find you have a natural tendency to be well connected on some of the four points and not-so-well-connected on others. Pay attention to where you are already well connected and then focus on making better connections in the areas that you need it the most.

**Now here is the super-cool  
part that was so unexpected.**

The more I got into applying the Happy Living List to my life and seeing real and lasting change, the more I wondered WHY the activities were so effective.

So, I started doing a little more digging and I came up with some really interesting information.

## Laura Labrie

There are **CONCRETE, SCIENTIFIC REASONS** that many of the things on the list have a positive impact on you.

And here I thought it was all just some woo-woo thing—live like happy people in the jungle and you will be happy. It felt unquantifiable, un-pin-down-able. It felt like the roots of everything must be esoteric. And while I was ready and willing to embrace these things because I was already seeing results in my own life, boy was I excited when I discovered there were some very solid and easy to understand reasons that my happy application was working so well.

For example:

- Singing releases oxytocin—the love hormone—in your brain!
- Chili peppers are full of capsaicin—a natural pain killer!
- Your body absorbs tons of mood-boosting vitamin D when you sit outside relaxing in the shade!
- Raw chocolate (revered by the Bribri) contains anandamide—a compound that is similar to THC!
- Keeping the lights low in the evening (or using candles) encourages your brain to release melatonin—the hormone that is vital to helping you get a good night's sleep!

Living in a connected way is easy and has wonderful, pin-downable rewards. And believe it or not, you don't have to live in the jungle to do it. You can incorporate almost **ALL** the living practices of the happy people into your life no matter where you live.

So, let's put this puzzle together so that you can see lots of **SPECIFIC WAYS** you can make connections and **WHY** those connections are so effective. Onward and upward!

# HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE



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# PART TWO

the four points  
of connection

# HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

# THE FIRST POINT OF CONNECTION

## your authentic self

*What does it mean to be connected to your authentic self? It means that you get to be you! It means you pay attention to how your body feels and you honour it. It means you are in touch with your emotions and you are OK with them. It means you take time to do the things YOU love to do. It means you feed the flower that is your passions and talents. You water it so that it will grow, and you enjoy its blossoming.*

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authentic self  
HAPPY LIVING LIST

avoid toxins  
live simply  
eat whole foods  
take cold showers  
wear bright colors  
get moderate exercise  
only work when necessary  
live in the present  
enjoy what you are doing  
live within your financial means  
focus on the positive  
minimize troubles  
sing a lot  
laugh a lot  
listen to loud music  
wear clean clothes  
acknowledge pain and death  
fast regularly  
don't strive for perfection  
be proud of yourself

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

HERE IS THE FIRST PART of **The Happy Living List**. It is focused on the first point of connection. The things you will find here are things I saw people doing every day all through Middle America. They are simple things in some ways... but may take a bit of re-training your brain in other ways. Never-the-less, they are all things you can add to your day to help you better connect to YOUR AUTHENTIC SELF.

### **avoid toxins**

The more remote people live, the fewer made-made toxins they have in their environment. People in the out-islands in Bocas del Toro are practically toxin free!

### **live simply**

Especially the older generations of indigenous people have little need for things they don't use day to day. If you don't have a lot of stuff, you don't have a lot of stuff to worry about!

### **eat whole foods**

Very little comes from a box in the jungles of Costa Rica or Panama. People eat fresh fruits and vegetables, fish, chicken, eggs, rice, and beans. You should TASTE a mango picked fresh off the tree!

### **wear bright colors**

Bright color is everywhere. The buildings are painted in orange and pink, homes are decorated in what seems to make no color sense at all—all green and blue and turquoise and orange and purple. And the color-riot applies to clothing as well. People dress in colors that make them happy!

### **get moderate exercise**

A life of farming, fishing, hunting, and gathering means days filled with walking, hiking, swimming, paddling, stretching, climbing, and all sorts of other moderate, healthy exercise.

## only work when necessary

There is no guilt trip for taking time to relax. And, a job that provides food for a couple weeks into the future is considered a blessing because then you can quit working for a couple of weeks and spend time with friends and family.

## live in the present

Living in the moment is something these people are experts at. When I ask questions about the future, I typically get puzzled looks or comments like, “Oh, why worry about that? It isn’t even here yet!”

## live within your means

Almost no one takes a loan! Ever! Every car is paid for in cash. Every house is paid for in cash. And that means, if you lose your job, you still have a home. This eliminates a huge source of stress.

## focus on the positive

Don’t worry, be happy. This is not just a nice idea in a song. It’s a lifestyle. I am learning to do this, but it can be a struggle. The indigenous people who live in the mountains and islands and jungles of Middle America do it naturally and would not know any other way to live.

## give less attention to troubles

This may seem similar to “stay positive” but it’s a bit different because it means actually “down-sizing” troubles. If you make a mole-hill out of a mountain, everything gets brighter.

## sing

I love that you can always hear people singing or whistling. And I don’t mean quietly! There is a wonderful reason to sing more often. It releases the *love hormone in your brain!*

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

### **Laugh**

People laugh easily and often. I know a family that keeps a rescued parrot as a pet. And you know what that parrot does? It LAUGHS! Parrots are super smart and learn to mimic the things they hear often. I guess you know what this feathered guy hears all day long =)

### **listen to loud music**

In some places they call this “sharing music” and they DO share. Walk down any street and you will hear music coming from everywhere.

### **wear clean clothes**

I have never seen such white shirts as those of the school children who have to walk through the rain forest to get to class. I don't know how they do it, but the women who live in the most remote places have laundry magic! The great thing about this is that they are enjoying what they have and taking good care of it.

### **acknowledge pain and death**

Pain and death or not hidden or brushed away. They are faced head on, dealt with among the support of family and friends, and then let go.

### **fast regularly**

Often people will go a day without food and just drink water and wild, herbal tea. They believe this cleans the blood and revitalizes the body.

### **don't strive for perfection**

One older Mexican man gave me some great advice, “Don't try to make everything perfect, because perfect never comes. Just do everything good enough.” When I asked him what good enough was, he smiled at me a bit mischievously and replied, “Good enough is good enough!”



# authentic-self ACTIVITIES

Now you get to spend some time putting ideas into action. Choose an activity and take some time to connect to your authentic self. You can do one each day for the next week since there are seven “connect with your authentic self” activities. You owe it to yourself to connect with YOU!

## 1. love color!

I LOVE THE EXPANSIVE WAY color is used all through Middle America. My favorite purse, which I bought in Puerto Vallarta, is purple and green and yellow and blue and burgundy and white and pink and gold. I would normally never put all those colors together, but the riot makes me happy like a party on a festive day with blue skies, good food, and lots of laughter.

Color is part of life. We are surrounded by it in so many hues and variations, but we often don't take time to really notice how it makes us feel. A LOT of research has been done into how color effects our feelings (yellow is a happy color), attitudes (pink encourages compassion), energy level (orange is energetic), even ability to concentrate (green and blue help you chill out and focus) and strength of appetite (red makes you hungry). So, it only makes sense that the colors you wear would have a big effect on your mood.

### activity:

Here is a fun activity you can do to bring color into your life in an intentional way.

**FIRST:** Go look in your closet. Take note of which colors are most and least represented there.

**SECOND:** Identify the item you wear most and think about how you feel when you wear it.

**THIRD:** Now identify your favorite item in your closet and think about how you feel when you wear that.

**NEXT:** Get on line and look up the meanings of the main colors of the clothing you chose. You can use a question to get good internet results, like “What does blue mean?”

Now here is where it gets fun...

**ASK YOURSELF,** “Do I resonate with the meanings of the colors I looked up?” In other words, do you feel like they are accurate in describing how you feel when you wear those colors? If so, do you **LIKE** the way you feel? Would you like to feel differently? Maybe you wear a lot of grey to work and you are finding that grey is a color that can be a bit sad, unmotivating, and even make you seem invisible to both yourself and other people. Grey is considered a nice color for work by our society. Hmmmmm. I wonder why? Do you really want to feel “grey”?

**NOW TAKE A LOOK** at the meanings of some of the colors you don’t normally wear. Is there a color you might like to **ADD** to your wardrobe, or one you already have in there but would like to pull out a bit more often?

## Laura Labrie

Now here is something very interesting. ASK YOURSELF this question. “What colors make me feel uncomfortable?” Looking at what makes you uncomfortable can be a great way to pinpoint where growth can happen. Maybe you don’t like to wear pink. Pink is a color of compassion and feelings of love. Is it possible that you don’t like to wear it because you don’t feel a lot of self-love?

MAKE A LIST of the colors you are least comfortable wearing and look up the meanings. Some colors are just not part of your personality. I am not suggesting you go out and wear bright yellow all the time if you are a very earthy, quite person. All I am suggesting is that there may be a feeling or attribute you would like to encourage growth in. Maybe you wear a lot of blue and, while it is a very secure and relaxing color, you are feeling like a bit of rosy red might add some spark you are looking for. Try adding a red scarf or purse or even some red jewelry to your day and take note of how you feel.

This is fun to experiment with. You can even wear something different every day for a week and see how people around you react and how you feel. You may find some surprising changes and want to make some colorful adjustments to your life!

## 2. sing!

DID YOU KNOW THAT SINGING reduces cortisol, a stress hormone? It also releases a hormone called oxytocin, otherwise known as the “love hormone”. Oxytocin reduces anxiety and stress and is found at higher concentrations in people who are falling in love!

In villages all through Middle America and Mexico, I often see people humming, whistling a tune, or singing out loud, and I mean OUT LOUD! Sometimes I walk down a street and see an old man walking to the market and singing his heart out or a teenager working on an old, beat-up car, and tapping his feet while singing away without a care in the world.

There are two things at work here.

One: Most Middle American and Mexican people really enjoy music. They listen to it often.

And Two: They are not afraid to sing at the top of their lungs.

I remember this old guy who called himself Rambo and loved Bob Marley songs. His favorite song was Buffalo Soldier. Almost every time I saw him, before he disappeared he would break into song. His wrinkled old black face would beam as he pulled tourists aside and encouraged them to sing along with him.

One day, I was staying at a hotel and I was up on the second floor, standing out on the porch overlooking the main street in town. Below me I could see Rambo strutting down the street, laughing and chatting as usual. Just for fun I sung out—as loud as I could so I would be heard down below—just the two simple words, “Buffalo soldier!”

## Laura Labrie

And that was that. Off went Rambo singing at the top of his lungs, happy and dancing and getting as many people on the street involved as he could! Just imagine all the oxytocin being released on the street that day!

Unfortunately, in places like the US and Canada, we are not encouraged to sing out-loud whenever we feel like it. We are trained to believe it might bother someone. We are also trained to be a bit paranoid about how we might sound. In fact, many people have phobias about singing. They may love to sing but are overcome with feelings of insecurity, believing that if they open their mouths they will instantly be judged on the quality of their voice.

How sad....All that potential oxytocin going to waste!

### activity:

Think of some of your favorite songs. Try to remember the words.

Then, when you feel relaxed and happy, SAY THIS OUT LOUD:

*Singing is a gift that releases happy hormones in my body.  
I am so thankful I have been given this easy way to  
increase my happiness.  
I choose to open this gift and use it often.  
Thank you for the gift of song.*

NOW SING!

### 3. be proud of yourself!

ONE OF THE COOLEST things I noticed about people living in small villages in the islands and jungles of Middle America, is that they are not hung up on feeling horrible about themselves. They really are happy people. They don't worry about what kind of car they have or how big their houses are. They never ask you what kind of job you have. They really don't care!

But that doesn't mean they don't care about a job well done. They also have no trouble telling you how long they worked building a canoe, how many children they have (a big source of pride), or how to make the best tortillas on the planet.

These people have a wonderful ability to be genuinely proud of something in the same way a child is proud of a drawing or learning to tie their shoes. It's the kind of pride that releases that wonderful dopamine rush that makes you feel so happy. There is nothing self-conscious about it. There is no self-judgment or self-abuse. Their pride is free of self-consciousness. It is pure and simple.

Dopamine is the compound released in your brain that makes you feel fantastic. You feel happy, motivated, clear, and energized. Drugs that make you feel good, like cocaine, pump tons of it into your brain and that's why you feel high. One of the main reasons for drug and alcohol abuse is that we are not getting enough of this important compound on a daily basis. And the reason we are not getting enough of it is because we are not doing enough things that release it. Pretty simple, right?

Well, one of the best ways to get little spurts of dopamine is to accomplish goals. Psychologists will tell you to set small goals that you can accomplish during the day. Make a list and then check them off. Each time you do this, you get a shot of dopamine.

## Laura Labrie

The problem—and that is with a capital P—is that we often back up our accomplishment with some nasty self-talk. And when nasty self-talk is attached to an accomplishment, there is little, if any, release of dopamine.

Truth be told, we can be pretty messed up.

1. We are afraid of someone seeing us working on our goal...being in process...because they might see something that is less than perfect.
2. We make excuses of why our achievements are not good enough.
3. And, horrifyingly, we tell ourselves it is not OK to be happy we meet a goal because this is somehow prideful.

All these things steal our dopamine rush. ☹️

Just imagine how good feels to bumble over a new language and have the locals tell you that you are doing great when all you know how to do is ask for two beers and then ask where the bathroom is! What a blessing to have people see your failings as part of your growth and cheer you on.

I am working really hard on my Spanish and I keep saying, “I’m sorry, my Spanish is not very good.” (in Spanish of course) But the locals keep saying, (also in Spanish) “NO! Your Spanish is great! I can understand everything you say!”

Now, I can accept that compliment and a nice little shot of dopamine along with it.....or not.

Why do we have such a problem with accepting compliments?

The answer is that we are self-conscious.

Break that down...self-conscious simply means conscious of self. It means you are aware of self, focused on self.

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

The people I spend so much time with just get really excited about what they love to do. And they are genuinely happy to tell you all about it. In short, they are not thinking about self at all. They are more “out” of themselves, less self-conscious, which is a really great thing!

Imagine how great it would feel to play guitar for people who ignore every mistake you make and applaud with gusto when you finish because they know you tried hard and they are really happy for you! You would be beaming. You would be happy, glowing. RECEIVING the applause AND the dopamine.

It's OK to feel good. It's OK to be proud. In fact, it's necessary.

### **activity:**

The directions are easy. Write down everything you can think of that you have done, learned, discovered, accomplished, practiced and improved, or even just started and are still a newbie at but are excited about. You can do it for the past year. Or if you like, you can go back further, just depending on what feels good to you. (I suggest you DO set a time frame on this one. You will see why as you keep reading the directions.) There is ONE rule. If you think of something, you HAVE TO write it down. No skipping anything.

Your tendency may be to overlook things you think are not good enough. That is not allowed. If you think of it, you must write it down.

So, here is how this will probably go:



## Laura Labrie

At first, you will have a hard time thinking of anything at all. You might come up with one or two things. But as you start to write, other things will come to mind. You are not allowed to stop until you just cannot think of anything else. You can stop when you sit there for five full minutes and can think of NOTHING more.

You can write things like: I started taking a watercolor class. I got a new job. I got a raise. I read 5 books. I spent more time playing with my grandchildren. I painted my living room. I started being kinder to myself. I forgave my uncle. I cut back on smoking. I started eating healthier. I traveled to a foreign country. I started a garden. (The list is endless) Include anything that made you push some boundaries or anything that you feel proud of.

When you are finished, go back to the beginning and read your list out loud. Reading it out loud is important because then your ears hear it and it feels more real.

When you look back over a whole year, it is AMAZING how much you have grown and accomplished. We normally just live day-to-day and each day rolls into the next and we are unaware of how much has really happened.

If you want, you can post your list on social media somewhere and encourage other people to do this exercise. It is so empowering, and it is a wonderful thing to help your friends and loved ones see how wonderful THEY are.

Oh, and then you can put THAT on your list...I encouraged my friends. 😊

## 4. enjoy what you're doing

IMAGINE HOW WONDERFUL IT WOULD BE to be fifty pounds heavier than modern standards suggest and HAPPILY climb into a bathing suit because you are not thinking about how you look, you are imagining how much fun you are going to have swimming!

Or, think about how good it would feel to go out on the golf course and have a great time playing even though you usually score 135 in 9 holes. (OK, that might be a BIT of an exaggeration.) Imagine not being worried about how well you will play, but just being excited about enjoying the fresh air, having fun with friends, and sharing a beer and a golf cart!

The point here is that it IS possible to be focused on the fun you are having and NOT on how you look or how good your performance is.

I see people on the beach here in beautiful Caribbean Mexico every day wearing things that, years ago, I would not have been caught dead in. Old women really do wear two-piece swimsuits and very round men wear little tiny speedos. (Sometimes their bellies are so big, you are not sure if they are wearing anything at all!)

Years ago, I would have worn a wrap over my suit and then walked—self-consciously—all the way to the water WEARING that wrap, taken it off the SECOND before I got in the water, and put it on again the second I got out.

How awful!

As you can imagine, I did not fully enjoy swimming. Which is too bad, because swimming is one of my favorite things to do.

It's sad to not enjoy something because:

- A. You are too self-conscious about your appearance
- B. You are too self-conscious about your performance.

Did you notice the words I used in both sentences?

*You are too self-conscious about your...*

You could rephrase that as: *You are too "conscious of self."*

It's a little odd, don't you think, to be talking about being connected to your authentic self and then talk about NOT being conscious of self? That's because, when you are focused on yourself—conscious of self—you limit the things you love to do. You STOP actually BEING yourself.

Let's talk about why this happens.

When you are focused on self, you make lots of judgments. Sometimes these are judgments about how you feel about yourself, but usually these judgements really trace back to what others think of you.

Think about it: If you are afraid to play guitar in front of someone because you don't think you are very good, you are actually afraid of what OTHERS think.

If you were afraid of what YOU think, you would not play the guitar at all.

When you are afraid of other people's opinions, *fear* is running through your body. I heard someone once say, "It's like you are running from a tiger."

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

Years ago, when people were constantly living in survival mode, they had a huge need for a hormone called cortisol. It gave them a burst of adrenaline to run faster than that pursuing tiger. The trouble is, now, you are not afraid of a tiger, you are afraid of someone's opinion. Unfortunately, your body doesn't know the difference. It just knows there is fear, so it happily sends you everything you need to deal with it...and that everything is cortisol.

Well cortisol and serotonin are not friends. Serotonin makes you feel happy and relaxed. But, happy and relaxed are not how you want to feel when you are being chased by a tiger! So, cortisol momentarily *suppresses* the release of serotonin until all tiger danger has passed.

Sadly, if you are always afraid of people's opinions, you will always be running from that tiger and never happily enjoying what you love to do.

### activity:

1. Today you get to make a plan: Think of something you love to do, but often don't do because you are afraid of other people's opinions.
2. Now, make an actual appointment with yourself to do this thing. Something you can follow through on.
3. When you go do it, decide that, to the best of your ability, you will focus on **WHAT YOU ARE DOING**. Get lost in it. Be totally involved in the action.
4. When you finish, make a plan to do it again, and again, and again. The more you get lost in what you love to do, the more your brain will remember to focus on having fun and not on what people think. You will re-wire your brain. Eventually you really **WILL** get lost in the moment and start having some serious **FUN!**

## 5. wear clean clothes

ON ISAL SOLARTE, AN OUT-ISLAND in Panama's Caribbean, there is nothing but a few gringo houses and a small indigenous village. There are no stores or businesses...or schools. So, every morning, kids walk through the rain forest in school uniforms and bare feet. They carry their shiny black shoes because the ground is muddy. They walk down to the dock where they rinse off their feet, slip into their shoes, and wait patiently for the school-boat to whisk them away to the main-island school.

It is the coolest thing to see them all appearing from the jungle in bright white shirts and navy-blue pants or skirts. The foliage is thick and wet. The paths are narrow and slick with red-orange clay. The hills are steep and slippery. The air is hot and muggy. The contrast of well-dressed school children appearing from between the vine-laden mango and bread fruit trees almost makes you want to laugh.

In truth, I have never seen such white shirts in all my life.

They fairly glow in the sun.

I have seen women washing clothes in small streams on Isla Solarte. They use river rocks to scrub stains away. Imagine them carrying their clothing to the stream, getting into the water (where small crocodiles called *caimans* live) and washing everything by hand. Imagine them carrying wet clothes back up the slick, muddy hill to their grass-roofed homes and waiting for the sun to come out to hang those clothes out to dry. Now imagine how important it must be to them to have clean clothes.

Why?

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

It is a simple answer, really. They just want to feel good about what they are wearing. Don't you? Having very little does not mean living in squalor. It doesn't mean you can't take care of what you have. These families were proud that their children could go to school and they made sure that the kids looked great.

Happiness inspires us to take care of the things we have. We feel motivated and thankful. Depression leaves us feeling unmotivated and un-caring. I am sure you have had days where cheerfulness motivates you to open all the windows, turn up the music and turn your house into a sweet-smelling, sparkling oasis. Or, to weed the garden, mow the lawn, and trim all the hedges until your yard looks like something from a Country Living magazine.

I am sure you have also had days where you don't feel like doing anything.

Well, thankfully, on those days when you are feeling a bit lackluster, if you can convince yourself to get up and do something to take care of your things, soon YOU will feel better. Happiness can motivate us to clean and shine everything. But it works the other way around too. Cleaning and shining everything can foster happiness. And it's really cool when you put that cleaning-shining energy into the clothing you wear. Because that clothing goes on your body and, when you leave the house, you take them with you.

Like those sparkling white shirts on those adorable children in the rain forest.

### activity:

1. Go through your wardrobe and pick out those favourite clothing items that are stained. You know, the ones you love, but no longer wear because they need a TLC washing.
2. Wash them.
3. Wear them.

## 6. enjoy the process

WE HAVE A TENDANCY to spend tons of time wondering about the future and very little time actually *living* in the present. I used to notice, in my conversations with the locals in Middle America, If I expressed some thought about the future—not necessarily anything negative, but a hope or an inspired plan—it would invariably be met with a waving of the hand as if to brush away a worry, a smile, and a, “Don’t worry about that. Just enjoy today. Today is good.”

At first, I was a little disappointed because it seemed no one was interested in my wonderful plans. I wanted to inspire excitement about the future, but it just didn’t seem to be there. People were too busy living in today.

The change in my understanding happened slowly. At first, I felt alone in my excitement about tomorrow and a bit sad. But as time went on and I participated more in the locals’ daily lives, I saw people really enjoying the present. They were still happy and excited, but they weren’t happily planning for the future. They were happily living in the moment.

Then something else happened. I began to see that in my happily planning for the future, I was also doing a lot of worrying, asking a lot of “what ifs,” and feeling a bit frustrated that I could not make the future happen faster. I noticed that happily planning for the future was causing me pain. I am not saying you should not plan for the future. What I am saying is this...

Enjoy the process.

Let’s use the beginning of a new relationship as a good example.

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

You meet someone new and butterflies are flying everywhere. You lay in bed at night and dream about the future. You wonder what it may bring. And then you begin to worry. The “what ifs” get you. Fear of the unknown begins to creep in.

WHAT IF instead of spending all your time thinking about what might be, you could just enjoy that giddy, I-have-no-idea-where-this-is-going feeling? Could you embrace the excitement of not knowing? Kind of like watching an exciting movie and sitting on the edge of your seat when the music starts to build, and you know SOMETHING is going to happen, but you don’t know what. You PAY good money to have that feeling at a movie theater. WHAT IF you could embrace that feeling for a few moments in your life? How exhilarating!

Now, let’s say you meet this new-found love interest for dinner. You are walking down the street just outside the restaurant and wondering if they are already inside, if you will have to wait by yourself, if they will still like you, if you will still like them. You try to shake off the feelings because they are outside of your normal daily feelings and you don’t quite know what to do with them. You wish the relationship was a bit further along in development, so you felt more relaxed about meeting for dinner.

WHAT IF you just let go and embraced the rush? It’s a bit like being on a rollercoaster just as it’s plunging downward at nearly the speed of sound and your stomach is in your throat and you almost wish you could push it back down, but you are really thrilled with the stomach-in-your-throat feeling, you just don’t quite know what to DO with it.

Enjoy the process.

Let go of the need to control. Put your hands in the air and scream and FEEL.



## LAURA LABRIE

One more example: This one is about having that FEELING that something is going to change in your life, but not knowing what or how or when or where. Maybe you are sure you are going to move. You can feel it in your gut. But you have no idea what the details might be. You might not even know WHY you think you are going to move.

Enjoy the process.

Can you enjoy the feeling of having a premonition? Of knowing SOMETHING is going to happen, but not knowing exactly what. Can you enjoy looking for signs? That whole process of discovering a trail of bread crumbs left for you to follow. Can you enjoy getting those first real, solid pieces of the puzzle that is unfolding before you? What an exciting journey to be on!

Letting go of knowing life's destinations might be a bit uncomfortable, but it is thrilling. It takes your thoughts out of the future and pulls them back into the present where you are right now. And it takes the pressure off you to have to come up with all the answers and allows you the freedom to enjoy this moment. Relax. The future will be here eventually, but in the meantime, embrace today!

### **activity:**

Close your eyes and let your thoughts drift toward what you feel is in your future that you wish you could bring into today. Notice how you feel. See if you can identify any emotions that come up.

Now bring yourself back to where you are right now, to where you are *in the process* of this thing you are hoping for. Where are you in the process today? How does that feel? Can you let go of the need to move the process forward and enjoy exactly where you are today?

## 7. take a cold shower

OK, I KNOW THIS DOESN'T SOUND LIKE a fun exercise. But, hear me out before you turn the page. I am not suggesting you freeze yourself. And remember, I really do have your best interest at heart!

I didn't have hot water for three years.

It's the truth.

All through Middle America, most homes are without the luxury of hot water. People take cold showers, and, interestingly, when asked if they would prefer a hot shower, the answer is often, "No."

Now, keep in mind that, for the most part, taking a cold shower in Middle America is not the same thing as taking an icy shower in Canada in the winter. The water is cool, and the air is warm. So, instead of calling today's activity, *Take a Cold Shower*, we could call it *Take a Cool Shower*.

So why on earth would you want to take a cool shower?

Many cultures suggest that a cool shower in the morning is a great way to wake yourself up, get your mind clear, and get your energy flowing.

Well, science can back that up. Did you know (this is awesome), taking a cool shower with a water temperature of 14C°/57F° can increase dopamine substantially—up to 250%!

I have many friends who swear taking a chilly shower in the morning boosts their mood and productivity all day, even more than drinking coffee. And I agree!

## LAURA LABRIE

So, feel this (I would say picture this, but this is more of a feeling type description):

*You are groggy, a bit cranky, and seriously still in zombie-mode because you have not had your morning coffee. You turn on the shower and let the water warm up. Then you step in, eyes still half closed, and let the steamy water ease your transition out of those warm snuggly covers you were under just a few minutes ago.*

*You run your fingers through your hair and let the water fall over your drowsy body. Then slowly you begin to turn the temperature down. Incrementally, you go from hot to warm and allow your personal temperature to adjust to the temperature of the water until the two feel almost the same.*

*Then you go from warm to cool, letting the decrease in temperature increase your awareness. You start to feel the fog lifting. Sleep finally pulls back its covers and your mind begins to clear. Then you turn the temperature all the way down if you are in a warm climate, and almost all the way down if you are in a cold one (no reason to shock yourself with water that is just above freezing!) You let the cool water run down your back, its chilly fingers pleasantly awakening your energy and encouraging your energy to move and breathe within you. You begin to feel invigorated, awake, aware, happy, motivated, and ready to start your day.*

### activity:

Take a cool shower 😊

# HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

# THE SECOND POINT OF CONNECTION

## other people

*What does it mean to be connected to other people?*

*It means being yourself, your real self. It means allowing others to be themselves and appreciating them just the way they are. It means participating in the treasure that we have in each other, the connection that always exists—but sometimes we forget—and holding that treasure near and dear to your heart.*

# HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

LAURA LABRIE

others

# HAPPY LIVING LIST

make time to party  
stay close to family  
enjoy the elderly  
have lots of good friends  
learn another language  
dance!  
be surrounded by children  
play!  
talk to people  
show your emotions  
read people's energy  
forgive quickly  
be loyal  
live in a small community  
work together  
celebrate festivals, holidays, & parades

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

CONNECTING TO OTHER PEOPLE is vitally important to our well-being. We humans were not meant to be alone. We are born into families. We need each other. We need to share our energy, our time, and our laughter. To deepen your connection to others, you can take the advice of many happy people and incorporate a few of the following things into your life:

### **make time to party**

Did you know that the Spanish language has more words in it for *party* than English does? That MUST be significant! I know a place in Panama where almost the ENTIRE MONTH of November is a holiday. So, break out the cervesa!

### **stay close to family**

Family is everything in Middle America. Many people live with extended family. Having family around is a constant comfort and help and considered a tremendous blessing.

### **Enjoy the elderly**

Often, Grandma is the person who holds everything together. She is well cared for in her retirement, as is Grandpa. Older people are loved and respected and considered a treasure.

### **have good friends**

“Your friends are your family,” I have heard this many time. Friends are easy to make, and relationships can last a lifetime.

### **Learn another language**

Almost everyone I have met while living in Middle America speaks at LEAST two languages. Many speak a dialect and Spanish or Spanish and English and MANY people speak three or more languages including French, Portuguese, German, Italian and more!

### **dance!**

Children learn to dance almost before they can walk. Music is everywhere and there is always time to dance. It’s a wonderful way to express yourself, connect with friends and family, and have fun!



## **be surrounded by children**

Children are always part of the scene. Mom may bring the young ones to work with her. Older ones help at home as soon as they get out of school. They learn and play and have plenty of time for fun, but you can be assured, they are always a part of life in this tropical paradise!

## **play**

Playing isn't just for kids. It's an important part of daily life. It might be a game of soccer or an afternoon of dominoes but playing is definitely engaged in often and with much gusto!

## **talk to the people**

One thing you won't see a lot in Middle America is people on their cell phone while having dinner or hanging out or on an adventure. It's considered rude to be on your phone when there are real live people standing right in front of you. Social media is a wonderful tool, but it can also separate us if we allow it to get in the way of the moment.

## **let your emotions show**

Emotions appear easily and are acknowledged. It's a healthy, happy way of being true to yourself and to others and helps build strong, open relationships.

## **read people's energy**

Understanding where are coming from, deeply connecting with them, means listening to more than just what they are saying. It means listening to body language and reading energy.

## **forgive quickly**

Just as easily as the pot boils over, the emotional heat is extinguished and any unforgiveness is put to rest. Anger last for only a moment and, because it is dealt with quickly, forgiveness comes just as easily.

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

### **be loyal**

Loyal always. Even if you don't particularly like your brother at the moment, he is still your brother and the old saying, "blood is thicker than water," holds true. If a stranger speaks ill of your brother, you will defend him, even if you secretly think the stranger is correct!

### **live in a small community**

Small communities even exist in large cities. One of the great things about urban design in Middle America is the town square. Every so often parks jump up and all around them are all the shops and other things you might need. It is possible to walk to get all your basic supplies and no one really needs a car. This is wonderful because it supports a feeling of community, even in a large city! And a small community fosters relationship, familiar faces, and lots of smiling!

### **work together**

*Many hands make light work.* It's an old saying that still holds true and is adhered to in most of Middle America. Brothers help brothers, neighbors help friends. People work together, and then they play together. And that way, all the really "important" stuff gets done.

### **celebrate festivals, holidays & parades**

The entire town turns out to dress up and watch fireworks, and drink and eat and listen to music and dance and laugh and watch the parade. Life is an on-going festival. Holidays abound. Reasons to celebrate give families reasons to be together. THIS is life in the Caribbean America I love!

# others

# ACTIVITIES

There are seven activities here to help you better CONNECT WITH OTHER PEOPLE. Take time to do some or all of them and see how a little reflection and a bit of a change in perspective can make all the difference in the world.

## 1. say what you think

IT'S NATURAL TO WANT to feel good, to go through your day with an easy, relaxed happiness. So, because we want this chilled-out feeling, sometimes we allow our need to keep the peace to keep us from saying what we really think or feel.

You bite your tongue because you don't want to cause an argument. And then you hold those feelings inside. But, they don't go away, no matter how much you hope ignoring them will make them eventually disappear. The next time you come into contact with that person or situation, it's a little more difficult, and then even more difficult after that, until you finally either avoid that person or situation all together, or you explode.

I am not going to ask you to go address those things in person right now. So, you can relax. What I am going to ask you to do is to consider a thought process that can help break a pattern.

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

I had a problem with endings. I would rent an apartment for a while and everything was wonderful until I decided it was time to move. Then things went downhill quickly. Suddenly, I no longer wanted to talk to the home owner (I moved a lot, lived out of a suitcase for years and stuff). It seemed like there were little problems that I was too uncomfortable to face, so I would let things go until finally, I would leave under stressful circumstances.

I had no idea where the pattern came from. Never-the-less, it existed. Trust me, moving a lot is not easy, and moving under stressful conditions is the pits. So, I consciously decided I would change that awful-endings pattern.

I recently moved to Mexico and had to rent a car for much longer than I originally planned. At first, the guy at the rental company was super nice. When I wanted to extend my rental, he asked me to write up a fresh contract and exchange the car. No problem. But when I needed to extend it again, he seemed a bit concerned. (I guess people don't usually rent a car for three months!) I told him I understood it was unusual and I could rent from a different company, but he wanted the income, so he wrote up a fresh contract again and gave me another fresh rental car.

My transportation issue didn't resolve itself as fast as I wished, and I found myself realizing I would have to go to him AGAIN, which I seriously did not want to do. I felt I had worn out my welcome (which is just silly because he was making money and I was taking good care of the cars).

My old, "things are going to end badly" feelings started rushing in with full force. I started envisioning a long trail of progressively angry emails and a smattering of unanswered phone calls—all over a silly rental car.

## Laura Labrie

Then I stopped. I told myself it didn't need to be that way. I decided I would not go down that road, and I instead would do everything in my power to not avoid confrontation, AND to make things as pleasant as possible. I decided I DID want to change companies because I thought my renting for so long was making the car guy uncomfortable. But, I set a clear intention to end our business relationship with flowers instead of a hurricane.

So, I took the car in a few days early. When I arrived, the guy was glad to see me. I pulled happy smiles from somewhere near my toes, even though I was still feeling nervous.

I addressed how odd it must have seemed for someone to rent for so long and I told him how much I love Mexico and how I needed the car because I was making a transition to make Mexico my home. He beamed. We laughed. I paid him. He called one of his workers and instructed him to use the car I returned to give me a personal and free ride half-an-hour away to my new home.

WOW! What a difference! I was happy and felt so blessed! Addressing the thing I was trying to avoid had great results. And what I learned was that it was just my own fear that could have turned an easy situation into an unpleasant one.

### activity:

- Draw two pictures, one of a sun and the other of clouds.
- On the cloud picture, write words you associate with unresolved conflict—uncomfortable, nervous, angry.
- On the sun picture write words you associate with resolved conflict—relief, happy, satisfied.
- Burn the cloud picture. Then fold up the sun picture and put it in your wallet.
- Every time you reach into your wallet and see that folded paper, you will be reminded of how good you can feel by facing conflict head instead of avoiding it =)

## 2. call a friend

WE LIVE IN A WORLD that has become very disconnected. Despite cell phones, Wi-Fi, FB, Instagram, Messenger, texting, and all the fancy new ways we use to communicate, we are communicating on a much shallower level than we are meant to. Ideally, we should be in physical contact with the people we love every day. We should be sharing lunches, chatting, laughing, and hanging out on the doorstep, watching the world go by.

The people of Middle America put family and friends at the center of everything they do. They make time to spend together. Their work schedules allow for long lunches that they can spend with friends. They go out to eat and sit for hours chatting and enjoying each other's company. In fact, it is considered very rude for a waiter to bring you the check if you have not specifically asked for it. Time spent socializing is at the core of community and it is almost revered as a basic human right.

Research done on exploring happiness and longevity shows that living in close knit communities with extended family and lots of friends lengthens life spans and increases overall satisfaction in daily living. You may have many friends, but how often do you see them? Messaging is not the same. You end up feeling like you are living in some strange silent world where all you hear is the sound of typing instead of the sound of the human voice. This leads to feeling isolated, anxious, and depressed.

Now, I understand that maybe you have a busy schedule with work and kids. Getting together with friends and family can feel easier said than done. Well, the next best thing is to pick up the phone. You really do need to hear the sound of someone's voice. You need the vibrations of laughter and tears and excitement and compassion to reach your ears so you can take it in and allow the healing power of simple, tangible human connection to take place.

## LAURA LABRIE

I saw a funny cartoon the other day. It was an adorable dog laying on the floor, paws in the air, looking completely panicked with its eyes so wide open they were almost falling out of its head.

The caption said, “This is me when I send someone an instant message..... and they call me back!”

I hate to say this, but for some of you, today’s challenge might make you feel like that panicked puppy. If that is you, really take some time to ask yourself *why* it makes you feel uncomfortable.

### **activity:**

Pick up the phone and call someone. =)

### 3. enjoy the elderly

GRANDMA SITS IN A ROCKING CHAIR out on the covered porch. It's a tiny house with colorful curtains and new pink paint. She is a sweet old lady and wears a flowered dress. When you pass by, she smiles and waves and, if you come close, she asks you how you are doing. Her patois English is both lilting and earthy and makes you want to listen to everything she says.

I stop to talk to her and she tells me about how she walks up and down the steep hill every day for a bit of exercise. She tells me how important the fresh air is and how if you make sure to get a lot of air in your lungs, you will never get sick.

Her nephew comes around the corner from the back of the house. He asks if you need anything, and when he is satisfied all is well, he asks Grandma if she needs anything. She waves her hand at him in gentle dismissal. Her attention is focused on you. She is enjoying the conversation. You can tell from the way he looks at her that he would give her anything she asked for. "Weel, I'm goin' over ta work on da house," he says. "Ya let me know if ya need any t'ing," and he picks up a piece of undulated zinc roofing and heads across the sidewalk. Both houses belong to the family. He disappears around the corner and soon I hear the muffled sounds of work drifting through all that nice fresh air.

The benefits of spending time with the elderly are numerous and, for the most part, obvious. They have wonderful stories. You gain wisdom. You learn patience. You learn to worry less and slow down more. But mentioning all those benefits makes me feel like you need to be talked into spending more time with your grandparents—like it is something you don't really want to do, and I am trying to convince you otherwise. And that is not the way of things at all. Do you need to be talked into spending time with your spouse or your new baby? Do you need to be talked into spending time with your best friend?



## Laura Labrie

If we dig deep, we find this is where the problem really lies. Many people in fast-paced cultures are not interested in spending time with the elderly, even their own grandparents. I think this is a by-product of a lifetime of disconnection. Don't beat yourself up over it but do try to look at it openly.

When I was little, I spent hours with my grandfather. We played baseball in the yard. He taught me the names of all the flowers and how to grow green beans. I remember the smell of waffles and strawberries when he got up early to make me breakfast. I remember asking him a thousand questions about the National Geographic articles I was trying to understand. And I remember how he was so patient and always had time for me.

The point is, I LOVE my grandfather and I miss him. When he was quite elderly and had trouble remembering what he wanted to say, I sat on the edge of my seat waiting expectedly for each word as if it held some secret treasure for me. Spending time with someone you love is never a burden. You never have to be convinced of why it's good for you.

The product of minor disconnection now, is greater disconnection in the future. We grow farther apart. We get so caught up in our jobs and our houses and our kids, that we drift away from the people we love. We grow, not only physically, but also emotionally farther away from them. Take time today to ask yourself these questions.

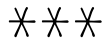
### activity:

- How much time do you spend with your older relatives?
- When you are with them, what do you do?
- How do you feel when you are with them?
- Is there anything you would like to change?

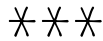
## 4. sit & visit

### THREE CHILLIN' OUT SCENES...

UNDER A BIG SHADE TREE sits an old plastic table surrounded by four old men sitting in plastic chairs. They are laughing and shouting and occasionally you hear the great SLAP! of dominos hitting the table.....



“I HATE TO MOLEST YOU,” says Noilie, as she knocks on the fence, a half dozen limes in her hand. “But I’ve all these extra limones and I wan’ know if you wan’ ‘em.” I cheerfully open the gate and tell Noilie, “No problem!” I am happy to take her limes. She comes in and sits at the little table on my shaded porch and I pour her a cup of hot black coffee even though it’s ninety degrees and the humidity is nearing one hundred percent.....



FISHING BOAT CAPTAINS SIT ON A LONG bench in the shade of the military marine building by the old dock. They have four cans of beer between the six of them and a greasy paper lunch-bag filled with a few pieces of fried chicken. No problem, they share equally in the heat. Their boats bob in the turquoise waters, waiting for tourists to appear. Bright orange life jackets sit piled on a bicycle—the kind with the seat for two on the front. A scrappy white dog sits at the edge of the scene waiting for the odd chicken bone to be thrown his way.....

## Laura Labrie

This is life in the tropics. Laughter tickles your ears everywhere you go. People are happily engaged in enjoying people. Despite the intense heat of the sun, they choose to remain outside. “Fresh air is good fo’ yo’ soul,” declares a grandmother. No one retreats to the air conditioning. It is considered unhealthy. And anyway, you wouldn’t be able to play a game of bottle caps with your friends if you were huddled up inside.

The importance of connected community living cannot be stressed enough. No one sits home alone. And there is no pressure to stay busy either. Busy is drawing pictures with colored chalk or practicing your dance moves. Busy is sharing a piece of chicken and a beer. Busy is playing dominos or delivering an abundance of limes to your neighbor.

Hanging out with friends is much more important than you think. Adults with strong social support have a reduced risk of many significant health problems, including: depression, high blood pressure, and unhealthy weight gain. Studies have even found that older adults with a rich social life are likely to live longer than their peers with fewer connections.

I heard a very sad story about older, widowed women in Japan. Apparently, they are so desperate for connection, that some are breaking the law intentionally, so they can get thrown in jail in order that they might not be alone.

We need each other. It is vital to our health. A study was done in the UK that tracked 480,000 adults over a period of seven years. The study showed that loneliness was associated with a 49% higher risk of first-time heart attack and a 36% higher risk of first-time stroke. Wow!

### **activity:**

Take time today to sit & visit.

## 5. Listen beyond Language

I WALKED INTO MY FAVORITE BEACH BAR and my favorite bar tender (I'm not telling who in case all my other favorite bartenders read this!) asked, "What's wrong?"

I thought I had a smile on my face. I thought I was being pleasant and cheerful. I did actually feel pretty good. In fact, I had almost forgotten the stress from earlier in the day.

MFB (My Favorite Bartender) was listening to me, but not to the words I was speaking. He was listening to cues that were giving him information about me that I had almost forgotten.

We do this every day. We read body language, tone of voice, eye movements, and energy signals that give us a lot of information about the people we are talking to. This activity is about learning how to listen beyond language. It's about learning to really connect deeply with people by listening to what is NOT being said.

### **activity:**

The next time you are having a face to face conversation with someone, try this:

Your objective is to read non-verbal information that will let you know what is really going on with the person you are talking to.

1. Pay attention to body language. Is it open or closed? Are their arms down and relaxed, or crossed and protecting their body?
2. What emotions are they expressing? Are they excited, angry, depressed, anxious, happy?
3. Look right into their eyes. What do you see there? Can you identify feelings like joy or sadness? Do they maintain eye contact or look away?

## LAURA LABRIE

As you focus on these things, paying close attention while the person is talking, you will instinctively pick up information about how they are motivated, how they are feeling, what is BEHIND what they are saying. You could go take classes on reading body language, which could be cool, but you already have so much knowledge in this area. You just don't usually quiet your own thoughts enough to pay attention and use it.

This is something you can be more aware of every time you chat with someone. The more you practice, the deeper your connection with people will become.

## 6. forgive often

TWO GUYS ARE ON A FISHING BOAT. They are trying to hook the front of the boat to a mooring ball and things are not going well. The waves are bigger than normal, and the younger guy thinks he knows the best way to take care of the problem. The older guy, feeling quite irritated, gets out of his way and the younger guy jumps up to the bow with a brand new long-handled pole with a hook on the end—and promptly drops it in the water. The older guy moves quickly, yells at the younger guy, reaches out and grabs the mooring ball line by hand, and hooks the boat securely. The expensive new pole is not visible in silty bottom below.

Younger Guy (we'll just call him that) jumps into the shallow water off the back of the boat with another line which is looped on one end around a cleat on the back of the boat. He slogs through the surf and ties the other end to a palm tree on shore. The boat is secure, but the pole is missing and will not be easy to recover. Younger Guy climbs back into the boat and Older Guy gives him a quick and stern talking to, then he hands Younger Guy a beer. The two sit and happily share a drink, laughing and talking about the fish they are going to cook for dinner.

One wonderful thing about the local people here is that they forgive quickly and easily. Often, I see people arguing and then a moment later going right back to what they are doing as if the argument never happened. They are totally free of whatever they were fighting over.

In all honesty, it is hard to imagine that Older Guy and Younger Guy really just dropped all negative feelings and enjoyed a beer together. But that is the way of it. They enjoyed a beer and afterwards they made a plan, worked together, and recovered the lost pole. No hard feelings. What a wonderful way to go through life.

Because we have been trained to avoid conflict, we hide the feelings we consider negative. Not being open about how we feel means stuffing our feelings. And that means eventual explosions. It is so much easier to forgive quickly when there is very little to forgive. If we stay current with expressing ourselves, then we can easily move on. Imagine if Older Guy had not addressed how he felt. Imagine if he held in his frustration every time Younger Guy did something that bothered him. A month or two or three might go by and there would be a huge pile of upsetting things hiding under the surface. When the explosion finally came, it would probably take a long time for the forgiveness to come too.

The lesson here is to address things right away, forgive quickly, and then enjoy the people that you love. This is really the only way we can have healthy long-term relationships.

## **activity:**

Make a commitment to yourself today to not let things go.

The best way to get into the habit of forgiving, is to start small. So, today just decide that if something bothers you, it's OK to say something right then and there. Address it, and then move on. But BEFORE you say anything, decide that after you express yourself, you are going to hand out an olive branch in a simple way, just like handing out a beer. Decide that you will do something concrete to show you really have let the problem go and you want to enjoy your time together. This gives people the chance to relax and see that everything really is OK. Remember, they are used to explosions and long term unforgiveness. They might need a bit of evidence that everything is OK. You really can help them by handing them a beer! (or a taco, tacos are good too)

## 7. time to party!

We have a tendency to think of taking time out to party with friends as a luxury. Not, by telling ourselves that we get to hang out and have fun after we get all our work done, that it is a reward or something we get to do only in our free time, we are actually de-valuing our friendships. We are putting the important people in our lives in second place behind our work.

Making time to hang out and have fun is vital to living. In fact, not spending enough time doing this is one of the biggest reasons we are depressed, anxious, and stressed.

I have a friend who runs a business in Mexico. He had a client come from the US. The client wanted to have a meeting at 2pm, but my friend took his lunch at that time. Lunch breaks here in Mexico often last for 2 hours. At first, the client was upset because he was used to taking a ½ hour at noon. But my friend explained that lunch is time for family and friends. They get together, share a meal, laugh and maybe have a drink, take a short nap, and then go back to work feeling happy and refreshed. The work day is extended to compensate for the break in the middle of the day and people often don't get off work until 7pm.

Yes, you need to pay your bills, but consciously prioritizing the people in your life will make it easier to make time for them, and THAT will make you a happier person!

### **activity:**

Take a look at your weekly schedule and take note of how much time you spend just having fun with friends. Remember, it is not a luxury, it is a necessity to your (and their) well-being. Where can you fit in more time to just hang out and have fun? Make a plan and then carry through on it!



LAURA LABRIE

# THE THIRD POINT OF CONNECTION

## nature

*What does it mean to be connected to nature? It means to heighten your awareness of the birds and the sky, to feel the deep pull of the earth beneath your feet, to allow the rain to cleanse you more than skin deep, and to turn your face toward the sun and allow its energy to revive you. It means to breathe deeply and allow the air that brings you life to fill your lungs and remind you that all that you are is connected to all that is.*

# HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

nature  
HAPPY LIVING LIST

spend time in wild nature  
use all-natural building materials  
live off the land  
use herbal natural medicine  
go barefoot  
live in an electronic/ electric free zone  
drink the rain  
sleep in a hammock  
go to bed early and get up early  
stay outside a lot  
grow stuff you can eat  
eat happy foods  
use all-natural things on your body  
enjoy having a pet or six  
sit outside at night by a fire  
dry your clothes on a line  
clean with all-natural products (coconut oil, lime, vinegar)  
drink raw cacao  
drink wild flower tea  
relax in the shade  
get your work done early in the day

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

MANY WONDERFUL PRACTICES I observed while spending time in remote areas of beautiful Middle America are included here. This list is filled with things YOU can add to your daily life. String up a hammock, take off your shoes, spend some time sitting in the shade. Your CONNECTION TO THE NATURAL WORLD will relieve stress and promote a sense of well-being that is difficult to find any place else.

### **spend time in wild nature**

Out in the forest, away from the hubbub of the world, with trees towering over you and the earth beneath your feet, your awareness comes alive and your connection with the planet deepens. Stress melts away and a feeling of invigorating well-being takes you on her gentle journey.

### **use all-natural building materials**

Homes built from bamboo, palm leaves, woven grass, and local tropical hard woods and beautiful testaments to the beauty and provision of nature. And surrounding yourself with these beauties lends a feeling of calm and depth to your home.

### **live off the land**

From fishing and hunting to gardening and gathering, for thousands of years people knew how to live off the land and many indigenous people are still doing so today.

### **use herbal natural medicine**

A Brirbi woman once told me she had never put a pill in her body. Everything she needed was easy to come by in the rainforest.

### **go barefoot**

When you walk barefoot, you allow your body to come into contact with the earth. This allows for the great exchange of discharging static electricity built up in your body and absorbing negative ions from the earth.

## **live in an electronic/electric free zone**

Next time the power goes out, notice how calm everything feels. There is a marked difference when you spend time in a zone free of electricity and electronics. Just imagine all those waves going through the air that you can't see. Now imagine them gone. Many places in the jungles and rainforests have limited electrical availability. Some villages only have power from 6pm to midnight. That means the rest of the day, the air is wave-free!

## **drink the rain**

People in the rainforest, especially those who live where little ground water is available, drink the rain. In remote islands of Middle America's Caribbean, the, rain water is pure and abundant!

## **sleep in a hammock**

Imagine swinging gently all cuddled up and sleeping with fresh air on your skin and your loved ones next to you. Families sleep together in family sized hammocks stung up away from critters and in a place that allows for natural air flow all around your body. It's a lovely way to fall asleep.

## **go to bed early and get up early**

In touch with the rhythms of the sun and moon, the people of the jungles and mountains of Middle America often go to bed early and get up with the dawn. Allowing your body's interior clock to align itself with the clock of the planet means a better night's sleep and more energy and good feelings during the day.

## **stay outside**

Fresh air and sunshine is considered the cure for almost everything. People spend most of the day outside, even when they have a nice home to spend time in. It fosters community connection, makes sure you get all that lovey vitamin D and puts you in constant contact with the beautiful natural world around you.

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

### **grow stuff you can eat**

While gardens may not be well manicured, they are brimming with good stuff to eat like yucca, tomatoes, peppers, bananas, papaya, sugar cane, zucchini, limes, oranges, and practically anything else you can imagine.

### **eat happy foods**

Foods like raw cacao, fresh tomatoes, and bananas are all full of nice little chemicals that help spread things like serotonin and dopamine around, thus spreading the joy to every part of your brain!

### **use all-natural things on your body**

Banana vinegar, coconut oil, and lime can be used for everything from washing and conditioning your hair to brushing your teeth. The people who live in remote areas of Middle America are well aware that all-natural body care is not only cheaper than things purchased in the store, but much better for your health and well-being.

### **have a pet**

Dogs are often a well-loved part of the family in many places in Middle America. They play with the children bring comfort to the elderly and provide security for the home. Many families have several. Why not? If one is good, two is better, right?

### **sit outside at night by a fire**

Fire light is a great way to allow your body to adjust to the coming night. It allows for the gentle release of melatonin, so you can get a good night's sleep. Plus, imagine the good feeling of sitting around the fire with family and friends, singing, sharing stories and the day and sharing an evening beverage.

### **dry your clothes on a line**

Bright whites and crisp colors, wind-blown on the clothes line, can be seen everywhere. People even hang out their underwear for the world to see. Fresh air and sunshine is always considered the best thing for clean, comfortable clothes and linens.

## **clean with coconut oil, lime & vinegar**

Inexpensive, readily available and all natural. These products are the usual go-to items for cleaning everything from laundry stains to bathroom floors.

## **drink raw cacao**

The Bribi in Costa Rica call raw chocolate, “The Mother of us all.” They drink 5-6 cups a day and are one of the longest-lived people groups on earth.

## **sit in the shade**

Sitting in the shade allows you to absorb all the vitamin D you need without risking the uncomfortable feeling of sun burn.

## **get your work done early in the day**

Up at five and working by six allows many indigenous people to take advantage of those morning hours when your mind is clear and your body is rested, and you get your best work done. It also means there is plenty of time for a siesta when the noon day sun heats up the day.

## **lay on the ground**

Stretching out fully on the ground, especially if you can put your feet up on a rock or a tree, restores your energy more completely than an hour long nap!

# HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE



# nature

# ACTIVITIES

From earthing, to eating chocolate, to finding yourself in a reverie watching a candle burn, the activities here are designed to get you back in touch with nature. Do one each day for the next week and then decide which ones you want to add, long-term, to your daily routine.

## 1. listen to the birds

IMAGINE LIVING WHERE YOUR WALLS are open to nature...where you wake up to the sounds of the jungle every morning...where you hear the parrots talking to each other as they leave their roosts and fly down to the beach...where the scarlet macaws circle above the palm trees announcing the return of the sun.

Imagine waking up slowly, your eyes are still closed and the breeze drifts in. You lay there drifting in and out of your dream all-the-while feeling the pull of daybreak as the birdsong crescendos from a single opening twitter to a rousing chorus of brilliant exultation.

Did you know that bird songs have been shown to improve mood, concentration, and even boost creativity? How cool is that! Studies show that listening to the birds can boost your mood for four hours after the birds quit their melodious celebration. So, take some time today to tune in to some twittering songs.

### activity:

For this exercise you will need your laptop or phone with a Wi-Fi connection or data.

Find a comfortable place to sit where you can set your phone or laptop nearby. Do a quick search for Relaxing Rainforest Bird Songs and pick a track you like. (YouTube works well for this). Turn up the sound and then allow your attention to focus in on what you hear. As you listen, allow a feeling of peace and joy to well up from the place just below your rib cage. As you become aware of thoughts that float in, let them go until you are not thinking at all but just listening to the twiddles and chirrups of nature's glory and feeling wonderful.

After doing this for 5-10 minutes, gently tell yourself that you are going to be aware of bird songs today. By making that association while you are still listening to the songs, you will subconsciously create a connection that will allow your attention to pick up on the sounds of birds singing all day.

Pull yourself out of your reverie, put your arms straight up over your head with your palms together and breathe in deeply. Hold your breath for a few seconds while stretching up toward the ceiling. Breathe out firmly and let your arms fall to your sides. Turn off the sound track and go about your day, being mindful of all the birds you hear during the day and into the evening.

Because you focused on feeling peaceful and joyful during this exercise, those same feelings will naturally want to come back to you every time you hear birds singing today!

## 2. chocolate bliss

THE BRIBRI PEOPLE in the mountains of Costa Rica cultivate sacred chocolate forests. They harvest golden-red cacao pods from lush trees guarded by warriors and crocodiles carved from stone. Then they ferment the raw beans until they are ready to grind into a stiff paste they use to brew a revered chocolate drink they enjoy throughout the day.

They are also one of the longest-lived people on earth.

The Bribri call cacao *The Mother of Us All*. And with good reason. This raw form of chocolate, known as *The Food of The Gods* or Theobroma (God-food) Cacao, is full of compounds that promote the release of things like serotonin, dopamine, and anandamide (called the “bliss molecule” and a close relative to THC) in your brain. Together these compounds create a feeling of everything-is-right-with-the-world. They alleviate stress and foster happiness, energy, and clarity of mind.

So, today’s ritual will be all about chocolate. I am sure you are already excited about this one!

### activity:

Today you get to brew the drink of the Bribri.

The original Bribri cacao drink is made with only raw cacao and water. I add a bit of salt and honey because it tastes awesome that way! If you want to be super authentic, follow the recipe below but don’t add the honey and salt. You will still need the coconut oil unless you buy unprocessed raw cacao beans and grind them yourself because when they turn the beans into cocoa powder (notice different spelling of the word cocoa... *cacao* is chocolate in its raw form) they remove most of all that luscious cocoa butter.

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

### Bribri Cacao Brew Recipe (with added sea salt and honey)

- Fill your favorite mug to the brim with water and then pour the water into a small sauce pan
- Add a heaping tablespoon of raw cacao powder, ½ teaspoon of salt (sea salt or Himalayan salt are best), a teaspoon of honey, and a ½ teaspoon of coconut oil. (The coconut oil is to replace the cocoa butter that is removed when they process the cacao into powder.)
- Heat until steaming, but not boiling. Boiling is too hot and will kill off much of the good stuff.
- Pour the hot cacao brew into your favorite mug and grab a spoon so you can stir it occasionally as the cocoa powder may not completely dissolve in the hot water.
- Now find a comfy place to relax and enjoy your bliss booster!

I highly recommend that you add cacao to your daily routine.

You can replace your coffee with it if you like or add a spoon of raw cacao powder to your coffee. Raw cacao will give you an energy boost, but it isn't from the caffeine in the chocolate. There is actually very little caffeine in cacao. The energy boost will be more gentle, last longer, and not give you that crashing feeling when it wears off. The Bribri people of Costa Rica drink 5-6 cups of cacao every day. Try drinking 2-3 cups a day and see how you feel. Then if you like, add more. Do it for at least a week and take note of your overall mood, clarity, and energy level. I think you will be amazed!

### 3. shady activities

DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU CAN get your daily requirement of vitamin D by sitting in the shade in the middle of the day and sipping a margarita? (OK, I admit, the margarita has nothing to do with the vitamin D.)

In a study conducted by University of Southern Queensland (USQ) Centre for Rural and Remote Area Health Research, Dr. David Turnbull found that getting your vitamin D early in the morning or late in the afternoon when the sun is low in the sky, will not give you the amount of vitamin D you really need. Ideally, you want to get that lovely sunshine between the hours of 10am and 3pm. But, there is no need to get all sweaty sitting in the sun. Enjoying the breeze and the coolness of the afternoon shade is a great way to get this much needed vitamin! And getting enough of this readily available vitamin is more important than you think.

Dr Turnbull said, “In the US alone, between 50,000 and 60,000 people die each year because of issues related to not getting enough sun exposure.” He went on to say that studies have indicated that vitamin D can help prevent cancer, multiple sclerosis, diabetes, bacterial infections, inflammatory bowel disease, elevated cholesterol, and rheumatoid arthritis.

But the benefits of getting enough vitamin D are not relegated just to physical health. Vitamin D-rich sunlight has been shown to increase available serotonin and elevate your mood, reduce feelings of stress and anxiety, and promote a sense of over-all well-being. It’s a powerful tool in the battle against depression and one you should take advantage of whenever possible.

No wonder so many people along Middle America’s Caribbean coast spend hours sitting and visiting in the shade!

## activity:

This assignment is fun and is sure to make you feel good.

Take some time today, at lunch if you can, and go find a nice shady spot to sit, chill-out for a bit, and soak in some vitamin D.

Here are a couple of things to remember:

FIRST: You cannot get any vitamin D through glass. So, sitting in your house in a sunny spot won't do the trick.

SECOND: I hate to tell you this, but sunscreen limits the absorption of vitamin D by up to %95! So, slathering on sunscreen is not going to allow you to absorb the vitamin D your body needs.

But, no worries. The plan isn't to sit in the sun today, anyway. It's to do something you probably thought was just a lazy luxury.

Funny...who would have thought relaxing in the shade could be so good for you?!

## 4. candle challenge

DO YOU LOVE WATCHING a candle flicker? It's mesmerizing, isn't it. The way it grows brighter and dimmer, all the while throwing shadows on the walls.

Candle light is warm and rich and is wonderful for relaxing, especially before bed.

This activity is about the natural rhythm of the earth and the moon and the sun. And it's about how you are connected to that rhythm.

There are hormones released in your pineal gland that help you wake up and fall asleep. You are probably familiar with serotonin and melatonin. Serotonin is famous for helping people feel happier and more positive and upbeat. But most people are not aware that serotonin is the hormone released in the brain to help us wake up. It's the alarm clock that goes off as the sun peeks above the horizon. This soft light is "seen" by your pineal gland—also known as your *third eye*. It "sees" that it's morning and it releases serotonin into your body to wake you up.

As the sun slips back beneath the horizon, the pineal gland, which actually has rods and cones similar to your regular eyes, sees that the light is slipping away and releases melatonin to signal your body that it is time to go to sleep.

If melatonin is not released properly, you can bet you are not going to get a good night's sleep.

Enter lightbulbs.

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

Turning on the lights as the sun goes down is a bit confusing to your third eye. The man-made light tricks your pineal gland into thinking it's still daytime when it might actually be ten o'clock at night. This is a problem, because then the gland is unaware that it's time to release the melatonin, so your body can get its goodnight message. The result is that you don't get tired. And not being tired makes it a tad bit difficult to fall asleep.

In the jungles and rain forests of Middle America, in villages way off the beaten path, there is little or no electricity. Families may sit around a fire in the evening if they wish to stay up after the sun goes down, but for the most part, when the sun goes to bed, the people go to bed too. Their internal clocks are in rhythm with the sun and the moon. And their pineal glands "see" when it's time to go to sleep. They get that lovely dose of melatonin and off to La-La Land they drift. And we all know, a happy night's sleep means a happier, more energetic day.

### **activity:**

This is not a ritual, but a challenge that might end up becoming part of your daily routine.

The challenge is to not turn on your lights as the sun goes down. Instead, when you feel the need for light, use a candle to help your pineal gland get the message that its time to go to sleep. (NOTE: lights on dimmer switches work well too)

Be aware of the way candle light makes you feel as you go about your evening. And know that your body itself will be very aware of the softening light. It will be working to alert all its parts that it is time for bed.

Sleep well,

laura



## 5. eat happy food

THE FRESH FOOD MARKETS ARE one of my favorite things about living in Middle America. I love poking around through piles of mangoes and avocados and sweet potatoes and chia and yucca and round, ripe limes and heads of purple cabbage and dried chilies and hibiscus flowers. I love the crushed spices that hang in little bags and the unmarked bottles of local honey and the oddly shaped blocks of creamy white cheese. And I love bringing home a bag filled with all the raw ingredients to make homemade spaghetti sauce or Yucatan pumpkin soup. It is easy to do, fun, and super nutritious.

There is very little that we do that is more important than the choices we make about what we eat. The compounds in food have a profound effect on, not just our health, but on how we feel. We know there is a deep connection between what we put in our bodies and what our daily life looks like, but still we make choices we know are not good for us.

I am not talking just about eating too much sugar or the wrong kind of fat. I am talking about the chemical make-up of food. **FIRST:** Processed food is full of toxins, some of which are banned substances in parts of the world. **SECOND:** Natural foods are filled with compounds that can enrich our lives by helping us feel more energetic and happier, helping us sleep better, even increase our spiritual experiences and intuition!

When I began to study the foods eaten in most of Middle America, I was amazed. So many of them are filled with things that make you feel great! So, I made a list of **HAPPY FOODS** that I am excited to share with you. So very cool to think that all this time the people here have been literally eating themselves happy! Now **YOU** can **EAT YOURSELF HAPPY** too!

### **activity:**

This is probably my favorite exercise in the whole book because I Do this myself all the time and I have noticed a BIG difference in the way I feel. ALL these foods are things people eat on a regular basis here in the tropical beaches and lush rain forests. Of course, types of food change some from one area to the next. This list encompasses food from Southern Mexico to the farthest reaches of Panama. ENJOY!

You might want to memorize this HAPPY FOOD LIST! (OK, you don't have to memorize it, but keep it handy).

Below, is a list of foods that are high in happifying compounds. Add as many of these foods to your daily routine as you can and I guarantee, you will start feeling happified in no time!

Included here you will find foods high in things like:

- L-Tyrosine: a building block for dopamine
- Anandamide: The bliss molecule! (found in raw cacao, so eat more chocolate)
- Vitamin D: a natural mood booster
- Vitamin B1: helps you relax and feel less stressed
- Vitamin C: can be as good as Prozac for depression!
- Magnesium: balances the stress hormone, cortisol
- Lycopene: bye-bye blues, baby
- Capsaicin: a natural pain killer
- Zinc: a natural anti-depressant
- And lots of other mood boosting compounds!

## THE HAPPY FOODS LIST

**Stay away from refined sugar...super, super important!**

Also, notice there are ZERO processed foods on this list.

Do the best you can to eat whole foods bought fresh.

Almonds, Avocados, Bananas (nature's magic chill-pill), Black beans, Broccoli, Cabbage, Cacao, Cactus, Cantaloupe, Cane sugar (raw), Carrots, Chamomile, Cervesa (oops! How did that get in there? Scratch that...) Cheese, Chia Seeds, Chicken, Chilies, Cilantro, Chayote, Coconut, Coconut oil, Coffee, Corn, Cucumbers, Cumin, Eggs, Garlic, Grapefruit, Grouper, Hibiscus flower tea (also called Jamaica), Honey, Kidney beans, Lentils, Limes, Mahi-mahi, Milk, Mint, Oatmeal, Onions, Oranges, Papaya, Peas, Peanuts, Peppers (hot ones contain a natural pain-killer!), Pineapple, Pork, Potatoes, Pumpkin seeds, Rice, Romain lettuce, Snapper, Shrimp, Spinach, Tamarind (detoxes your pineal gland which makes you happier, gives you a better night's sleep, and increases your spiritual vision!), Tomatoes (a tomato a day can raise your happiness quotient %52!), Tortillas (always corn), Tuna, Turmeric, Vanilla, Watermelon, Yucca, and Yogurt

## 6. earthing

ASA RUNS THROUGH THE DIRT, his laughter ringing out across the barrio as he chases his big sister in futility. His feet are bare. They are always bare, except when he wears his good shoes for school.

You may think this poor little boy needs shoes. And, truth be told, he may not have any shoes that fit him well. But, he prefers life with his toes in the sand. And there is a reason for it.

Nowadays, they call it *earthing* or *grounding*. However, Asa never calls it anything but comfortable.

So, is taking off your shoes and getting your toes in the sand just comfortable? Or is there more to it than that?

What is earthing/grounding?

I like the word grounding because I think it describes part of what happens very well. You know what static electricity is? It's what you feel when you walk across the carpet and then touch something and then get shocked, or when your hair flies up in the air uncontrollably, or when your pant legs stick to your socks. Static electricity is caused when the positive and negative parts of atoms are not balanced. When there are unpaired teeny bits floating around without friends, they can cause problems. BIG problems like painful electric shocks, damage to electronics, and even fires and explosions! Just imagine how having that extra and unbalanced charge in your body might make you feel: jittery, anxious, or stressed.

The opposite of grounded, relaxed, and settled.

## Laura Labrie

In fact, research shows that unbalanced electrical charge in your body heightens your cortisol levels. Cortisol is a stress hormone. You need a good dose of it when you are running away from a tiger, but I am guessing you don't want to always feel like you are running away from a tiger.

Now think of an electrical plug and outlet. There are three holes in the outlet and three prongs on the plug (unless your house or appliance is old, or you live in rural parts of Mexico). The fat third prong is called "the ground" and it allows a connection to be made between the appliance and the earth/ground. Appliances used to have only two prongs until inventors discovered they could make them safer by adding the "ground" thereby avoiding the dangers of unmanaged electricity that might cause fires.

**Just like your coffee pot, or your refrigerator, YOU need to be grounded.**

So, what is happening when you make that connection with earth?

The earth has a subtle negative electrical charge and your body has a tendency to build up too much of a positive charge. When you come into contact with the earth, you absorb those negatively charged particles from the earth and electrical balance is restored to your body.

The trouble is, you are wearing material on your feet that prevents you from receiving the gift of negatively charged ions from the planet. Rubber (the stuff the bottoms of your shoes is likely made from) is a great insulator. It prevents the passage of electricity from one thing to another. Unfortunately, it is preventing you from receiving the gentle negative charge from the earth.

The answer?

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

Bare feet.

So simple, so natural. Ask Asa. He goes barefoot all the time.

It amazes me how we have come to the place in modern society where going barefoot seems odd. It's something we think of doing on vacation at the beach, but that's about it. If you walked barefoot in the park, or even in your own backyard, people might think you were a bit weird.

I, myself, am not too fond of shoes. I love having my toes in the wet grass or feeling the heat of stones beneath my feet. It makes me more aware of my surroundings, more present, more in touch with the earth. I have always known going barefoot makes me feel happy and relaxed, but I didn't know why. I love it when science comes out and explains why.

So, take off your shoes. Be conscience of doing it every day. Spend as much time connected to the earth as your schedule allows. Go for a walk in the grass. Get your bare toes in the garden. Go ahead and get your feet dirty. Your body will thank you for it, and so will your state of mind.

### **activity:**

Spent fifteen minutes walking barefoot outside.

- \*Notice how your feet feel coming into contact with the earth.
- \*Notice the temperatures and textures of what you walk on.
- \*Stand still for a minute and close your eyes.
- \*Notice how your body feels.
- \*Relax and notice your state of mind.

## 7. Lay on the ground

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, our ancestors slept on the ground. Today most people in Middle America sleep in hammocks, which is lovely. But still, I often see construction guys taking a nap on the ground in the shade in the heat of the day. They are stretched out fully, body in contact with the earth. They may even have their feet a few inches above the ground, propped up on a rock, or a wall, or a large tree trunk. It feels really good to lie on the ground with your feet on a tree trunk. I know, I used to do it all the time when I was a kid.

Now, I know why.

Resting on your back, with your body outstretched and completely touching the earth, provides you with a profound connection to the planet beneath you. It allows for that magical electoral exchange between you and the earth. It also aligns your spine, hips, and shoulders, and it releases pressure on pinched nerves and opens your chest to allow for deeper, freer breathing.

Taking it a step further and getting your feet a few inches above your head allows you blood to flow back to your internal organs, your heart, and your brain. Hours and hours on your feet can be exhausting, but a few short minutes with your feet on a tree trunk is better than an hour-long nap. You get up feeling energized, alert, and refreshed. Take a few minutes to try this exercise and see how quickly you notice a difference in your over-all energy level.

### **activity:**

Go outside and find a tree or a big rock or something you can prop your feet up on. Lie down on your back directly on the ground and put your feet up. Stay there for 10-15 minutes. Be amazed!

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE



# THE FOURTH POINT OF CONNECTION

## supernatural

*What does it mean to connect with the supernatural?*

*It means to become aware of non-physical. To trust your intuition to be your eyes. To see things that exist outside the electromagnetic light spectrum, real things, important things. It means to become wholly human again, for it is your birth-right to see beyond the limitation of the material and to fully function in the immaterial. It means to finally become completely aware of the vibration of love that holds all things together and to live in this love moment to moment.*

# HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

LAURA LABRIE

supernatural  
HAPPY LIVING LIST

trust your intuition  
be aware of the spirits/energy of things  
celebrate religious festivals  
observe rituals  
use candles  
practice power traditions  
connect to the spirits of animals  
consult a shaman or spiritual leader  
heal diseases by healing the spirit  
use smoke to cleanse spaces  
believe in the presence of your ancestors  
believe there are both positive and negative forces  
believe there is energy in everything  
believe in elemental beings  
understand how to change the energy of places  
believe in prayer and/or meditation  
love art

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

**CONNECTING TO THE UNSEEN** is vital to happiness. Because we can't see it, in many parts of the world we have been taught that it doesn't exist. Can you see radio waves? How about micro-waves? Do they exist? Just because we cannot see them does not mean we don't experience their effects. It is the same with what we call **THE SUPERNATURAL**. Science has much to learn about the non-physical, but quantum mechanics is currently shedding a lot of light in this area. Ancient cultures have long known the importance of connection with the energetic realms of the unseen. Here is a (partial) list of many things I experienced while living in the jungles, mountains, and islands of Middle America. Take some time to go through this list with an open mind and see what speaks to you. Believe it, it's worth believing in!

### **trust your intuition**

Intuition is your non-physical sight. It allows you to be aware of things not in the electromagnetic "light" spectrum. Growing up learning to use and trust your intuition is a part of your human birth-right. Just imagine living in a world where you learn to use and trust your intuition from the time you are young. What an amazing, beautiful, rich place the world is for those who do!

### **be aware of the spirits/energy of things**

Everything is energy. And that energy is always in flux, always changing. It effects everything in your daily routine. Imagine being constantly aware of the unseen and knowing how to work with it in everything that you do.

### **celebrate religious festivals**

Religious festivals are a big part of life here in the tropics. From Three Kings Day to Dia de La Muerte, the people in Middle America are constantly surrounded by celebrations reminding them of their spiritual heritage.

## **observe rituals**

Rituals are reminders to make connections. They are observed on a regular basis all through these jungles and rain forests and offer a sense of history, comfort, and power to the people who practice them.

## **use candles**

Candles are used most every day to honor relatives and offer reminders of the unseen realm. The mesmerizing effect of a small flame burning brightly offers hope, peace, and stability to the lives of people connected securely to the spiritual plane.

## **practice power traditions**

A red thread tied around the wrist of a new born baby, A color or pattern woven into cloth, the wearing of an ancient symbol or a particular stone or seed. These things are constant reminders of the realms beyond, our human connection to them, and our ability to have an impact on those things beyond physical sight.

## **connect to the spirits of animals**

Animals are honored, and their attributes are channeled through the wearing of colors and patterns and the wearing of jewelry containing animal items like teeth, shells, and skins. Maybe you need the strength of a crocodile or the agility of a deer. The indigenous people appropriate these things and understand the energy and spirits behind them.

## **consult with a shaman/spiritual healer**

Most people who live in remote areas in Middle America will go to a trusted spiritual healer if they need help. From help completing a difficult project, to healing disease, to maintaining good relationships, everything can be trusted to a village healer/shaman.

## **heal diseases by healing the spirit**

These healers believe that all problems stem from energetic unbalances or things that begin in the unseen places. They treat the unseen to heal the seen. And often with great success!

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

### **use smoke to cleanse spaces**

Burning incense or herbs is a large part of cleansing spaces and done often in indigenous villages. In some traditions, people are specifically trained to perform energetic cleansing on special days and at times of need in homes and communities.

### **believe in the presence of ancestors**

The belief that your ancestors are still with you is comforting and powerful. People remember relatives who have passed beyond and sometimes ask for their help. There are many stories of signs of comfort and help coming from loved ones long gone. Even the Bible says, “we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who have gone on before us.” It’s nice to know there are people cheering you on!

### **believe in positive and negative forces**

The idea that both energy and spirits come in positive and negative forms is central to many cultural beliefs. Good energy is cultivated, and negative is banished. Good spirits are called upon and negative are guarded against. Rituals and prayers are often directed in these ways.

### **believe there is energy in everything**

The earth, the water, the rain, the plants, the rocks, the animals. Everything contains energy/spirit. All can be in or out of balance. All can be worked with, healed, and called upon.

### **believe in elemental beings**

Earth, air, fire, and water are elements and can manifest as conscious beings. Think dragons and mermaids, but in forms you may not be familiar with. Stories include beings that protect the jungles and guard the waters. Some are helpful, some fickle, and some can be dangerous. All are respected and an important part of rural life and connection with both the gods and the earth.

## know how to change the energy of places

Being aware that everything is energy means also understanding what you can do to change that energy. It is totally normal and considered important to grow certain plants, burn incense, clean regularly, move furniture, sing, play music and all manner of other things to change the energy of spaces.

## pray and/or meditation

Prayer, thankfulness, and meditations are all part of normal daily life. Many homes have altars and many people wear jewelry to remind them to pray. It is a way of connecting almost on a moment-by-moment basis to the unseen spiritual world that is always around us and impacts everything we do.

## Love art

Symbols, colors, and patterns that carry spiritual meaning are a big part of Caribbean and Middle American culture. Everywhere you will find people painting with specific colors to evoke feelings of joy and happiness, people proudly displaying art work depicting saints or symbols—some you are familiar with and many you are probably not—artwork depicting animals whose spirits the artist wants to evoke, and all manner of other beautiful colorful art as everyday reminders of the realms we cannot see.

# HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE



# supernatural ACTIVITIES

Practice makes perfect, right? While there is no perfect here, there is a need to practice becoming more aware of and trusting in the REALMS OF THE SUPERNATURAL. They are very much a part of our world. Take some time each day to choose an activity and give it a whirl. You might be surprised where Alice's Rabbit Hole will take you!

## 1. feel the vibration

I PULLED A STOOL UP TO the beach bar and sat down next to a Mexican woman with long, silvery hair pulled back in a ponytail. We quickly struck up a conversation, and though I am loathe to say I cannot remember her name, I do remember the conversation vividly.

She once lived in Puerto Morelos, but years ago moved to Cancun for the sake of her daughters' education. She was a single mother, working hard and doing her best for her two young children. And at the time, moving to the city felt necessary, despite the fact that she loved the little town on the beach. But, years had gone by and her girls were grown. She was ready to come home.

“What do you love about Puerto Morelos?” I asked her.

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

Without hesitation she answered me, “The vibration is better here.”

Which brings me to an interesting observation about the people here in Mexico and all through Middle America. Overall, they seem very in-tune with the energy of places.

Today’s exercise is about feeling energy. Before you can change the energy in a place, you need to be aware of it.

### **activity:**

This activity is to help you compare how the energy feels in different places. The point is to focus on a sense that you may not practice much. Your sixth sense. Your energy antennae.

Different people “feel” energy in different ways. You may get different sensations in your body. Or, you may find yourself experiencing emotions. You may even picture something in your mind. The idea is to be open to changes in the way you feel.

Pick a room to start in and stand in the middle of it. You can close your eyes if you like. Notice how you feel. See if you can give that feeling a name. Relaxed? Lighthearted? Nervous? Do you notice any sensations in your body? Tightness in your chest? Warmth in your hands? Do you “see” anything in your mind’s eye? A color? An image?

Now go to a different room and do the same thing. See if you notice any changes. You may notice a feeling coming from something specific in your house. It could come from a stairway or a closet or even a piece of furniture. If you do, tune in to it and get familiar with how it feels.

You can also do this driving through a neighborhood where you can drive slowly (obviously not with your eyes closed!) Pay attention to how you feel as you pass homes, green spaces, and businesses.

## Laura Labrie

The changes in how you feel can be very subtle at first. If I pass a place with very negative energy, I typically get slightly sick to my stomach. Sometimes, I feel like there is a dark cloud hanging over the area. I might even feel a bit claustrophobic, like I really want to leave. The stronger the energy, the stronger my feelings. When I am in a place with good energy, I feel very lighthearted and happy. It seems like I notice the beauty in everything and everything makes me smile. I might even feel a warmth in the center of my chest.

Sometimes, a place has very high energy. I might feel like I can't sit still or I might even feel a bit zingy, like energy is running through my body and I don't quite know what to do with it. I often get this feeling when I am in or around the cenotes on the Yucatan peninsula in Mexico. Cenotes are water-filled caves that are considered sacred. There is something very special about them.

Occasionally, I have been places that make me feel sad. One time I was walking through China Town in Montreal and I literally burst out crying for no particular reason. It was just an intense feeling of sadness. When I turned the corner and the scenery changed, the feeling lifted immediately.

So, just take note of how you feel today. Pay attention to the changes. If you want to write down your observations and date them, you can try this same exercise again in a week or so and see if you notice anything different. Becoming aware of energy is very important. It is already there, and it is already affecting how you feel. You may just not have made the connection yet. Once you make the connection, you can take steps to improve the energy around you. But we will save that lesson for another day.

## 2. clear negative energy

PERHAPS YOU LIVE IN A PLACE where the general approach to life is through reason, logic, and materialism. The evaluation of circumstances through observation of what can easily be measured and understood on this physical plane is considered the only sensible way to view the world. When you have trouble in your life, you look for answers you can see. But, I am sure you are aware (as we all are at some level) that there is more to this existence than what meets the natural eye.

One major difference in the cultures of the United States, Canada, and many northern European countries and the cultures in Middle America and Mexico, is the stance, or position from which life is observed. While northern countries tend to see life from a logical, even industrial, viewpoint, Meso-American countries tend to see it from an intuitive, even spiritual, plane. Therefore, when a problem arises, the answer is often found in places that you can't see.

Middle Americans have grown up in a culture that recognizes the subtle energies of life. Ever since they were children, these people have been encouraged to develop their sixth sense, or intuition. They are very aware of all manner of things beyond the veil of the physical world. They take the realm of the unseen very seriously and have learned how to work with it.

I was sitting at a little beach bar in Puerto Morelos, just south of Cancun, one day and happened to mention that I wasn't sleeping well. Right away, five or six local people animatedly began offering suggestions to help me overcome my sleep deprivation.

No one suggested I purchase a better mattress or buy dark curtains to block out all light. No one suggested I take a sleep aid or go to therapy to discover what was stressing me out. All the suggestions were on a spiritual level. And almost all the suggestions surrounded the idea that there was some negative energy in my home. Solutions ranged from burning different types of incense, to adding special potted plants, to prayers and declarations, all of which could be done to drive out any negative energy and or entities and fill my space with something positive so that I could sleep.

Just in case you are wondering, I did follow some of the suggestions, and guess what? They worked. ☺

## activity:

So how DO you clear negative energy from your home? Here is a simple pattern you can follow. Of, course there are other things you can do, but this is straight forward and easy to do, and it works well for me.

\*You will want some incense or sage. Sandalwood, palo santo, nag champa, and copal incense are my favorites. Use something you feel good about. You are going to use the smoke to “clear” the area. I thought this was interesting: A paper published in the Journal of Ethno-Pharmacology titled, *Medicinal Smoke Reduces Airborne Bacteria*, claims that research shows smudging to be a powerful antiseptic.”

A quote from the article says, “We have observed that one hour treatment of medicinal smoke emanated by burning wood and a mixture of odoriferous and medicinal herbs on aerial bacterial population caused over 94% reduction of bacterial counts by 60 min, and the ability of the smoke to purify or disinfect the air and to make the environment cleaner was maintained up to 24 hours in the closed room.”

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

How cool is that!

\*With your burning sage or incense, stand in the middle of your house and relax. Think about how this is YOUR home. It belongs to YOU (It doesn't matter if you own or rent or have a bedroom in someone else's house. It is YOUR space). The point of this is that you have the right to affect the energy in your home. If there is something there that you don't want, you have the right to clear it out.

\*Feel yourself taking charge of your space and feel your intention and energy pushing out anything you don't want there.

\*Now take the burning sage or incense and walk through your house working your way toward each window or door. You can say something simple like, "This home belongs to me. Negative energy and anything set against me or my family, you must leave." You want to speak out loud. Words carry vibration and are the very stuff of creation. They are powerful. Claim your space and tell anything negative to leave. You can speak directly to it as if it were a person. It might feel a bit funny to do that since you don't see anything, but it is real, so it is appropriate to address it directly.

\*Work your way toward each entrance and window in your home and visualize the negativity leaving. You can picture it as a grey cloud if you like. If you feel like opening doors and windows to let it out, that is fine too.

\*As you work your way through your home, stay open to becoming aware of anything that might be causing the negative energy or opening a door to it. You might see an object in your home that you want to get rid of. If you do, just take it outside while you are doing this, and you can get rid of it later.

## Laura Labrie

★When you are finished clearing your home, you will want to fill it up with something wonderful. After all, there really is no such thing as a vacant space. When you clear something out, something else will come in.

★Go back to the center of your house now. You are finished with the sage or incense and don't need it. Close your eyes if you like. It can make it easier to visualize things. Relax and picture brilliant light coming in through your doors and windows. Again, you will want to speak out loud. Invite love and joy and peace into your home. It doesn't really matter how you say it, just speak directly and invite in the things you want to have in your home.

★When you are finished, you can take some oil and go to each opening in your home and seal it. Just dab a bit of oil at the edge of the door or window and say something like, "This is my home. Light and love are welcome here." You can say anything that means something to you or relates directly to your situation. What is important is that you are defining what can come through the openings in your home. It is YOUR home and you can control the energy there.

★Repeat this whenever you feel the need. If you start to feel yourself struggling to maintain your peace, if you feel negativity creeping back in, if you are having trouble focusing, if you seem on-edge, or if you start not sleeping well, or are having troubling dreams, clear and fill your home again. After a while, you will see peace staying longer and the atmosphere really stabilizing.

### 3. symbols of power

WHEN A BABY IS BORN IN Mexico or Middle America, some parents tie a slender, red thread around the baby's wrist. Its purpose is to protect the child from the evil eye or *Mal de Ojo*. I have a friend who is from Canada and her husband is from Yucatan. They live in Mexico. When their youngest son was born, and as tradition suggested, they tied a red thread around the baby's wrist. The thread was secure for almost a year, but time eventually wore it thin and it broke. Within 24 hours, the baby fell several times and hurt himself. Of course, his mother quickly found a new red thread and tied it on the baby's wrist again.

There are countless traditions people follow for good luck, to attract money, to attract love, for protection, to balance energy, to provide creative inspiration, to provide strength, and all kinds of other reasons. A shaman I met in Costa Rica wore a necklace of special stones, cacao beans, and crocodile teeth. He told me the teeth helped him to channel the strength and cunning of the crocodile. A Rasta guy I know in a little beach town in Mexico wears a beautiful strand of huge pieces of Mexican amber. He says they are for good energy. I believe him!

I'm sure you know people who adhere to similar practices, or maybe you have your own. The belief and the intention are what give these items their power. What you believe is central to what you create in your life. Your expectations affect your reality on a quantum level. I am sure you have heard of the placebo effect. Two groups of sick people are given pills that look the same. One group has the real medicinal pills and the other has sugar pills. Both groups are told they have the real medicine. Results show that both groups respond equally well to the pills and sometimes, the ones taking the sugar pills actually respond BETTER. This demonstrates that it is our BELIEF in the ability for the medicine to work that makes it work.



## Laura Labrie

That's cool. But here is something even cooler. A man named Thomas Young did a very famous experiment called The Double Slit Experiment. The idea was to look at the properties of light as a particle and as a wave. What they did not expect was that the EXPECTATIONS of the person OBSERVING the experiment CHANGED THE OUTCOME! What's more, American physicist John Wheeler proposed to expand the experiment by doing something he called the "delayed choice" experiment. Almost unbelievably, the experiment demonstrated that particles of light responded to choices observers made about what would happen to the light in the experiment BEFORE they even made the choice. "It is as if nature knows not just if we are looking, but if we are planning to look."

This information gives incredible weight to the importance of what we believe. It shows that matter actually responds to our expectations and CHANGES based on what we are thinking. I love this stuff because it demonstrates that the beliefs of the indigenous peoples are valid. They really DO have a profound effect on our reality. So, if you believe wearing a red thread on your wrist will keep protect you from the bad intentions of the evil eye, then it will. And if you believe that wearing amber will surround you with good energy, then it will!

So, what would like to DO about it?

### **activity:**

Take a few minutes to thoughtfully answer this question: What do I want to bring into my life? Your answer will likely be something simple like: positive energy, love, good health, or happiness.

When you have your answer, you can do one of two things:

- 1. Do a little research and find out what things are generally believed to attract what you are looking for. See what resonates

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

with you and then obtain that item and carry it with you or wear it on your person.

- 2. Spend some time relaxing and allowing your thoughts to wander on the idea of something special you already own that came from a family member, from a significant trip you took, or from some important time in your life—something that would represent what you desire to draw to yourself. I have a pin that was given to my father when he was in college. It represents creativity to me since he was very gifted with creativity. Find a way to keep your item with you or wear it on your person. You might be able to repurpose it, use it to make a bracelet or necklace, or even sew it to the inside of your wallet or purse.

As you are going through the motions of bonding whatever item you choose to yourself (ie, putting it on if it's a necklace, sewing it into the inside of your purse, or setting it in a special place near where you sleep) put your intentions into it. In an easy fashion, give thanks for the item and tell it what you expect from it. For example: While hooking my father's pin to the lining of my wallet, I can say, "Thank you dad, for passing your wonderful creativity on to me. And thank you, little pin for reminding me and supporting me in the release of that creativity!" Then every time you think of it, touch the object and thank it again for drawing to you the thing you desire. You will be amazed at your results....if you believe!

## 4. believe in elementals

I HAVE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE in this area. Imagine tiny, wet footprints—too small to even belong to a baby—going all the way down your tile-floored hall. Sometimes we see things we have no explanation for, but because we are humans who are so well domesticated from birth, we dismiss anything we can't understand by default.

If you saw a huge red dragon with sparkling silver sequence on his wings flying overhead, what would you think? My guess is you would rub your eyes to see if you are dreaming, then maybe pinch yourself to make sure you are awake. Then you would think back to see if you remember doing any kinds of drugs, legal or illegal. If you answered yourself, “No,” then you might look at the angle of the sun and any reflections to see if you saw something that LOOKED like a giant red dragon with sparkly wings. Barring that, you would probably just assume you were having a momentary mental breakdown and promise yourself you would never tell anyone because you did not want them to lock you in the loony bin and throw away the key.

The problem is, you have no grid for sparkly dragons. It's OK if they are in story books, but not if they are flying over-head, unless they are beautifully decorated hot air balloons. When you were a child, you could easily have believed your own eyes, but now your domestication is complete. You were a wild little thing, but your parents, your teachers, your aunts and uncles and older brothers and sisters trained you very well. They taught all about your world, and you believed them.

They used a system of reward and punishment to do this. If you did things the way they believed you should do them, they rewarded you with approval. If you did not fit yourself into their expectation-box, they punished you with disapproval.

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This held true for pretty much everything in your life. Even things as simple as eating with a fork. Your mother showed you how to “properly” hold a fork. If you lived in the United States, she showed you that the proper way to hold a fork was in your right hand with the tines pointing up. But, if you lived in Australia, she demonstrated that the correct way to hold a fork was in the left hand with the tines pointing down.

Take just a minute to think of other cultural differences you know of. It’s true, isn’t it, that what is accepted in one area of the world is not accepted in another? Well, that definition of correct behavior also extends into correct thinking and correct believing. You are taught what to think and what to believe from the time you are born. You are rewarded with approval thousands of times for demonstrating that you are successfully incorporating what your parents see as “correct” thought patterns and beliefs. This training is extremely powerful. Did you know research suggests that we more easily believe a lie than believe that we have been lied to? Once we are convinced that a particular thought pattern or belief system is valid, it is almost impossible for us to change it. It can and does happen, but it takes either a catastrophic event, or a conscious effort and a lot of time to change these things.

So, let’s go back to the tiny wet footprints in the hallway. They were seen by myself, my adult daughter, and her adult boyfriend. We all agreed that they were not made by a human or animal (we had no small children or pets) The footprints looked very human, but they were very, very small. My daughter’s boyfriend was Mexican. While my daughter and I were mystified by the tiny prints, my daughter’s boyfriend had no doubt at all in his mind as to what they were.

“You have an alux,” he declared with a considerable amount of confidence.

## Laura Labrie

An alux is a small, human-looking elemental being. Sometimes it appears dressed in traditional clothing, sometimes it appears like a small child running around naked. By small, I mean between 18 inches and 2 feet tall. It is playful, sometimes mischievous, is territorial and often will protect the land it lives on. Sometimes, if you try to build on a piece of land that already has an alux on it, you will run into big trouble. The alux will not allow the building project to go forward until you and the alux have made an agreement.

As I am explaining all this to you, I bet you are not receiving this information as if it were about a cute and interesting animal, like a prairie dog or an otter. My guess is that you are receiving it with a fat dose of skepticism or downright disbelief. But, when my daughter's boyfriend shared the information with me, he shared it as if he were telling me about a racoon that had taken up residence in my house.

If you ask someone who is Yucatec Maya if he believes in aluxob (plural for alux) he will respond in the same way as if I ask you if you believe in racoons.

Why is this?

If you ask the same person if they have had any personal encounters with an alux (also known as *duende*), they will almost certainly tell you, "Yes."

This brings me to a very interesting thought. If an alux is real (and I had one in my house, so you know where I stand on the matter) and an alux is an elemental being (it is air), then what OTHER elemental beings might be out there?

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The word *elemental* comes from the word *element*—as in earth, air, fire, and water. Traditionally, most cultures have stories of elemental beings. Dragons are fire, mermaids are water, trolls are earth, and fairies are air. You were probably taught that these are all mythical creatures, stories for bedtime. But, what if you had been raised in the Yucatan? You would have been taught lots of real information about these beings and how to deal with them.

Can you imagine that?

It's OK if that seems difficult. What I want you to get out of this is that it's possible to hold space for things you may never have considered before. What if elemental beings are real? What if there is a whole dimension out there that you never knew existed? This chapter is supposed to be about believing in elemental beings. We KNOW that many of the local people of Middle America *believe* in such things, but *what if they are real?* What if there is a whole plain of existence you are unaware of? I had wet footprints going all the way down the hall of my house. It forced me to look at things I had never considered before. And by now, I have heard so many stories about elemental beings that I have changed my programming. It took time, but it is super cool to know that there is an entire realm of existence I never knew about before!

### activity:

FIRST: Think of your favorite elemental beings from all the fairy tales and stories you heard growing up. Maybe it's a red dragon like mine with silver sequenced wings, or maybe it's a fairy that wears a tiny blue dress and leaves fairy dust wherever she flies. Maybe you fell in love with mermaids when you were a child. What does the perfect mermaid look like? Maybe she has a shimmering green-scaled tale, long blonde hair, and sea shells for a bikini-top bathing suit.

## Laura Labrie

In Norway, they have little reminders of their beloved trolls everywhere. In Hawaii, the local people believe the menehune are fabulous crafters and build temples, roads, and bridges deep in the flower-filled forests. As you think of your favorite elemental, imagine all the details about how they look, what they are wearing (if anything) and how they behave. Let your imagination run wild and get as detailed as possible

.  
NEXT: Now, imagine that your elemental is real. What would it be like if you actually saw them? Close your eyes and create a scenario in your mind, complete with as many details as possible. How would you encounter them? What would happen next? How would you feel? If you like to write, you can write a story about your encounter, complete with as many details as possible. If you love art, try drawing, or painting, or using 3-D art to depict your experience. The more time you spend thinking about your imaginary creation, the more space you give for it, or something like it, to exist.

FINALLY: After you do this exercise, keep an eye out, because you may find yourself having some interesting experiences. If you do, keep an open mind and allow space for something new, something that was not in your previous programming. You might be surprised at what comes to you!

## 5. trust your intuition

INTUITION IS VITAL TO navigating daily life. My guess is that some of you reading this have well developed intuition and some don't. So, I am going to start with the basics. Having good intuition is part of your birthright as a human being. It is your sixth sense and you were born with it. If you grew up in a home where logic was revered, and intuition was dismissed, you may have been programmed not to trust it. Also, if you were exposed to toxins like fluoride and chlorine, your pineal gland—the seat of your intuition—may be damaged. Fortunately, BOTH of those things can be overcome.

In my time living in Middle America, I have noticed that most people here have good intuition. They use it regularly and with skill. They rely on it just as much as you rely on your eye sight or your hearing. In fact, if they could get in your head, they would feel confused and wonder why you are not using your intuition.

Most of the people I have met don't look for logical explanations to everything. They just *know* things and if you ask them how they know, they just shrug their shoulders and say, "I don't know how. I just know," and they accept it without worrying why. They accept it. They trust it implicitly, and they use it without really thinking about it at all.

Here is a good example:

*There was a guy named Good Times who lived in the islands of Panama. People called him Good Times because he was always trying to sell a free newspaper called The Good Times. He was a nice guy, and I didn't mind talking to him, but sometimes I avoided him because I didn't want to buy his free newspaper.*



## Laura Labrie

*After trying to avoid him several times and doing it unsuccessfully, I finally learned the avoidance trick. If I saw him and didn't want to fork out a few bucks for something I could easily get for free, I had to immediately turn my attention to something OTHER than him. If I even THOUGHT about him, it didn't matter how slick I was, within a minute or two, he was standing in front of me waving crinkled paper around and asking for money.*

*One day, I was walking down the street past the park. It was a small park and it was easy to see the parallel street that ran down the other side. It was also easy to see Good Times about a half block away walking AWAY from me. His back was turned toward me. There was no chance what-so-ever of him turning around, seeing me across the park, and running all the way over to try to sell me a newspaper. Ummmm....wrong. I was wrong. The minute I noticed him, the minute I put my attention on him, thought about how I did NOT want to explain to him why I didn't want to pay for a free paper, he felt it. He whipped around, looked right at me, and came running.*

*After that experience, I tried an experiment. Whenever I saw Good Times, I immediately thought of pink elephants. I averted my eyes, did not look in his direction, and pictured pink elephants in tutus dancing to Tchaikovsky's Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy. And guess what? He never noticed me. If I forgot to avert my attention in the first millisecond, he was on me, paper waving and the whole bit.*

Good Times was picking up on my attention when it was focused on him. He could easily feel it and he responded quickly.

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

Have you ever been in a room full of people and you felt funny, turned around, scanned the area, and found someone looking directly at you? Or have you ever been looking at someone, maybe on the beach or in a grocery store, and they turned around at looked directly at you? Caught! They *felt* you.

Going through life without actively using your intuition is kind of like going through life blind. You were designed with SIX senses, not the five you learned about in school. Your intuition feeds you lots of important information and, if you don't use or trust your intuition, you are missing out on all that information.

Some interesting research done by Dr. Rick Straussman linked intuition/spiritual sight to a chemical known as Dimethyltryptamine or DMT. This compound is produced naturally in your body and is processed in your pineal gland which is a tiny, pinecone shaped gland in the middle of your brain. Many cultures refer to this gland as your “third eye” and, interestingly, it has rods and cones and is light sensitive just like your eyes, even though it is in the middle of your brain. I like this because it means that your intuition has a biological source that scientists are familiar with and actively studying. It is not just some woo-woo thing that can't be explained.

I mentioned earlier that its possible your pineal gland may be damaged. This is how that happens. You ingest neurotoxins—especially fluoride—and the pineal gland acts like a sponge and absorbs them. This causes the formation of tiny, hard crystals in this little but very important gland. This process is called *calcification*. Calcification is when your pineal gland gets hard—calcified—and eventually becomes less usable, or in some cases, almost unusable.

## Laura Labrie

Think about this for just a minute. Young children often see things adults don't see, particularly ghosts or angels, or maybe imaginary friends. Why on earth do we assume, when a toddler is talking to something that they clearly see and we don't, that they are just talking to something in their imagination? Can you allow space for the possibility that the toddler still has a fully functioning pineal gland because they have not been drinking fluoridated water for thirty years?

Here is something really interesting. Mexico, Belize, Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua do not have fluoridated water. Zero percent of these populations are drinking water with fluoride in it. Guatemala has a small amount of fluoridated water and approximately 13% of the population is drinking it. Panama also has a small amount of fluoridated water and about 15% of the population is exposed to it. For the most part, the people living in these countries have well developed intuition. The United States, on the other hand, has fluoride in most of its public water supply and a whopping 64% of the population is exposed to it daily. And get this: A study done 30 years ago reported 40% of American children under the age of 17 were found to have pineal gland calcification in process. Pretty revealing statistics!

Drinking fluoridated water literally disconnects you from your intuition and your spiritual sight by calcifying your pineal gland. BUT, you can reverse this process by eliminating fluoride consumption, getting sun every day, and eating foods that detox your body from heavy metals. You can go to [www.thehappifyproject.com](http://www.thehappifyproject.com) to find a list of foods that will help you detox and restore your pineal gland health. You can also pick up a copy of **FEEDING YOUR INTUITION: A COOKBOOK & GUIDE TO A HEALTHY PINEAL GLAND** for more tips, food lists, and recipes to help you cook for your pineal gland health.

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Notice, I said, “intuition and spiritual sight?” They really are the same thing. It’s your intuition, based in your pineal gland with the help of naturally occurring DMT, that allows you to *see* other realms. Ideally, you should be like that toddler who is waving at his great uncle who is hovering in the corner of the room, just stopping by to say, “Hi!” You should be able to *see* with your third eye.

So here are a few things you can do help your pineal gland function and boost your intuition:

- Stop drinking water with fluoride
- Try to get at least 15 minutes of sunshine every day
- Eat foods high in vitamin C
- Eat foods high in iodine
- Sleep in complete darkness
- Keep electronics out of the bedroom
- Keep light to a minimum after the sun goes down
- Add tamarind, raw cacao, and cilantro to your diet

By the way, everything on this list is indicative of the way most people in Middle America live. They drink fluoride-free water, spend a lot of time outdoors, eat tons of fruit (vitamin c), and a lot of eggs, canned and fresh fish, yogurt and cheese (all high in iodine). They sleep in total darkness because they are in small villages without much ambient light and many don’t have electricity or have limited access to it. They have few or no electronics. They go to bed early and don’t use a lot of light after the sun goes down again because of lack of access to electricity. And they eat tamarind, cacao, and cilantro regularly (these are great heavy metal de-toxers) Interesting, isn’t it? And they have great intuition!

## activity:

The other thing that you need to do is learn to TRUST your intuition. The only way to do this is to experiment a bit and see what happens. So here is an on-going exercise you can do that is easy and fun.

- Buy a little notebook small enough to fit in your pocket/purse or use a note-taking app on your phone.
- When you feel your intuition prompting you to do (or not do) something, write it down. It may be a stray thought that crosses your mind out of nowhere, or a feeling you have. It might be an inspiration to turn left instead of right at a corner, or an impulse to go into a store you normally never go into. Just write it down, add a date and time, and any other information you feel is important.
- Then write down whether you took action and followed the prompting or not. Sometimes we feel prompted to do something, but we brush it off and don't do it. If you do this, make a note of it.
- Write down what happened as a result of your following or not following your intuition. Maybe you went into a store you never go in and you found something you had been looking for at a great price. Or, maybe you felt inspired to call a friend, but you ignored the feeling and didn't call. Then the next day you found out that they were thinking about you and had something really cool to tell you.

Doing this for a week or more will give you some good feedback about what is happening with you and your intuition. Because you are paying close attention, you will start seeing the results of both following and not following your intuition. I am sure you will soon discover that you CAN trust your intuition, and the more good feedback you get, the easier it will be to trust it on a regular basis!

## 6. animal activity

THE NGOBE BUGLE WOMEN OF PANAMA sew patterns into their clothing that represent the characteristics of different animals. For example: A snake is cunning and is represented by a diamond pattern like the markings on its back and a crocodile is powerful and is represented by a triangular pattern that looks like its powerful teeth. The Ngobe women sew these patterns into the necklines and hems of their dresses. They believe that the clothing with the pattern is then imbued with the power of that animal. So, as a Ngobe woman chooses what dress she is going to wear in the morning, she is doing more than picking a color she likes or a style she fancies. She is choosing what animal characteristic she will encompass that day.

### activity:

Get a note book or piece of paper and a pen or pencil--whatever you enjoy writing on and with. Sit in quiet and comfortable place and keep your writing materials handy. Set the intention that you are going to think about animals. Now close your eyes and start thinking about animals. The very first one that pops into your mind is the one you will work with.

Write the name of your animal on your page. You can write it anywhere you want to. Then start writing down every characteristic about that animal you can think of. What is it known for? Is it strong or fast or very intelligent? What does it look like? What does it eat?

As you are writing, something may jump out at you about that animal that seems to reflect something in your own life. When something jumps out at you, you can stop writing. Write down that thing anywhere you like on your paper and make it special. Draw a circle around it or make the letters big—something to set it apart from the rest of your writing.

## Laura Labrie

Now close your eyes again and this time think of the word you wrote. How does it apply to your life? It is something you need right now. In what way can that characteristic help you? Chances are your answer will come to you very easily and quickly. When I did this today the first animal that came to me was an elephant and right away I thought about the saying, “Elephants never forget.” I am studying Spanish and I have been feeling frustrated that I can’t remember the verbs as well as I would like to. I want to have a memory like an elephant when it comes to Spanish words.

Now come up with a simple affirmation you can use throughout the day. Back to the elephant example: I would say, “When it comes to Spanish words, I have the memory of an elephant”

Write down your affirmation somewhere on your paper and make it pretty or stand out in some way.

Now find an image of your animal. You can just draw a very simple one or print one out if you like. If you have a small trinket that represents that animal, that works too. Put your image in your pocket, or somewhere on your body, or where it will be close to you all day. (You could even draw it with a marker on your body!)

As you go about your day, frequently look at the image of your animal and say your affirmation. You will be surprised at the power this exercise has!

## 7. mop the floor

I HAD A HOUSEKEEPER. Her name was Alicia. She was a grandmotherly type, a bit round, jolly, eyes bright and shiny. She came three times a week to clean my house on the beach on Mexico's Caribbean coast. And every time she came, she mopped the floor. Now, I am not that dirty. I take off my shoes at the front door and I don't have small children or pets running around. So, I could not imagine why she kept wanting to mop the floor. Once a week would be more than enough, and I told her so. But every time Alicia cleaned, there was the telltale aroma of lavender Fabuloso, a very popular all-purpose liquid cleaning product. I would take Alicia around the house and show her the windows that needed cleaning, and the shelves that could be wiped down, and the refrigerator that could be cleaned out—and she did do those things—but no matter what I suggested, she always, always, always started by mopping the floor.

Well, a lot of time has gone by since Alicia cleaned for me. And during that time, I have seen so many other floors, and so many other women cleaning them. It seems to be a part of the landscape of Middle America—the smell of lavender Fabuloso and the sparkling of tile. It's almost ritualistic. Alicia only mopped my floor three times a week, but most women mop or have their floor mopped (many people have housekeepers in this part of the world) every single day, whether they are dirty or not.

I never understood this until just the other day. I always figured it was just routine, or maybe something taught by their mothers, or maybe the thing they knew how to clean best. I thought maybe they just like that pungent, lavender smell. But then the other day, I decided I needed to do some cleaning. I mean some real, deep down spiritual-type cleaning.



## Laura Labrie

I'd had a lot of company over the last few weeks and I had not been home much. And when I was home, I was entertaining. Things were fairly in order physically, but I could feel the difference in the energy in my home. It was a bit flustered, not peaceful like it normally is. I felt a bit scattered, not able to really relax, not able to think clearly. And so, I got out the broom and started to sweep.

The floor does seem like a good place to start cleaning. It's big, and when it's really clean, it has a big impact on the space in your home. I swept dust bunnies out from under the bed and sand from the folds of the woven grass carpet under the coffee table. I just couldn't seem to stop. I burned some Palo Santo incense. *Palo Santo* literally means "holy wood." It comes from a mystical South American tree and smells of pine, mint, and lemon. Shamans have been using it to cleanse spaces for centuries.

Once the tendrils of Palo Santo smoke were wafting through the air, the inspiration I felt to break out the Fabuloso was almost overwhelming. So, I grabbed a bucket of clean water, a mop, and the tell-tale purple bottle. I splashed some of the lavender liquid into the water, dipped the mop in over and over until it was saturated, then pulled it out, wrung it until it was almost dry, and began mopping the floor.

I started along one wall with a sweeping motion, back and forth, back and forth in long, fluid strokes. It felt calming, soothing. Like I was washing away the chatter and confusion of the past couple weeks. I am sure the fragrance of the lavender was doing its aromatherapy work on me. Lavender is famous for its ability to calm, relax, and wash away both depression and anxiety. It also has anti-bacterial properties, so it kills physical germs as it works its magic on you.

## HOW TO HAPPIFY YOUR LIFE

Time seemed to slow down and I found myself in an almost trans-like state. I could feel negative energy being neutralized. It was like I was using a huge eraser to erase it and paint peace all through my home.

Recently, I read an article about an interesting science experiment. Lynn McTaggart, an American journalist, author, and publisher, conducted experiments with thousands of people from 80 countries. She started with the idea of showing that human intention affected matter. All living things emit photons and with a sensitive enough camera, you can actually see any living matter glow as it emits bio-photons. So, she used two leaves from a geranium plant. One for people to focus their intention on, and the other as a control. The idea was to increase the natural “glow” of the leaf just by focusing on it. Dr. Gary Schwartz from the University of Arizona ran the experiment for her. The result was that the leaf that received people’s intention glowed far brighter than the leaf that did not receive intention. This mind-over-matter test was successfully repeated many times.

So, if focusing on a leaf could cause it to glow more brightly, what could focusing on my floor do? How was my intention of energetically cleaning my floor affecting it on a molecular or quantum level? I didn’t have a special camera to measure the results, but I could definitely feel the difference.

We are taught in much of the Western World to give little or no credit to our intentions. But, science is making huge leaps forward in helping us understand that our thoughts, feelings, and intentions, have a much greater effect on our world than we have previously giving them credit for.

## Laura Labrie

Dr. William A. Tiller, Professor Emeritus in material science and engineering at Stanford University, studied mind over matter phenomena. While at the top of his field, he did an experiment that demonstrated how human intention can change matter in an incredible way. He had a group of people concentrate on an electrical circuit that contained a crystal. The idea was to then take the crystal to a different part of the country and place it in a lab with tight controls and see if the crystal could change the PH balance of some water. The crystal was placed near a water sample and successfully changed the balance a full 1.5 PH. But the most amazing part was unexpected. When the when the crystal was removed from the room, its power remained. Any water that was brought into the room AFTER the crystal was removed from the premises was affected by the original intention. Its PH changed! Dr. Tiller concluded that intention can “change space” and rooms can be “conditioned”!

Now I understand why all those women mopped all those floors. They could intuitively feel the difference. They may not have been able to explain the science behind it, but they KNEW they were (and still are) changing the space, conditioning the room. All that lovely lavender had a powerful effect. And the constant cleansing with water imbued with a well-loved cleaner literally changed the “atmosphere” of the room. If intending to change the PH balance of a small sample of water can condition an entire room, what can intending to cleanse the floor do?

### **activity:**

This is an easy one. All you need is a bucket of water, a few drops of lavender, or lemon, or your favorite cleansing essential oil (or Fabuloso, if you have it!) and a mop. I like the mops with strips of felted fabric, but any mop will do.

\*Pour a few drops of essential oil into the water, dunk your mop in a few times to get it good and wet, and then ring it out until its almost dry. (My bucket has a ringer on it).

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- \*Start on one wall and use smooth, long strokes from side to side.
- \*Breathe in the aroma of your essential oil deeply and relax as you mop.
- \*Allow it to become a ritual, almost a yoga exercise or meditation. Feel the cleansing. Imagine you are erasing negativity and painting peace, wellness, and joy all through the room.
- \*There is no need to rinse when you are done and using an almost dry mop insures that the floor will be almost dry by the time you finish.
- \*Do this as often as you like. If you do it on a regular basis, you will literally “condition” the room!

LAURA LABRIE

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laura LaBrie is the author of seven books including

I RAN AWAY TO MEXICO:

AN UNEXPECTED SPIRITUAL JOURNEY.

She is also a photographer, adventure traveler, mentor, speaker, reverend, and teacher. She has been living and traveling in Middle America for the past seven years and has a huge heart for what she likes to call, "the beauty in the poor places" and for taking YOU there!

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