

The Happiness Solution: **Finding Joy and Meaning** **In An Upside Down World**

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Coffee, Anyone?

In Cape Cod this past summer, I discovered a little hole-in-the-wall Brazilian bakery. I've always had a penchant for strong coffee. One cup a day is plenty for me, but I look forward to that cup. I'm not addicted. Sometimes I go weeks without having any. But for me, coffee is one of the small pleasures of life. When I saw the bakery, the line of an old song began running through my head. I'm not sure about the name of the song, but I think it's called "The Coffee Song." It may have been by Sinatra. The line of the song as I remember it is, "They make an awful lot of coffee in Brazil!" I'm pretty sure it's something like that. Anyhow, this refrain seemed to get stuck in my brain circuitry and I was humming it and singing it for a good deal of the summer. Luckily, it felt like an unobtrusive obsession and I felt fine whenever it showed up. "They make an awful lot of coffee in Brazil!" There it goes again.

Back to the story of the little Brazilian bakery. As I entered the place, which was painted a pale lime green, I encountered the store owner. He nodded. I asked something along the lines of, "What kind of coffee do you have?" He pointed. I looked in the direction his finger indicated and there it was. One coffee pot. That was it. Wait a minute. Was that really it? It was true. There was no decaf. No latte. No French vanilla, hazelnut, or chocolate raspberry. There was no dark roast, morning blend, or Ethiopian organic. No cappuccinos. No espressos. There was just a pot of coffee. Take it or leave it. Well, since I'm pretty much of a no frills guy and happen to like a strong cup of black coffee, this was fine by me. In fact, it was more than fine.

Life has seemingly gotten more hectic and more complicated with each decade. As a kid, if I needed sneakers, they were black or white and were Keds or Converse. That was it. Now, buying sneakers is like buying a car. The options with colors and styles and heel gels and, well, you get the idea. Sometimes things are more complicated than they need to be. The simplicity of the Brazilian bakery was akin to a bit of an oasis in the midst of our hurried

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lives. The store carried five or six different types of baked goods and rolls. They all looked interesting although I wasn't quite sure what any of them were.

I got a cup of coffee to go. They only offered one size cup. No small, medium, large, extra large, grandee, or fire hydrant size. Just a regular size cup. The owner spoke very little English but we communicated just fine. I pointed to a slice of something that looked like corn bread and said, "I'll have one of those." Then, I pointed to a small, round baked item about the size of a golf ball and asked for two of those. He gave me everything in a previously used brown paper bag.

"Three dollars," he said.

Later that morning I savored the coffee and shared the baked goodies with my wife. They hit the spot. Much of the day I was singing, "They grow an awful lot of coffee in Brazil!" Sometimes it was "grow" and other times it was "make." Sometimes I'd sing it silently but other times I'd belt it out. After awhile, my wife was singing it too.

The next morning, I returned to the bakery, and after exchanging good morning smiles and nods with the owner, I bought a cup of coffee, three fairly large rolls, and something that resembled a single serving size of pie.

"Three dollars," said the proprietor.

The following day, I got my cup of coffee and six of those golf ball sized things. When the owner asked for three dollars, I began to wonder if this was simply coincidental or not. I ordered something different on each of the next ten days. I changed the number of items, ordering as few as two and as many as seven. He always charged me three dollars. It worked for him and it worked for me. Whenever I was in the Brazilian bakery, life seemed simpler and easier. I think the mantra "keep things simple" is helpful with regard to being happy. Otherwise, it's easy to feel overworked, oversubscribed, overly stressed, and overwhelmed - all of which lead in the opposite direction of happiness.

There's probably something going on in your life now that is difficult, stressful, or discouraging. Think about it from a different vantage point. Take action to make it feel less complex and less confusing. Ask yourself, "How can I turn this situation into a Brazilian bakery for me?" Wake up and smell the coffee.