

## **RVing to Happiness**

**By Deborah Wheeler, PhD, MBA**

"One's destination is never a place, but rather a new way of looking at things".

--Henry Miller

If you are like me, you know that the best feeling is being on the road toward an adventure, just an hour or two away from home, with only the future and the open road in front of you. This passion for the road, for new experiences, and all that travel offers, makes me feel truly satisfied, happy and fulfilled. And for RVers who are passionate about the RV lifestyle, you know exactly what I mean. RV travel is a means to your feelings of happiness and times of joy. You are RVing your way to happiness.

What do you find makes you happiest? More than likely, you find that RVing contributes to your happiness. Factors like time with friends and family, seeking new experiences, pursuing hobbies, and seeing sights of interest are all part of the RV experience. Whatever your reason for RVing, you know that relationships with others and the call of the road are big parts of that experience. Research on happiness and increasing positive moods is more popular than ever thanks to the positive psychology movement. While we know it is not possible to maintain a sunny disposition for 24 hours of every day, researchers find that we can learn how to bring more meaning and satisfaction into our lives. This interest in happiness research can help us understand what really makes us tick and help us identify the ways we can be happier each day.

From dreaming about and planning your RV trip, to wading through the necessary packing and preparation phase, throughout the journey, and finally on to the longed-for destination itself, we all have ample opportunities to increase our happiness. No matter what phase of RV travel you find yourself in, happiness is right in front of you—if you just take the time to look.

## **RVing to Happiness**

### **Part 1: The Call of the Open Road of Happiness**

#### **Planning Your Trip**

RVing is a state of mind, as well as a planned adventure. Where are we going? Where will we stay? Can we access the sights we want to see? How long will we go? What route will we take? These questions can have their own challenges, far beyond a simple car trip. If these things are enjoyable for you, you are well on your way to RV happiness. But, if you are challenged to do these things, we can help.

Try to make the preparation phase all part of the fun.

**Give yourself plenty of time to plan**, make reservations ahead to simplify your life, then just let the winds carry you from there.

**Remaining flexible** and avoiding over-planning is the key to enjoying the trip long before you leave the driveway. Work on making the trip planning portion as enjoyable as the trip itself and you will find greater contentment in your journeys.

**Focus on what truly makes you happy** and you will be able to plan a trip that satisfies. If you are wise, you will make the trip planning phase part of the fun. Give yourself plenty of time to reflect on what you truly enjoy and what makes you happy to help you create a great trip plan.

· ***To make sure you fully enjoy planning your next RV trip, try the following tips recommended by both happiness researchers and travel experts. These are some of the tools, activities, and practices you can insert into your life and increase RV happiness today. Here's what you can do: Think about your last trip and ask yourself: What was the best part? What was the worst part? What do I really want out of my RV trips?***

- *Focus on what makes you happy and take some time to plan your next RV trip today.*
- *Review your planned itinerary and add activities you love, such as hiking or fine dining*
- *Plan quality vacations and select destinations of value.*
- *Pick destinations that focus on building relationships with other.*

*If you make the trip planning phase a part of the RV fun, you will discover RVing to happiness occurs long before your RV heads down the road.*

## **RVing to Happiness**

### **Part 2: Saving Your Sanity**

#### **Packing and Preparation**

There are times when the packing and preparation for RV trips can sometimes feel far from promoting peace and more like a full tactical assault. Between the household items, clothing, equipment, food, toys, and making your RV road-ready, it can feel that the packing and preparations are threatening to consume you.

Still, it is important that you make this phase of RV travel part of the fun. To do this, consider making a “necessary items” master checklist, get those items in the RV, then relax a bit. Use your master list for every trip, adding additional items as needed for the beach, ski resort, or special event. If you’ve forgotten something you can likely find it on the road. That’s what Wal-Mart stores are for, after all. Prepare for the trip as far in advance as possible to avoid becoming overwhelmed, collect the most critical items in one place before the trip so you don’t forget anything, and organize items to make the whole process go smoothly. Start collecting items in one place at least a few weeks ahead of the trip. Split up duties with others, when possible. Remember, you are supposed to be RVing toward happiness, not a mental breakdown. Consider ways to make this phase of the trip more fun next time, and save your physical and mental well-being in the process.

Here is a sample Master Trip List for any beach trip:

Swimsuits

Hats

Sunscreen

Towels

Chairs

Water toys

Beach blankets

Umbrella

Beach bags

#### **Now that you have planned and packed, where to find your happy?**

While research on how to increase positivity and develop happiness has increased lately due to the positive psychology movement, there is much more to be learned. Martin Seligman, founder of Positive Psychology, has been a key leader in furthering our understanding of happiness. As we all know from daily living experiences, not everyone is born happy. Just look around you. Who is happy and why? Do those who are the happiest have something to teach the rest of us? Are the happy ones just lucky to have inherited a cheerful personality or are their circumstances significantly different? Happiness researchers would tell us that prosperity, health, and physical attractiveness have very little to do with overall happiness.

Feeling happy, fulfilled, and satisfied is a critical component of well-being. Both philosophers and researchers have consistently found that a sense of contentment is critical to our well-being. Psychologists, in particular, are interested in studying the well-being of individuals. What makes us healthy mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and financially? If RVing makes you feel content, then you are likely contributing to your overall well-being. If there are aspects of RVing that cause you stress, you may need to identify ways to reduce those particular stressors.

Seeing new places, surrounding ourselves in great environments, spending time with loved ones, enjoying spectacular scenery, and relaxing along the way are all components of good physical and mental health. And all of them are important stops on the way to RV happiness.

*To make sure you maintain your sanity during the next packing and preparation phase leading up to your next RV trip, try the following tips recommended by both happiness researchers and travel experts. These are some of the tools, activities, and practices you can insert into your life and increase happiness today. Here’s what you can do:*

- *Avoid putting additional pressure on yourself.*
- *Develop a master checklist of items to bring on every trip.*
- *Add items as needed based on your RV destination and activities.*

- *Prepare for trips as far in advance as possible.*
- *Collect must-have and critical items in one place before the trip.*
- *Collect information on your iPad or put it in a folder to bring with you on the trip.*

If you make the packing and preparation a pleasant part of your RV trip, you will discover RVing to happiness occurs long before your RV heads down the road.

## **RVing to Happiness**

### **Part 3: Are We There Yet?**

#### **The Journey**

When you do encounter those times on the journey when the roads are closed, the RV needs unexpected maintenance, or you find yourself in a hurry to get to the fun, take time to re-think your journey. Don't let the challenges make you unhappy or distract you from the joys of RVing. All road trips have challenges. When these challenges arise, consider the happy circumstances that can arise from change. They may try our patience, but they can also be a big part of learning how to RV to happiness. Consider yourself lucky and fortunate to be on the road, headed to a great destination.

Many people attribute their happiness to good luck or fortune. Whatever its origin, we want more of it. Some researchers believe that our actions determine 40% of our happiness. They suggest that we can and do control much of our own happiness. Efforts to boost our happiness can come from pleasant activities (such as meditation), cultivating positive states (such as stress management), and engaging in positive relationships (such as RV communities). These actions have been shown to promote health, quality of life, and overall well-being.

As they say, "It's the journey, not the destination". And RVing, more than any other type of travel, is as much about the journey as the selected and aimed-for destination. All the time spent between your driveway and the chosen destination is a journey worth making. Do you have that perfect RV trip destination in mind already? If you do, then you are already excited about the journey to come. But, there may be times you have a destination in mind and find yourself with a foot on the gas pedal headed to meet the floor. Most certainly, a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, but it is not necessarily the most fun. Remember to stop more often, get out of the RV more and smell the wild roses, pick a remote trail to explore, minimize freeways on the GPS device once in a while, pick a small town to explore, or seek out the world's largest paper cup, just because it is on the way to your destination.

*To make sure you fully enjoy your RV journey, try the following tips recommended by both happiness researchers and travel experts.*

- *Remember to slow down and enjoy the journey part of the experience.*
- *Avoid stress-filled agendas and take time to stop and smell the roses.*
- *Focus on important relationships along the way.*
- *Post symbols of happiness in your RV such as pictures of favorite trips, loved ones, or souvenirs.*
- *Give yourself reminders to take frequent breaks.*
- *Look out for and plan to make stops along the way.*

If you enjoy your journey fully, you will discover RVing to happiness occurs long before your RV heads down the road.

## **RVing to Happiness**

### **Part 4: You are Here**

#### **The Destination**

Do you select destinations that make you happy? Whether it is historical sites, a new state or city, going to the lakes, rivers or oceans, visiting family members, or just seeking a new stretch of road, this is the joy of RVing. The joy of the open road, being at a campsite, cooking meals together, sleeping in a new locale, are all the ultimate bliss for an RVer. When the destinations meet, exceed, and delight you, there can be nothing better. A pleasant surprise and an unexpected treasure can often be found around the next bend in the road. But, sometimes you may find that your destination isn't all that you thought it would be or all that it was advertised to be. You may find that the weather does not cooperate with your best laid plans or you may find too late that

RV access is limited at your destination. While these things may temporarily diminish your enthusiasm and dampen the joy of anticipation for the destination, it does not have to impact you continuing to RV toward happiness.

If you find yourself unpleasantly surprised, try to “go with the flow”. Changes will occur. Stuff happens. Accept that the road is not always a smooth one on your way to happiness and you will already have achieved a small piece of that longed-for happiness. Your thoughts and actions during tough times will greatly affect your RVing to happiness. Lose your cool, let your frustrations swell, and you will likely feel the stress. Take positive steps to deal with setbacks and you will feel a sense of control in uncontrollable situations.

In one happiness article by the Pew Research organization entitled “Are We Happy Yet?”, it was found that:

- People who often feel rushed are less happy than those who don't rush.
- Non-city folks are a bit happier than city folks.
- Warm weather seekers are a bit happier than people who live in colder climates.

Does this list describe you or one of your fellow RVers? Are you happier than your fellow campers because you have learned to slow down, escape the hustle and bustle, and seek lovely climates? The answer, according to researchers: Very likely.

*To make sure you fully enjoy your RV destination, try the following tips recommended by both happiness researchers and travel experts. These are some of the tools, activities, and practices you can insert into your life and increase happiness today. Here's what you can do:*

- *Remain flexible and be willing to accept change.*
- *Choose destinations that make you happy.*
- *Plan ahead for alternative destinations and activities should your original plans not work out.*
- *Let your personal feelings of happiness guide you.*
- *Select destinations that help you improve your personal relationships.*
- *Aim for destinations that let you develop new social connections.*

If you select your destination carefully and plan for pleasant alternatives, you will discover RVing to happiness occurs long before your RV heads down the road.

## **RVing to Happiness**

### **Part 5: Relationships**

Why do we find travel so appealing? What is it about us that finds happiness through travel, especially RV travel? Researchers studying the topic suggest that our happiness must be a combination of our genetics, lifestyle, and our own efforts to do the things that make us happy. For all of you RVing your way to happiness, there are lessons to be learned along the way.

Relationships are part of the RV lifestyle. Whether you are bonding with family members, meeting up with friends old and new, or seeking out new relationships, RVing is a great way to develop those relationships. You are likely to find your deepest relationships are strengthened and you are able to connect with other like-minded individuals who are passionate about the RV lifestyle. Relationships are a significant component of well-being and happiness. Even when things don't go well in relationships, there is something to be learned. As psychologist Carl Jung stated, "Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves." Positive and healthy relationships are a key to our sense of well-being, enjoyment in life, and overall happiness.

*To make sure you fully enjoy your relationships while RVing, try the following tips recommended by both happiness researchers and travel experts. These are some of the tools, activities, and practices you can insert into your life and increase happiness today. Here's what you can do:*

- *Involve the most important people in your life in the RV planning.*
- *Talk with the whole family about the importance of well-being.*
- *Remember to focus on people, not just destinations.*
- *Spend your time and money on building experiences with those you love.*

By focusing on relationships, you will discover RVing to happiness occurs long before your RV heads down the road.

## **RVing to Happiness**

### **Part 6: The Data**

According to Carlin Flora's Psychology Today article, The Pursuit of Happiness, we are currently in the midst of a "happiness frenzy". She reports that in 2008 there were almost 4,000 books published on happiness. As she states, happiness is not about feeling glee or smiling all of the time. It's not about eliminating bad days or changing your personality preferences. It is not about smiley faces and cheery facades. Instead, it is about contentment, living with grace, lifelong learning, and feeling satisfied.

The "golden nuggets" from her analysis of happiness studies are summarized here:

- Some People Are Born Happy
- You Can Develop Happiness
- Getting What You Want Doesn't Bring Lasting Happiness
- Pain Is a Part of Happiness
- Mindfulness Brings Happiness
- Happiness Lies in the Chase
- Some Money Can Buy Some Happiness
- Happiness is Relative
- Options Make Us Miserable
- Happiness Is Other People
- Do Your Happiness Homework
- Happiness Is Embracing Your Natural Coping Style
- Happiness Is Living Your Values

Ultimately, happiness is complex. Therefore, she concludes happiness is all of these things... and so much more.

As Flora succinctly states, "The state of happiness is not really a state at all. It's an ongoing personal experiment". This means, if you are reading this, you are likely to be a person who is already actively engaged in your own personal experiment of happiness: you are RVing your way to happiness.

*To make sure you are RVing your way to Happiness, try the following tips recommended by both happiness researchers and travel experts. These are some of the tools, activities, and practices you can insert into your life and increase happiness today. Here's what you can do:*

- *Read more on happiness and well-being topics.*
- *Visit happiness websites such as the one at the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania: <http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu>*
- *Bring reading materials on happiness for the RV trip.*
- *Eliminate a focus on material "things" and focus on the people and activities you relish.*
- *Donate your money and time to worthy causes.*
- *Start engaging in your own Personal Happiness Project today!*

By focusing on the data on happiness, you will discover RVing to happiness occurs long before your RV heads down the road.

## **RVing to Happiness**

### **Part 7: Putting it all Together**

What factors have most influenced your happiness throughout life? What influenced your decision to buy your first RV? What was it that motivated you to add the RVing lifestyle into your "personal happiness toolkit"?

What is it about your personality that revels in the wanderlust that arises every so often?

Americans inherently feel a certain connectedness to the "pursuit of happiness". But, not everyone feels equally happy. Some of us are just happier than others. While happiness studies do indicate that a comfortable amount of money to meet basic living requirements is a key factor in happiness, it is certainly not the most important factor. Once basic needs are met, more money does not make individuals happier. And more money certainly does not "cause" happiness to occur in individuals.

One happiness researcher, Ed Diener, known as "Dr. Happy", found in his research that a third of Americans

responded that they were “very happy” and the majority of individuals identified themselves as “pretty happy”. Similar findings have been found in other developed countries. He also found that individuals who faced horrible or extreme situations only had their happiness temporarily disrupted and returned to their prior states of happiness.

He also found that social environments and external factors often had relatively little to do with an individual’s happiness. Socioeconomic conditions and religion, for example, accounted for no more than 3% difference in levels of happiness. On the other hand, in a study of twins over a decade, 50-80% difference was associated with genetic variation and some heritability of happiness. But, does this mean that we can’t impact our happiness at all or we just can’t make ourselves happier?

Happiness is heavily influenced by life events such as work promotions and relationship problems, and, general psychological traits such as self-esteem, optimism, a sense of belonging, and the capacity to love. Many of these things are outside the reach of scientific measure or even outside the individual’s control. As a result, they are difficult to measure and study scientifically. You can certainly think of your own life and personality to understand the challenges involved in studying factors of happiness for each person.

RVing to Happiness is about the relationships we develop and strengthen while RVing, the joy we have in planning and anticipating the next RV trip, and, the delight and pleasure we have in all the positive things that accompany a great RV trip. The enjoyment and appreciation of the RV is far more than the lovely object itself. It is the joy that accompanies us as we are RVing to Happiness.

*My RVing to Happiness Philosophy: You can be happy anywhere, but especially in your RV.*

## **Sidebars/Mini-Articles**

### **Interest in Happiness is Increasing**

Research on happiness has included the Happiness Initiative Index for the United States. Many other individuals and organizations are interested in learning more about happiness. The interest is spreading

worldwide with multiple indexes across the globe, including the UK’s Well-being Index, China’s Happiness Index, and the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index. There are also:

- government programs such as the Local Wellbeing Project
- movements such as Action for Happiness and Delivering Happiness
- university studies such as UC Berkeley’s School for Wellbeing
- research centers such as The Happiness Institute
- think-tanks such as NEF’s Centre for Wellbeing
- initiatives such as the World Database of Happiness and Mappiness.

### **The Happiest Nations in the World**

According to 24/7 Wall St., in an examination of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s report on life satisfaction, economic prosperity, health and a strong social support network continue to correspond highly with happiness in developed countries. According to the study, the United States fails to make the top 10 of happiest nations in the world, while countries like Australia, Canada, Israel and all of the Scandinavian nations do. Based on their findings, the happiest nations are:

1. Denmark
2. Norway
3. Netherlands
4. Switzerland
5. Austria
6. Israel
7. Finland
8. Australia
9. Canada
10. Sweden

## Lottery Winning Effects on Happiness

The following 2006 report by Statisticbrain.com includes data compiled from 34 national lottery winners (8 Male, 26 Female), with an average age of 46.

The Effects of Winning the Lottery on Happiness:

Percent of lottery winners who are happier after winning= 55%

Percent of lottery winners with no effect on happiness= 43%

Percent of lottery winners who are less happy= 2%

Percent of winners who's family claims to be happier= 58%

Percent of winners who's family claims to be less happy= 37%

## The Happiest Professions

According to a 2011 study reported by Statisticbrain.com, the following jobs were found to be the happiest:

| <u>Rank</u> | <u>Occupation</u>   | <u>Happiness Index</u> |
|-------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1           | Clergyman           | 2.66                   |
| 2           | Actor               | 2.51                   |
| 3           | Architect           | 2.47                   |
| 4           | Firefighter         | 2.44                   |
| 5           | Police officer      | 2.40                   |
| 6           | Physician           | 2.39                   |
| 7           | Teacher             | 2.38                   |
| 7           | Economist           | 2.38                   |
| 7           | Real estate agent   | 2.38                   |
| 10          | Electrical engineer | 2.37                   |
| 10          | College professor   | 2.37                   |

## Factors of Travel Happiness

The articles "Reliable Findings from Happiness Research" and "Decoding Keys to a Healthy Life" found some interesting results related to happiness. Based on their findings, you can start RVing your way to happiness today by investing in yourself, your relationships, and your experiences. The authors suggest that:

- 1) You can increase your happiness level. Although the exact level will vary from individual to individual, much of our happiness is within our power.
- 2) While money doesn't buy happiness, donating that money to a positive cause does increase happiness. Those who give money away appear to sustain greater levels of happiness over time than those who don't.
- 3) Relationships are a key factor in long-term happiness. Strong social connections with others are important to our own happiness. The more of these you have, the happier you will be.
- 4) Happiness is based in our experiences, not stuff. People who spend their time and money on doing things together report higher levels of happiness than those who buy things.
- 5) The quality of vacations in your life is a better indicator of late-life happiness than income.

## Further Reading on Happiness

What Makes Us Happy

<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/06/what-makes-us-happy/307439/4/>

Authentic Happiness

<http://www.authentic-happiness.sas.upenn.edu/Default.aspx>

The Geography of Bliss: One Grump's Search for the Happiest Places in the World

<http://www.amazon.com/Geography-Bliss-Grumps-Search-Happiest/dp/0446580260>

Alaska Trip Helps Heal Father and Son in 'Backcast'

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16744336>

## Happiness Questionnaires

Develop insights into yourself and the world around you through these scientifically tested questionnaires, surveys, and scales.

<http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/Default.aspx>

## Dr. Deb's Dictionary of RV Happiness

### Happiness

hap•pi•ness [hap-ee-nis]

Noun

The quality or state of being happy

Synonyms: Pleasure, joy, exhilaration, bliss, contentedness, delight, enjoyment, satisfaction. Happiness, bliss, contentment, and felicity imply an active or passive state of pleasure or pleasurable satisfaction.

**Happiness** results from the possession or attainment of what one considers good: the happiness of RV travel.

**Bliss** is unalloyed happiness or supreme delight: the bliss of the perfect RV trip.

**Contentment** is a peaceful kind of happiness in which one rests without desires, even though every wish may not have been gratified: contentment in one's RV surroundings.

**Felicity** is a formal word for happiness of an especially fortunate or intense kind: wishing you felicity in your RV lifestyle.

## TAKE 5

### Happiness Studies Find:

1. People who often feel rushed are less happy than those who don't rush.
2. Non-city folks are a bit happier than city folks.
3. Warm weather seekers are a bit happier than people who live in colder climates.
4. Married people who have children are no happier than those who don't have children.
5. Pet owners are no happier than those without pets; Dog owners are not happier than cat owners.

### The Happiest Places on the Planet:

1. Denmark
2. Norway
3. Netherlands
4. Switzerland
5. Austria

Read more: "The Happiest Countries in the World" at 24/7 Wall St. <http://247wallst.com/2012/05/22/the-happiest-countries-in-the-world-2/#ixzz28LsSsoYG>

### Happiness by the Numbers:

1. 4,000 books were published on happiness in 2008
2. More than 100 U.S. universities have positive psychology programs that include happiness studies
3. The Authentic Happiness website has more than 2 million users from around the world
4. Total annual revenue from professional happiness coaching worldwide is now nearly \$2 billion dollars
5. There are more than 17 million Google results for the search term "happiness workshop"

### RVing to Happiness--Great Destinations for Relationship-Building:

1. Couples: Sedona, Arizona
2. Families: Everglades National Park
3. The Kids: Walt Disney World
4. Multiple Generations: Grand Canyon National Park
5. Teens: Surf lessons in Orange County, California

## **The Girl Scouts' Science of Happiness Badge: Five Steps to Happiness**

The Girl Scouts of the USA teamed with Martin E.P. Seligman, PhD, to develop a "Science of Happiness" Badge. To earn the badge, Girl Scouts in sixth, seventh and eighth grades must create and implement a month-long strategy for increasing their own happiness. Some happiness activities for the adolescent girls include:

- 1) Make a collage about someone meaningful to them
- 2) Write a list of things that make them feel good
- 3) Create a family "bliss box" of memories and souvenirs
- 4) Keep a journal about the happiness activities and their plans for future projects
- 5) Identify happiness interventions and test them

### **RVing to Happiness: The Survey Says**

National statistics on RV customers indicate that:

- 1) According to RV association estimates, nationwide there are as many as 30 million RV enthusiasts, including RV renters.
- 2) U.S. ownership of recreation vehicles (RVs) has reached record levels with one in 12 vehicle-owning households now owning an RV.
- 3) Those under age 35 posted the largest gains in RV ownership rates.
- 4) Nearly nine percent of U.S. households headed by 35-to-54 year olds own an RV, only slightly exceeding the 8.6 percent ownership rates of those 55 and over.
- 5) Two-thirds of current owners plan to purchase another RV.

### **A Personal Happiness Project**

Each one of us is currently conducting our own personal happiness project as we move through life. The Happiness-project.com suggests that there are several important questions to ask ourselves about our happiness. Explore these prompting questions to learn more about what truly makes you happy.

- 1) What makes you feel good? What gives you joy, energy, fun?
- 2) What makes you feel bad? What brings you anger, guilt, boredom, dread?
- 3) What makes you feel right? What values do you want your life to reflect?
- 4) How can you build an atmosphere of growth where you learn, explore, build, teach, and help?
- 5) What resolutions will you make? What are the specific and concrete actions you will take to increase happiness?

### **Engage in the Happy Conversation: RV Survey**

Take the survey below and tell us how you are currently RVing to Happiness:

#### **What Makes You Happiest About RVing?**

- Getting away more often
- Spending quality time with family
- Escaping stress
- Traveling more inexpensively
- Flexibility of travel

#### **Who Makes Your RV Trip Happy?**

- Family
- Friends
- Pets

#### **Where Do You Travel to Find RV Happiness?**

- Close to home
- In the same state where I live
- Anywhere in the United States
- Around the world

#### **Tell us more! How Do You Find Happiness RVing?**