

ARE YOU HAPPY?

Street interviews on what makes life worth living.

By: Atdhe Trepça

For Gjergj and Bes.

Author's Note

In 2018, I made six films in six months.

I didn't have a portfolio. I didn't have a clear path. I just knew that if I kept making things, something would eventually sharpen. Five of those films didn't work. One of them did. By the end of that run, I found a rhythm. I understood how lens choice impacted the viewer and how to work with actors. I wasn't great yet, but I was finally getting good enough to ask a harder question.

Around that time, I was deep into cinema vérité. I was digging through its history, trying to understand how filmmakers had once dared to let life itself become the story. That search led me to *Chronique d'un été* (Chronicle of a Summer), often cited as the first cinema vérité film. When I watched it, I was struck how it organically followed real people along their daily life -- but it kept me glued to my seat the entire time.

One question from that film stayed with me: *Êtes-vous heureux ?* (Are you happy?)

That question sparked the real idea.

What if I made a film where real life provided the structure. Where people were the actors, their words were the script, and every decision the characters made was simply what naturally happened next.

The ambition wasn't realism; it was cinema. To see if truth, when listened to closely enough, could carry the same weight as fiction.

That single question, are you happy?, led me to quit my job and travel across the country. The problem was that when I first started, I couldn't get out of my car.

Not because I didn't know what to shoot, but because I was afraid of speaking to strangers. Eventually, I opened the door in Springdale, Utah. I walked up to someone. I asked the question.

The months that followed that moment were more surprising, more emotional, more imaginative than anything I could have planned. Conversations twisted. People revealed themselves. Life refused to behave neatly. My job became less about directing and more about paying attention. About capturing moments in a way that showed how connected we all are, how we're all part of the same invisible story.

Two months later, I tried to turn what I had captured into a trailer I could sell as a documentary.

I tricked a film executive to dinner. When he arrived, my laptop was already open. A pair of headphones sat on the table. We ate mostly in silence while he watched. He said "wow" a few times. When the video ended, he closed the laptop, looked at me, and said, "Wow—you actually did it."

We finished dinner. I went home convinced something had worked.

A few days later, I got an email saying they were going to pass.

I was stuck. No job and a hard drive full of footage I was almost too ashamed to revisit, because I assumed my theory had failed.

Around that time, my brother showed me a TikTok he had posted: him jumping into a pool with his clothes on. It had around 50,000 views.

After some time away from the footage, I went bac and remade the trailer. This time, I wasn't trying to edit something a film executive would like or a financier would find appealing. I was cutting a trailer for a movie I wanted to watch. Suddenly, the film began to reveal itself.

I shared that trailer with my family. It spread quietly. Relatives reached out. People at parties said, "I saw that thing you made." I didn't fully understand what it meant, but I felt momentum.

Then I posted three short clips from the footage on TikTok. One after another.

A few hours later, each had about 300 views.

Nine hundred people. "That's a theater," I thought. "A big one."

I uploaded more videos. Now there were 20,000 people watching. "An arena."

Then one clip reached seven million. 7,000,000 people.

That was 2020.

Six years later, *Are You Happy?* reaches roughly fifteen million people a month, with over five million following the project. The documentary has been released for a few months and, at the time of writing this, has been seen by about ten thousand people.

To be honest, I don't know if everyone gets it.

But I get it. And I enjoy it. And that's enough.

This book exists because the film couldn't hold everything. It's a collection of some of my favorite interviews.

The greatest gift of this project has been making it with my family. They supported me through uncertainty, obsession, and long stretches of not knowing if any of this would work. Together, we made something I'll carry with me for the rest of my life.

This book is an extension of that journey. A place for the moments that kept unfolding, even after the film found its form.



Behind the scenes photo. Here we have Aster (leftmost) our Location Sound Recordist, my brother Dibran (rightmost) who served as the Assistant Director throughout the production, my mom (back-left) who watched the van with the film equipment and did her own are you happy interviews on her phone, and Felicia my now-wife (back-right) who helped coordinating production and get release forms from everyone we interviewed.



Me driving the production that brought myself, the crew, rolls of celluloid film and filming equipment across the northwest. I put all the money I had in my bank account into this film. I would do it all over again.



As luck would have it, in the middle of filming the Are You Happy documentary we received a call from Burberry (the fashion brand) to shoot an advertisement for them. I flew the crew to London after we filmed in the US. Here is John our camera assistant and a local sound recordist we hired in London because Aster couldn't make it to London at the time.



It was important to me that we shoot the documentary on 16mm film. So this is me, Dustin Supencheck (cinematographer extraordinaire), and the camera. The camera is the Aaton XTR Prod -- a legendary 16mm documentary camera designed for vérité shooting.



This is right before we were about to set sail on the documentary. My friend Ryan Glovna designed all the shirts I wore throughout the documentary and this is a picture of his wife dropping off the shirts to me.

You can purchase shirts designed by him here: <https://www.etsy.com/shop/ryanglovna>

ARE YOU HAPPY?



I'm beyond happy, brother. Beyond happy. Because I've received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit dwells in me. Therefore, I bear fruits of the spirit: kindness, gentleness, self-control, and it all is powered by love. The love of Christ in me, who dwells mightily. I did 20 years on the streets. Conformed to this world. Stealing, robbing, illuminati, Freemasons. I chased women... wild imaginations. And then Jesus touched my life and set me free. Why do bad things happen in the world? Because He has faith in his creation. Because He has faith in you. He has faith in His son. He breathed his life into you, and he knows that that part that lives inside you can overcome every bit of this world. You no longer have to endure anything. I'm so grateful for this moment. Whatever's happening here.



Of course—why not? My job is to make these students happy. Every day I'm out here wishing them a good day. Here's how I look at it: if a student is having a bad day and woke up on the wrong side of the bed or something, and just one person said, "Have a good day," or "I hope your day is good," then maybe when they get into school, they'll be just a little bit better—and the day will go just a little bit better for them, and it might make them smile.



Yes, I am. I'm still alive. But I'm getting ready to die. And I got friends that are waiting for me. My one message to the world is: Love one another. I tell you, there ain't nothing that can beat that.



Absolutely, 100%. I'm happy when I'm giving back. That's what this little lemonade booth is. We make it with a lot of love, all natural, and when the community comes by--kids, families, everybody--and they tell me they love it... that fills me up. Before I hand anyone a cup, I always try to start the same way: "How are you doing today?" Not "What do you want?" Just--how are you. Then, "How can we help you?" That's part of it. People don't always get asked that. The truth is, lemonade started as my therapy. There was a time when life felt sour. A really down moment. And it sounds funny, but I connected with lemons--because they're sour, and then you add what you add, you take your time, and they can turn sweet. I needed something that could bring me back to myself. Lemonade gave me purpose. It gave me my passion back.



Not really. Life is rough sometimes. I got punched in my eye. Actually, my husband did this to me, but he's never done anything like this before. And we lost our stepson to a drug overdose before COVID started. And it's been really hard on us. And he's been drinking a lot. And so this isn't... This doesn't sum me up, because it's never happened to me before. It's Friday and I have time to heal up. Come back on Monday and hopefully it'll be a lot better. I do have a dentist appointment tomorrow which is not any fun. Can't wear sunglasses into the dentists office.



Yeah, I'm happy. Christ is in my life. That's where it starts for me. It's in the simple things--just breathing, waking up, seeing another day. It's in my children, and everything I've been blessed with. I'm most grateful for my kids. My kids. I have three boys. Two of them are autistic, and my youngest is gifted, so it's two different worlds in one home. Each one is different. All three of them are unique, and I get to be their mama. Being a mom is what's taught me the most--especially being a mom to special needs kids. It makes you learn a whole lot, whether you want to or not. It pushes you into places where you don't get to sit down and wonder if you're capable. You just keep chugging along, because no one else is going to do it for you. And then one day you look back and you realize, oh--I actually did it.



Yes--I'm happy. I say that because I feel fulfilled in the parts of my life that matter to me: my marriage, my work, my social life. But I didn't always feel that way. Therapy is what got me through the rough parts. I started after I had cancer. I didn't think it would carry this far into my life, but it did. It gave me somewhere to put what I was carrying. I really believe everybody needs somebody to talk to. I'm in remission now. It was 2014. If I got it again, it would be a new case. When I look back at the times I wasn't happy, a lot of it comes back to choices--what I picked, what I accepted, what I stayed in, and then the aftermath of that. Sometimes you don't feel the weight of a choice until you're living in it. And the older I get, the more I feel this: inside, we're all the same. Everybody has struggles. Everybody has issues. All this division--none of it changes what's true underneath. We're the same inside.



I am happy. I was just thinking about it today--how, in terms of my life, I'm doing exactly what I wanted to do. For a long time, I didn't feel connected to what I was doing. And when you're not connected, you start to lose that sense of purpose. It feels like you're not really leading the life you pictured for yourself--you're just moving through it. Now, outside of friends and family, a huge source of my happiness is what I'm doing with my life. The projects I'm working on. The job I have. Even something as simple as doing this. It makes me proud. I didn't always have that. I worked a job for about six years that paid well, but I wasn't necessarily happy. I stayed because it was easier to stay. I think leaving that job is exactly why I'm so happy now.



I am happy. I have a 21-year-old daughter, and then God gave us a son. He was a miracle baby all by himself. My wife had a lot of complications the last several years. There was a moment it looked like she miscarried during the pregnancy -- she bled out, right there in front of her job, and ran to the hospital. And God sent an angel in the form of a nurse. That nurse told my wife the Lord spoke to her that morning: my wife was going to come in, and not to worry -- the baby was going to be okay. After all that blood, after what looked like the end, he was still there. He's two years old now. I remember a church service where the preacher was talking about having kids. Later I went to him and asked him to pray for me -- I told him I wanted a son. The first thing out of his mouth was, "God gonna give it to you." And literally a month later, my wife was pregnant. That's the kind of God I know.



So my my sister passed away. She was army intelligence, and it was a probable suicide. You know, the the torture guidelines were bent a little bit. And then she was stationed in a place where they were doing some tough stuff to the prisoners and we know that she didn't like that. For anybody who's reading this, that is have is having those thoughts: we need you. I work a lot in entrepreneurship and in education and the mantra I repeat is: we need everybody. We need everybody's creativity, everyone's problem solving. We need everyone's entrepreneurship. We need everyone's humor. We need everyone's innovation, everyone's ideas. We need everyone. We don't know how, we don't know when. And the other thing is like you are not your thoughts. Just because I have a thought cross my mind, doesn't mean I have to act on it. And, you can pause, and hold on, relax and everything will be all right.



Hell yeah, I'm happy. Why not? My hubby just had a triple bypass, and I'm still here. We're still here. Hell yeah. They put in one pig valve and one cow valve. That's a sentence I never thought I'd say out loud about the person I love, but here we are--walking around with a whole new appreciation for ordinary things. It taught me I'm here for a reason. I know that. I can feel it. What it is, they haven't told me yet. Life doesn't hand you a little card that explains it. But I'm here for a reason. If I'm saying anything at all, it's this: try to be happy if you can. Get outside more often. Get up and get outside. Move your butt. Sitting in your house playing video games all day--no. It doesn't do you any good. It doesn't solve a friggin' thing. Right now, I'm happy because I've got my honey, and I'm getting on the bus. Route 255 to New Haven.



Yeah, I'm happy. Because I'm alive. I had a three-and-a-half-month nap, and it sucked. A coma. When I woke up in the hospital and realized everything I had was gone, that was a time I struggled with happiness. But it was a stupid mistake on my part. I didn't wear a seatbelt. Auto accident. I opened the passenger door of the car with my head. Cracked my skull. I was laid up in the hospital for two and a half years. Three and a half months of that, I wasn't even here. So when I look around now, I can't ignore what this is. Just a free place to be, you know--this country. Every night you turn on the news and you see how bad it is all throughout the world. Yeah, we've got our little problems, but it's nothing compared to what it can be. I know how fast it can all disappear. All I can really say is: enjoy life while you can, because nothing is a guarantee. Just be happy. Just be content.



Yes. I'm happy. I'm from Mississippi. I'm a country girl. I worked for a long time, about forty years, as a CNA in a nursing home. I dealt with patients and peoples every day. I think that's part of why I'm so happy--I've been around people my whole life, and I've seen what it means when somebody shows up for you. I'm retired now. I'm grateful I made it to this part. If I had anything to say, it would be to be there for each other. Help people. Help the homeless. Help old people who really need it. And get into church and find out about God. That matters to me. That's how I know happiness.



No. I can't really be happy unless my world feels like it's how it's supposed to be. And this isn't how it's supposed to be. There's something off at the core of it. Like nuclear energy -- like dark magic. Something that throws the whole thing out of balance. And when the balance is gone, it doesn't just sit out there in the streets or in the air. It gets into people. It interacts with everyone's souls. It touches everything. So then where is inner peace supposed to come from? You can't find it when there isn't peace. You can't find it when it's already gone. And it's been gone for a long time. Thousands of years. We've been on a decline since-- since, like the Romans.



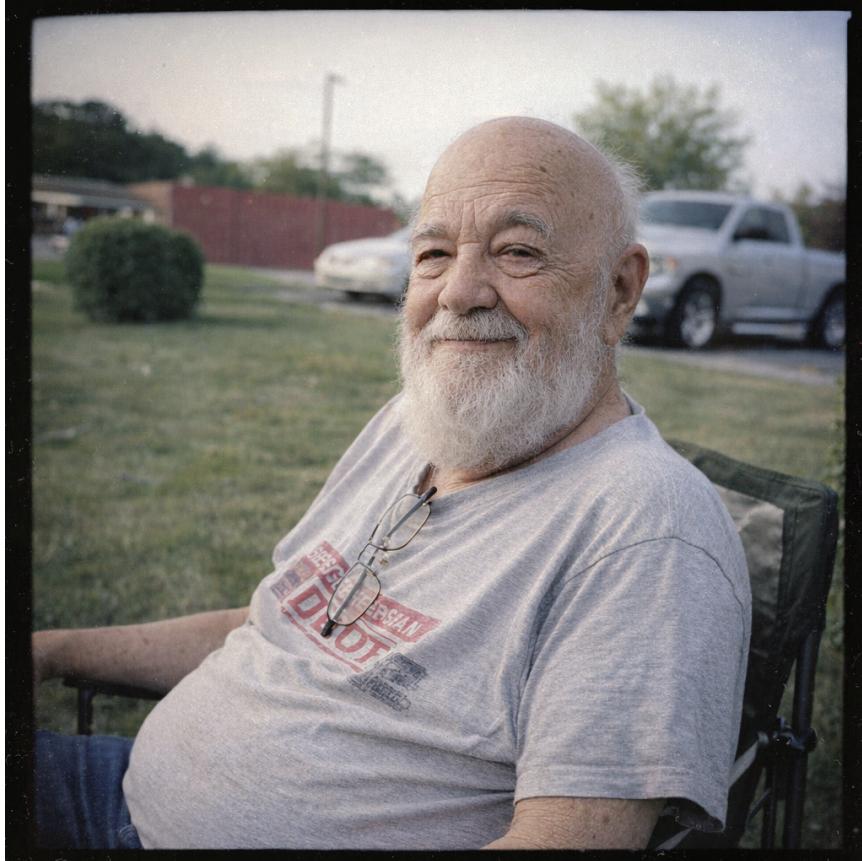
Yeah. I'm happy. I'm the happiest motherf***er there is. I'm excited just to be here. A day above ground is a good day. Any day above ground is a f***ing great day. What makes me happy is me... and my girl. I'm in love. I can't help it. I love this one as*****. She's an as*****. A major as*****. A stupid b****. And I love her. Oh my God, I love her. We've been together for years. That's how I met her, too--she was a f***ing a**hole right from the start. I held the door open for her one day. Then I came out to see her and I was like, "Yo, let me get a kiss." She kissed me, then she goes, "I got a boyfriend." Wild. So I still persuaded more kisses out of her. That's my girl. Right now she's not here with me--she was a resident at -redacted- and then she left there and went to a program. But that's still my girl. I'm not gonna stray. I love that girl. That's it. That's what I've got. I love that girl, and I'm above ground today.



Yes, I'm happy. It's a vague question, but it's also very specific. Today, it's a beautiful day out. It's a nice day to have lungs that work and feet that walk. When you're in the pits of despair, gratitude is what you've got to cling to. It was pouring earlier, and now the sun's out. I don't maintain happiness like it's a straight line. It's not linear. I learned that through a lot of pain. Pain is inevitable. Everyone's going to experience that. But suffering--staying there--feels like a choice. Growth usually doesn't happen where everything is consistent and easy. Change is typically how that works. And the more you experience, the more you endure, the more empathetic you become.



Oh, yeah. I'm happy. God in my life. That's the first thing. And waking up every day and seeing life. I been homeless over a year. What keeps me going is my kids. I got two. One is 15 and one is 22. My daughter's in college. I'm not going to lie, I was on drugs too. I'm in recovery. People think because I still smile, nothing ever happened to me. I was in a relationship for 18 years. Beat up and everything. I put up with it for 18 years. I still love him. It ain't about the abuse--it's the good times and the bad times all mixed up. I can admit my part too, with my drinking and all that. But now we just friends. I been single for two years. I hear my grandma in my head all the time--don't look back in the past, keep going forward. Don't worry about people who don't like you. Because when you're down once, you'll come back up. That's really it. I keep my head up, and I don't look back.



I'm a little sad. I lost my wife. So no, not happy. Are you taping me? Ok. All I can tell you is this: cherish every minute, because it all comes to a tragic end.



I am happy, I feel. But my definition of happiness isn't really yours. It's not just family or friends, it's more a state of mind. When you turn 50, and I'm in my 50s, just opening your eyes in the morning makes you happy. I have arthritis. So a day where I can go all day--like today--and I don't have any flare-ups, that makes me happy. Being healthy makes me happy, especially because I was sick last week. Sometimes it's as simple as being outside, feeling the air, and realizing I'm still here. And I can watch my child just be the best she can be. She's exceptional, by the way. That makes me happy. A lot of people think money makes you happy, or having a lot of things makes you happy. I've had a lot of things. I've had money. That's not shi*. It really isn't.



Yeah--we're happy. It's each other. That's the honest answer. We were classmates, and we met fourteen years ago. We've been together almost thirteen. How did we know? I don't have a clean explanation for it. You just know. It was energy. It was interest. It was immediate--like the first day, I was already locked in. I knew it. Life hasn't been soft the whole time, though. When I was seventeen, I had a big health scare. That's still one of the hardest things I've carried. But it's also the moment that made me fall even deeper in love, because he didn't flinch. He stayed. He was my rock through it, right there beside me, steady when I wasn't. When things get heavy, I don't pretend I'm strong all on my own. We're so in sync it's almost embarrassing. One brain. We'll say the same thing without trying.



Yeah--right now, I am. It's my birthday today. I'm about to go to the beach with my friends, and in this moment it feels easy to say I'm happy. It feels like I'm in a good place, and I can feel new changes coming in--good stuff, the kind that makes you look up and notice where you're standing. I also know it doesn't stay like this in a straight line. Progress isn't linear. It ebbs and flows. There are days when things feel light, and then there are days when you hit a rut and it feels like you forgot what "good" even felt like. So when it's good, I try to remember that I'll find my way back here again. And when it's not, I try to hold onto the fact that the good moments do come back. Eventually, it turns around.



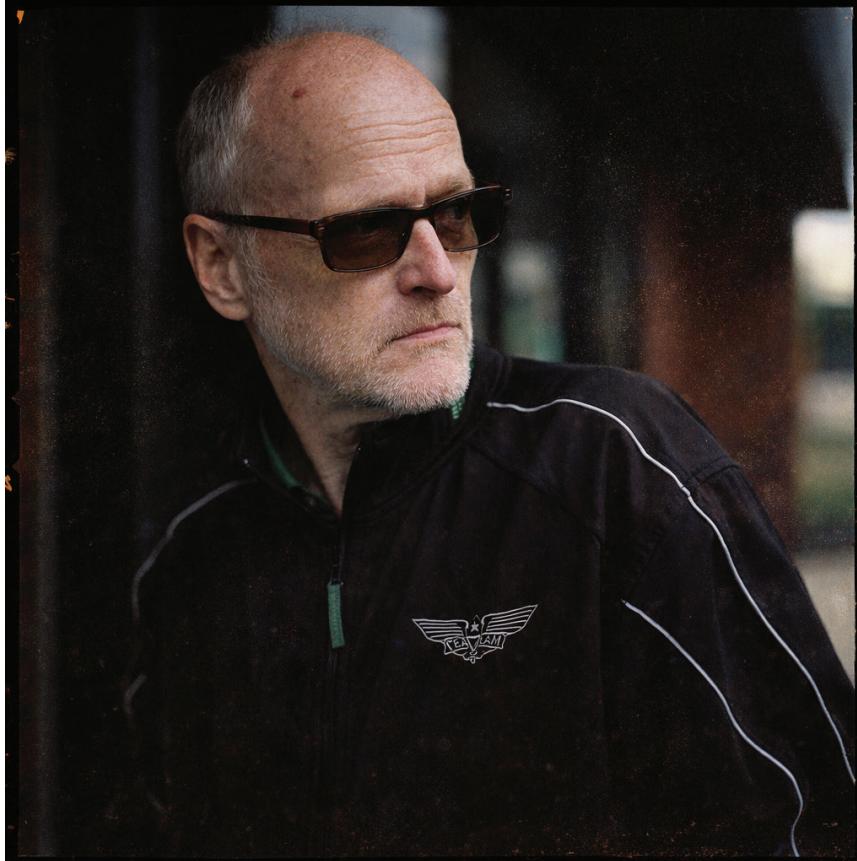
No--right now I'm not happy. I'm melancholy. I'm standing here with grief in my coat pockets because I came in for my grandmother's funeral. She made it to 96 and passed on New Year's Eve, and even saying that out loud still feels unreal. I didn't grow up with her in my life the way people assume you do with a grandmother. I found my way to her late. The whole wacky world of Ancestry.com And that trail led me to my grandmother. And when I finally got in the room with my grandmother, she kept staring at me like, "You look familiar." Over and over. Like her mind was reaching for something it couldn't quite grab. And then I said it. I told her who I was. So now I'm here, after finally getting to know her, and she's gone.



Yeah. I'm happy. I'm alive. Is that too simple? I'm breathing. I've got all my senses, my limbs. I'm drinking coffee. I'm kind of mad at myself for adding to the plastic landfill, but I'm happy. I always wanted a van I could live in when I travel, and I have one now. I wanted something I could cover in stickers and paint, like a mural--but one that moves. So I made it into that. My dad painted the first part. That was the first project. Then I started adding things--stickers over here, stuff along the sides, things people on the street have given me. Little pieces of life. I've got a cat. She travels with me. I made a U.S. flag map. I find random things--bottle caps, earplugs. I kept some used earplugs for like fifteen years. I'm a light sleeper. I need silence. Next week, maybe upstate New York. Then in the winter, Texas and Florida. If I could say one thing to the whole world, it would be: get over yourself.



Yeah, I'm happy. The reason I can still find joy in the middle of my storms is my faith. It's God. He's got me. I've been through a lot. Rejection. Depression. I used to cut myself. I was reaching for love in all the wrong places, trying to make something fill a space it couldn't fill. There were times I was so far down I didn't even trust myself. Times I wanted to commit suicide. And I can say honestly: the strength I had to get up did not come from me. I believe Jesus literally kept me alive. I believe He saved me from doing things I can't take back. I'm not saying life got easy. I'm not saying battles disappeared overnight. It takes intention. It takes relationship. But I know what it felt like to do life without Him, and for me, that was heavier than anything. So yeah, I'm happy. Not because nothing hurts, but because I'm not carrying it alone.



Yes, I'm happy. I have a part time cooking job and it pays well, and I have been there about a year and even got a raise, so I feel like I am handling my own business. But a lot of my happiness is music. I am in college for music recording with about a year and a half left, and I built a small studio in my bedroom. The school equipment was covered by my grant, so I have this setup without going into debt, and sometimes I think I win both ways. I make pop, I sing, and I play electric and acoustic guitar and a keyboard, with a couple microphones, basically a one man band. When life is hard, music relaxes me. I can drown my sorrows without drugs. I keep my lyrics happy and clean because I do not want to put anything into the world that harms people.



Yes, I'm happy. I'm traveling with my mom, just us, and it's the first time we have taken a trip together. I live with her, and the small things get loud: she keeps me in check, she says what I need to hear, and when she cooks breakfast I feel taken care of in a way nothing else matches. My dad died in January, and it was heavy on all of us. I was there for my mom and she was there for me, and it showed me what family is when it hurts. I think about how I pulled away in high school, tried to hide my feelings, and she still faced them with me. I can have a billion friends, but seeing my own family does something to me. We are planning to go back to the Philippines, and I still remember being a kid outside in the streets, animals around, vendors, food, and kids making the most of nothing. I just want to show up better for the people I am tied to.



Sometimes. My mood comes and goes, and people say I am bipolar. Maybe it is true, maybe it is bull, but some days I wake up already fighting myself. Right now, overall, no. I am homeless, waking up without a shower, without my own place, my whole life boiled down to what I can carry. Small kindness still matters. A smile can pull me into a better minute, and if somebody comes at me hard, I come back worse. I had a dog for a while, loud and smart, and she made me happy in a real way. Kids laughing, pets, a puppy you do not expect to see, that is instant happiness. The long term is different. I want to work, I want my family, I want stability. I go back to my parents sometimes, but even words can lie, so I trust what I feel. If I say I will buy you a beer, I mean it.



Yes--I'm happy. If you define happiness as shopping, sure, that can feel great for a minute. But for me, the real kind is simpler than that. It's being with my sister--someone I care about--knowing she loves me back. It's good health. It's the quiet relief of having the people I love still close enough to spend a day with. I'm happy because I'm alive. Because I made it through a pandemic. Because I can still sit with loved ones and call that a day well spent. Today is my mother's birthday. She's resting in heaven now. So I honored her the only way I know how: I spent the day with my sister, and we lived life to the fullest, right where we are. If I have anything to say at all, it's this: live your best life--intentionally.



Yeah--I'm happy. I'm on my way to get supplies to design a jacket for a runway show at my school, and I'm excited. I'm a college student, but being a designer is the dream. It's a pretty recent dream, honestly. Like, the past year. My whole life I thought I was going to go into medicine. That was the plan. And then I had this moment where I realized being in an OR, being in a hospital--none of that was going to make me happy. I wanted something else. I wanted to be able to express myself, to travel, to be creative. That realization is what made me change my major. That's how I ended up here. And the truth is, I think I've spent my entire life trying to make other people happy. Designing is the one thing I do just for me. It's the one place where it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks. It's just for me.



I am. Right now I feel happy because I just spent a week with incredible people, learning and stretching, and I can feel the growth in my body. It was about business, but it was personal too, being around minds that make you question your limits. I realized how often I have thought too small. I heard how it can be easier to get a loan for a ten unit building than for a single family home because the bank sees steadier income, and it flipped my whole frame. Growth has always made me happy. My mom is an educator and learning was never optional in our house, and I still feel lost when I am not expanding. Travel did the same for me, showing me how different people live and how much I assumed was normal. I keep asking why it should bother me how someone lives as long as nobody is harmed. Connection and community still feel profound to me.



No, not lately. These endless days have been dragging on, and it feels like I've got nothing to do. Like all my free will is gone--seemingly all my happiness too. The pandemic has royally f***ed my life, and I'm not really sure where to go from here. In my wallet, I carry poems I've written. One of them goes: "The sky remains cloudy as the temperature begins to rise. The craze is dying down. They begin to let out their sighs. But we know it's too early to do such drastic things. The world is changing forever and no one seems to be listening."



Yes. My happiness comes from family and friends, from people, from life--and from music. The deepest part of it, though, is my wife. We've been together 45 years. Two years ago she went into residential care because of dementia, and I had to learn how to make a life that still includes her, even when so much has changed. I didn't expect it to be rich. But it is. It's rich because she still has access to music. Music gets through. It heals everything it can reach. It gives us something to stand in together, even now. If I could say one thing to the world, it would be this: All you need is love. Love your neighbor.



I'm very happy. A lot of it comes from paying attention to my actual life and what makes me feel like me: sleep, my dog, making things just to make them, time with friends where we can laugh, and getting near the ocean when I need to come back to myself. Recently I spent an evening with friends making candles in layers, talking, eating, drinking, taking our time, and it reminded me that fun counts. A turning point was realizing other people's opinions of me are none of my business. I still feel that pull sometimes, but I do not have to follow it. In 2021 I got my heart broken, and I saw how much power I had handed over. It hurt, but it made something click. Pain is part of existing, but I am not letting it decide if I am allowed to be happy. I am trying to stop holding myself back and just do the thing.



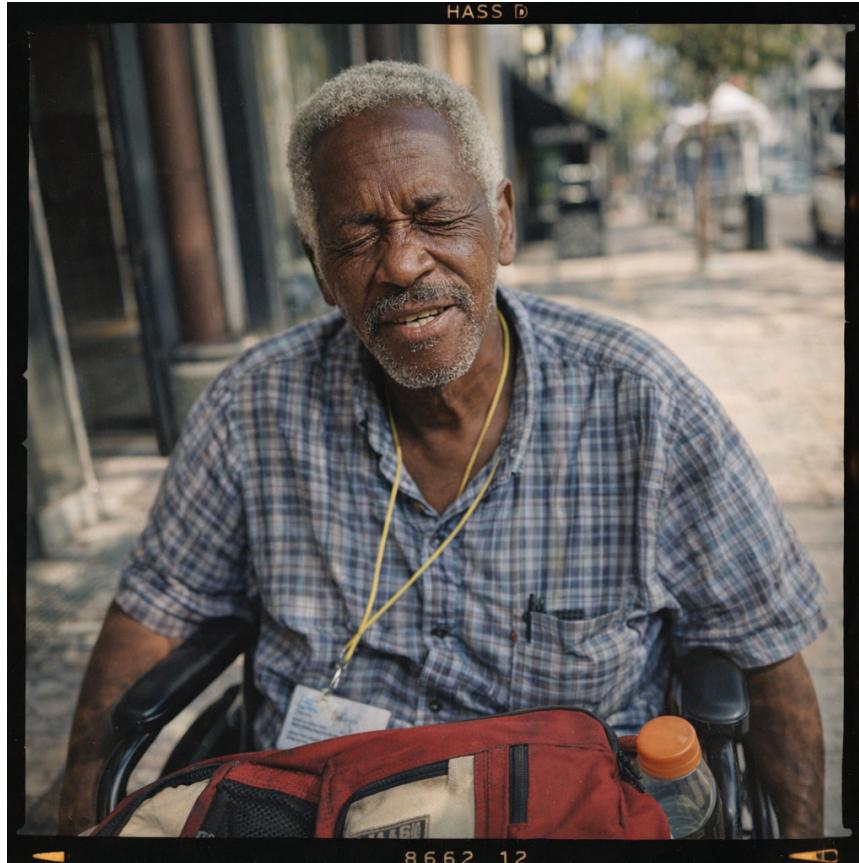
Yeah, I am. This year feels like it is opening up. I moved away from home for a new internship and a new job, and it feels like I am starting strong. What really holds me up is people. My family and friends show up for me, and even just being out with my guys reminds me life is good. I get sad when I am not around them, so I try to stay close, keep talking, travel to see friends, and spend real time together instead of letting it slip. I also need things that keep me learning and creating, and make me feel like I am serving, not just moving through days. When I dip, I exercise, call someone I have not talked to in a while, get outside, and pray with worship music until I feel some peace. I keep opening the box I want to avoid, because that is where I change.



Yeah, I'm happy. I was happy before, and I'm happy now. It's all relative. Money can't buy it. What actually does it for me is people, real people who support me and genuinely care about me. It doesn't matter if I have a dollar or a million, that number does not change what I reach for at the end of the day. When you have money, problems do not disappear, they just change shape, and you start caring about things you would not normally care about. It turns into noise. I grew up with nothing. My family struggled, and that stays in you. Now that I have done better, it shapes how I take risks. If I take a shot and fail, I am in the same place I started. My baseline is zero. Leaving the small town I grew up in was the biggest unknown, but I left, and I am glad I did.



Yes, I'm happy. Right now it's the view, the water, the nature, the ducks just doing what they do. We recently moved, and I am not used to seeing this up close, so it quiets my brain for a second. I keep coming back to the idea that happiness is a choice, even when that sounds too easy. If nobody teaches you how to be content, how would you just know it. I do not even know who taught me. I think I had to learn it myself, especially when my parents separated. Some situations do not give you a choice, so I had to find a way to say I am okay, then repeat it until I believed it, like a tattoo on my mind. I am shy, and I live by habits. Having kids taught me things are not only one way. Sometimes it is the quiet. Sometimes it is the repetition.



Yeah, I'm happy. My happiness comes from everything positive--mostly from God. He's the one who helps me keep a positive attitude toward life, no matter what I'm going through. And I've been through some things. I had a slight stroke. I made it through the military--I used to be in the Air Force. And I went through a bad divorce. So I don't say "happy" like nothing ever happened. I say it because I'm still here. I'm above ground. Life's going to throw you bad times. Curves in the road. Then sometimes it's straight for a while. When the curves come, you've got to learn how to deal with them. I just keep on. I keep treading. And I know I can't do it by myself. I've got to have a higher source. I've got to walk with Him, too. I can't make it without God.



Yes, I am happy. Not in a loud, perfect way, but in a real way that feels like I can breathe again. I changed careers recently. I used to work in public service and politics, and now I write. It was a big shift, and it did not happen casually, but it is why I catch myself smiling when I think about where I am. Before, I was depressed. The work was not bad, I just knew it was not what I was meant to do, like I was living in the wrong place inside my own life. Writing is different. It lets me be myself and say what is on my mind, things I could not express in that other world. After the pandemic and the losses, I keep returning to one thought. I have one life, and it ends the same for all of us, so I want to use it honestly.



I am happy, not because my life has been easy, but because my hope is in Christ Jesus, not in what people spend their lives chasing. I believe he is coming again, and that steadies me and changes what I reach for and how I see myself and others. I have seen people miserable with full hands, and I know how empty that feels. More than twenty years ago I was diagnosed with stage four cancer, with a huge mass. Believers gathered, anointed me with oil, and prayed. Weeks later I had one chemo treatment, then a scan, and the doctors said they could not believe it, but it was gone. I still did chemo and radiation, but in my heart I knew who healed me. I should have been dead, but I am here, and my joy comes from knowing my life is not an accident. “Come to me, all who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”



No, I am not happy in general. I can laugh and be goofy, but happy as a steady state is not where I am. I do not even know what people mean by it, elated or that quiet contentment. I have had money and love and it did not automatically turn into happiness. For me it would mean being okay with myself and not fighting my own head all day, but I get sad a lot and I deal with depression. My dog makes me happy and keeps me moving. He is training to be a service animal, and honestly he already is for me, because I have to get up, feed him, walk him, take him out, and my day has a shape. I used to be outgoing and then I got really introverted with social anxiety. The gym helps, and I am working on habits I know can pull me down. I feel better when I find solutions. I am not happy, but I am still here, still trying.



Yes, I am. My wife is the source of my joy today. We have been married almost 30 years, and we have been through a lot together, tackled adversities, and come out on top. Now, being able to enjoy each other and not expect too much else out of life feels like everything. One of my favorite memories is simple: an afternoon by the water, watching porpoises and sailboats, eating seafood, just being in that moment. We met in college, and we started as friends. That mattered. There was no pretension, no acting like I was somebody I was not. We learned each other first, then we chose each other. I am 66 and she is 76. Intimacy is fleeting. Trust is not. I see it in her friend who calls every night to pray with her. Relationships like that last.



I do not know. Right now, I am happy. On paper my life is going great. I am 17, a senior in high school, accepted to three colleges, waiting on one more, with a good job and good friends. But school can pull me under. I have crippling anxiety, and I am a hypochondriac, so even when everything is fine, my brain tells me I am barely holding it together. In my head, I still feel 12. My sweet 16 was right when COVID got really bad, and nobody came. Time kept moving, but I did not. Around 12, my anxiety got worse and I started seeing how bad things were with my father, and that it would not get better. I learned that what I do and say matters, but I do not feel like an adult or an important person yet.



I am happy. I have been through really bad times, darker than I thought I could handle, and I got past them. Not because life got easy, but because I learned to look ahead and tell myself, next week this will be behind me, next month, next fall. Every day is still a challenge. I have two little ones at my old age, my oldest is 47, and I am a single, working grandmother. I have lost too many people, and I know how fast it can all change. I was not always happy. I am amazed I am here. Even on a bad day, I know what it costs to keep going, and I know what it means that I still can. I focus on what I do have, and on the people I love who are still healthy.



Yeah, I'm okay. Because I'm alive. I'm amongst the land of the living. Considering what's going on out here, I'm still here. That's enough for me to say I'm okay. I look at life and I don't put it on money or fame. None of that holds you up when it's really time. It's your health. It's your condition. That's the primary thing. Worth more than a billion bucks. Billionaires die. Poor people die. So I'm just trying to keep on living, keep my strength, and be well.



I am happy. I cannot always explain why, I just try not to let what bothers me run my life. I lost a son when he was seven months old and it broke me. I sent my other children to my parents and lived in depression for a while. Then I had to show up again because my kids still needed me. Knowing they were waiting on me gave me confidence I was going to be alright. Prayer helped. Friends and family helped. I do not have many memories of the baby I lost, but my boys are grown now, and I hold on to the good days, like a family trip after my oldest graduated. I do not take time for granted. Bills stay, but my happiness is mine. I just got off work and I am headed to the park to play with my babies.



Yes. I'm happy because I love to dance, and tonight I'm outside on a beautiful Friday, with water and ducks and air that makes me feel grateful in my body. In day to day life, dance keeps me open. I'm on a bachata sensual team, and it is not just classes or performances. It is showing up, seeing familiar faces, learning with other people. When I dance with someone, we build a kind of community without forcing it. I love social dancing because you can do the same dance a hundred times and it still changes. Everyone hears the music differently, and even if you know the steps, you are still learning the person. Travel does that for me too. I've danced on a beach in a silent party until sunrise, then walked into the water. I've traveled alone through the woods and saw sloths and monkeys and deer. That freedom is happiness to me.



Yeah, I am. Even though my life is not ideal, if I was not happy I do not know if I would keep going, so I hold onto this place in me where I am okay, even when I do not look like it. Today was rough. I had a stressful encounter with a guy, the police got involved, they thought I did something I did not do, and after waiting they let me go. It has been situation after situation for weeks, and I feel my bandwidth running out while I am trying to heal, process, and have peace all at once. My mom is my safe space. Hearing her voice steadies me. When I feel terrible, I take care of the outside, shower, brush my teeth, put on a good outfit. Bed can feel safest, but I do not want to stay there and keep the hurt going. I get up, go out, see something new, lean on my friends, look for work, and sometimes I act okay until my body catches up.



Yes, no, I do not know. I am not fulfilled yet, and that sits in me. My life is not terrible, but I keep thinking about what it would mean if it ended tomorrow. If I died tomorrow, no one would know who I am. I do not say that for attention. It is just a thought that will not leave. What did I do that mattered outside my own small circle. What would I leave behind that proves I was here. I cannot even name the exact thing that would make me feel okay, I just know I want to leave some kind of mark and be remembered as someone who made things better. Maybe it is not huge. I really believe kindness counts, because everyone is carrying something, and I have seen how one kind moment can change a person and keep moving. Maybe that is how a mark gets made.



Yes, I am very happy. A lot of it is my daughter, my husband, my family. This stage of her infancy has been the sweetest. She laughs at everything, like her personality showed up one day and filled the whole room. She watches closely, like she is taking it all in. Sometimes I look at her and think, you are wise, like we have done this before. Today was simple, and that made it so good. My husband did not work, so we ate breakfast together, did not rush, just stayed home as a family. Those are the days that land in my body and make me feel steady. One of my favorite memories is the morning we eloped. It was quiet and real and ours. With him, the feeling was immediate, then it grew until I could finally name it. I cannot build a life on anything unless I am good with myself first, so I try to live in a way that fits me and keep it honest.



I'm happy most of the time. Two years ago I had terrible losses back to back, and I lost my identical twin sister, my partner and roommate, the person I had always had. I took care of her for two and a half years, then she was gone at sixty five from pancreatic cancer. It was very hard to learn how to be in the world without her. After that, I started saying what I mean while I still can, and I pay closer attention to my own health, because if I am not taking care of myself I am no good to anyone. I live with a lot of gratitude now, especially for the friends who pulled me through by listening, holding me, and not judging me. Joy came back in pieces. I retired, I consult, I started painting, I move my body, and I spend time with people I love.



I'm happy, but I'm feeling my age. I'm 68, and the aches and pains are there all day, and they take something from the easy kind of happiness. Still, I'm happy with my life. I'm retired, I have friends, a nice house, and a check that comes every month. I'm in good health, and you do not really understand what that means until you see it threatened. The last couple of years my son had cancer, and he is doing very well now, and he and his girlfriend are having a baby. I have grandchildren too, and watching them grow and seeing my kids become parents gets me in a quiet, deep way. I like bike rides and a little puff of a joint. My husband sometimes makes me happy. Sometimes I do not know. Time goes by extremely fast, and high school feels like yesterday.



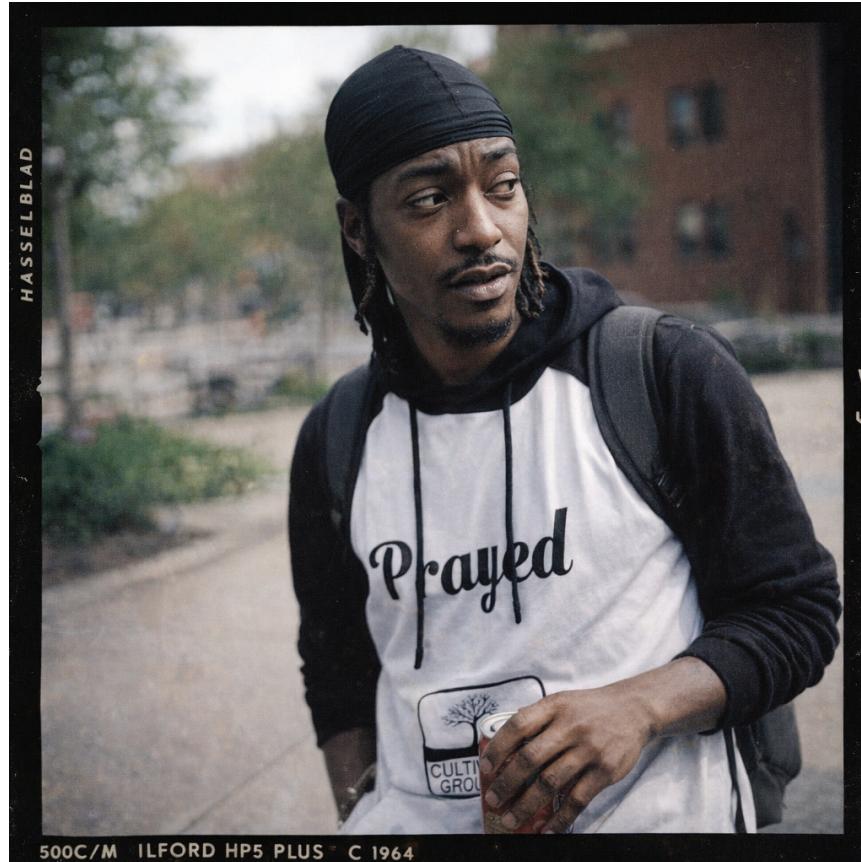
Yes, I'm very happy. I'm happiest when the people around me are happy, especially when I see my kids just being okay, laughing and relaxed. I have five kids, and the hardest part is being strict and still being someone they can come to. Some days I balance it, some days I am still figuring it out. If I could give them one thing, it would be happiness, because I have seen how much easier life feels when you have that. When I am not feeling happy, working out pulls me back, even when I do not do it enough. It helps me take small steps again and my mood shifts. At 47, life is better than I hoped for. I came from a rough upbringing, but I have learned what opportunity and effort can change.



Sometimes I'm happy. I'm getting there, kind of in the middle, but overall yeah. Getting there means moving toward where I actually want to be, so right now feels more neutral than bad. I'm working toward running my own business through music, making my own money, being my own boss. Music makes sense because I get creative control. I can make whatever I want, however I feel that day, without waiting for somebody to approve it. Sometimes I hit a flow where I am not even thinking and it just happens. Other times I overthink, worried about doing too much or too little. I play bass and I am blending alternative, indie, and rap. Most of what I write comes from everyday life, and the feeling goes into the beat first. I keep this line with me: I know that you bleed a certain way, I might bleed that certain way as well. I am paying attention either way.



I think so, yeah. Right now my joy is my family, having people who are there when you need them. I did not realize how much that mattered until I went without it. I lived out west for a long time, and it was beautiful, but I was lonely. I could stand in front of something incredible and still feel like I had no one to share it with. I moved back a week ago and it feels peaceful. The views are gone, but I am happier because the people are back. Going away made me appreciate them, and it made them appreciate me. Presence is really everything. We take a yearly vacation and we make the time no matter what. We show up. I am Christian, and I try to live by the golden rule. After you have been through something, it gets harder to judge.



Yes, I am happy. I am ecstatic. I look up at the birds flocking and it hits me that people can gather like that too, if we put what we have into the world. Three weeks ago my car broke down and money got low, so I rode the bus for the first time to donate plasma. When I stepped off, it was empty, and I felt it in my spirit, this is a stage and I am going to use it. I make Christian rap, and believing in Christ does not spare me from mistakes. I am in a trying time, with no real backing, and I cannot do it alone. I started a nonprofit for people fighting drugs, alcohol, and suicidal thoughts, and I have to say it plain, I am an alcoholic. Today I am sober. That is why I am happy.



Sometimes I'm happy. Sometimes I'm just hanging on, with gratitude and pain in the same day. I'm a recovering addict with five years clean, and I don't say that lightly. I'm here because my mom never stopped showing up when I gave her every reason to walk away. She is my hero. She has had spine surgeries. I had spine surgery too, and she took care of me. A couple months ago I had surgery, then I fell down the stairs and shattered my elbow. I am trying to heal and keep my head above water at the same time. I am only working two days a week, so everything is tight and every little thing matters. Today someone offered to fill my gas tank, and I needed it. I have hit rock bottom and started over. Being happy does not always look like laughing. Sometimes it looks like taking the help and driving one more day.



I'm okay. I'm hanging in there. I have been through a lot, and I still struggle with childhood trauma. Some things do not stay in the past just because time moves forward. This year I lost a really close childhood friend to suicide, and it has been a tough year. There are still happy moments, but grief changes the air in the room, even on days that look normal from the outside. I keep thinking about why it is so hard for people to reach out, and how much stigma there is around mental health, like it should be simple, like you can just get over it. I go over it in my head. If she had reached out, I would have been there. She would never have been a burden to me. Sometimes I still need to say that out loud.



Yeah, I'm happy. Some days it's as small as looking at my nails and letting myself smile, but mostly it's waking up alive. I used to say little affirmations out loud, and I still do. My husband, my family, a few real friends keep me grounded. I did not always let people in. I was in a domestic violence situation and afraid for my life, so I shut everyone out, embarrassed and stuck, even living out of my car because I refused to lean on anyone. I tried to leave three times and could not. Then my ex was in a violent car accident and he was suddenly out of my life. Soon after I found a place to stay, got promoted, and moved away. I know God is real. Being free made me face what I ignored and learn to accept help. Now I love myself first, and I do not skip the little joys.



I am happy, not effortlessly, but because I built it on purpose. It comes from small things I used to miss, a tree in bloom, a bird landing close enough to notice, a few seconds where I register something real. It took work to get here. When I was eleven, twelve, thirteen, anxiety felt physical. I was scared to leave my house, scared to be seen, and I still feel those cycles trying to creep back. Gratitude and presence help me look up, but I am not a perfect example. I disappear into my phone sometimes, and I try to catch it and lift my head again. Therapy helped. I struggled in high pressure school, then went to hosting at a restaurant, and it messed with my self esteem. When heavy feelings come back, I let them move through me. At night, I pray to whatever. I garden with my partner, I dance alone, and I try to be kinder than I used to be.



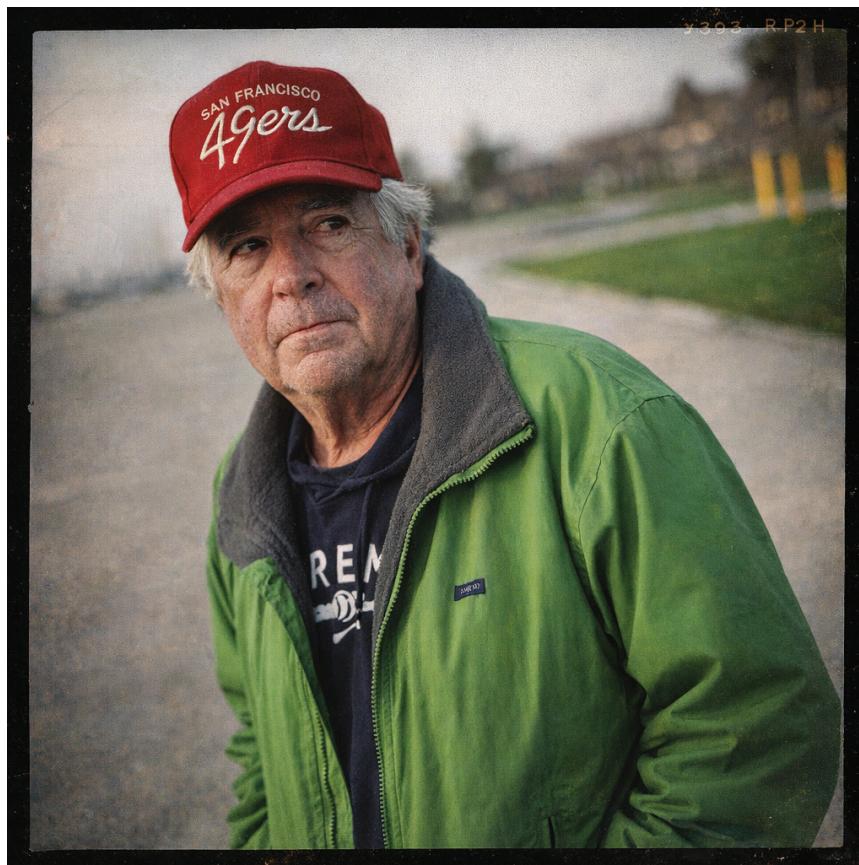
Yes, I am very happy. At 61 I have learned life is about enjoying what is here and participating, not standing off to the side waiting for permission. I have lived with fear and watched it shrink my world to whatever felt safest. I have overcome it on a number of levels, not perfectly, just enough to start moving again, so I set out to do what I want. I am in college now. My home is happy and beautiful. I am learning something new, and I wake up with something ahead of me. For me it comes down to satisfying the honest urges, the pull toward experience, the need to grow, the need to be in my own life. If I have one message it is nowhere, it is not going to work anymore. The purpose of mankind is to love one another, and I mean it. If you miss that, the world has been a loss.



Sometimes. I measure it by the people I can count on. I have four real friends, where it is mutual, where I am invested in their lives and they are invested in mine. If someone is not really invested, I do not hold them close, even if they think we are. Not all of them live near me, so if I needed someone physically right now, maybe two could show up. But if I needed a voice, someone to stay with me through a day, I could call any of them instantly. Life shifts. People move, have kids, get busy, and I still want friendships that keep making time and keep showing up. Our family dog died last week. My best friend had just lost her dog too, and she mirrored my care right back, calling me, checking in all day and all week, even sending me money for coffee. It was small and steady from far away. That is what I hold onto.



Right now, yes, I am happy. Life is still life with ups and downs, but I try not to stay stuck in the little stuff. Bills do not disappear because I am mad at them, so I would rather clock in and handle it than complain. What makes me happy is simple: my kids, my family, waking up and realizing I am still here. I catch myself saying I am alive and I am grateful, I am healthy and I am grateful, I am wealthy and I am grateful. I like plants too. I carry a money tree and I give plants as gifts because it is something living you have to take care of. My happiness now is what we are building, my kids selling lemonade and me and my wife making holistic products. I did not expect this path, but changing how I ate changed how I felt, and years later I still feel clearer. What I want in the world is love.



Yes, I am happy. I just turned 70, and I am still alive, and I feel it when I wake up and realize I get another day. Happiness is simple for me: getting up and seeing my wife right there, then the two of us going for a walk. I try to notice what is in front of me instead of chasing something bigger just to prove I am doing okay. I do not want money running my life. It matters, but I have learned what it can do to your head. A lot comes down to how I treat people. When I lead with kindness, the day feels lighter. I do not take myself too seriously, and I am tired of everybody being so angry. I love my teams, but I do not tie sports to my mental health. Mostly I am happy because I am here, I can still walk, and I can still laugh.



Yeah, I am. My friends, my partner--my life right now is really good. It's the way they're unconditionally there for me. We've built this bright little community where we all share the same interests, and there's this undying desire to help each other and show up for each other, especially with how crazy the world is. When we're together, we cook. That's one of our things. Most of the time it's sharing a meal, cooking side by side, bringing cookies we baked for a cookie exchange. Food turns into this thread--culture and community and care--all in the same room. Happiness, to me, is a comfortable joy. It's contentness. It's something steadfast. It's home. And if I had one thing to say, it's to block out the noise and find the people who matter most to you--because those people are what matters most.



I'm content, I wouldn't say I'm happy. Contentment starts small, waking up breathing, speaking, my limbs working, that is where my gratitude sits. I used to live in regret about my choices. Then I lost people, and in 2020 my brother was shot and died. Foster care had separated us, and when I finally wanted us to be close, it was taken. His death pulled up pain I had been ignoring and made me look at the distance I keep, what I show up for, and how I have overshared trying to be understood fast. I am learning to preserve myself. I am still optimistic, I feel I am here for a reason, and a lot of it is creative. I paint abstract work, write poetry, and I am working on a memoir and a guide about aging out of foster care. I am building a routine and a life I can stay in.



Yeah, I am happy, every day. First thing I think about is my two kids. They are grown, doing well, and that hits me like an accomplishment. I was in the street life for a big part of their lives. I used drugs. I sold drugs. For a long time I carried shame, but I let it go when I saw they watched it up close and learned what it costs. It is easy for kids to get misled, and they did not repeat what I did. They still make their own mistakes, but now they ask me sometimes, and I can speak from experience. My daughter is in a financial bind right now and I had to be firm and stop the bailout. She is learning, right this minute. As long as my kids are doing good and happy, I cannot be unhappy.



Yes, I am happy. I woke up today and God gave me the grace to see another day, so I start from a good place. Before I go anywhere I pray, even in the car, asking God to watch over my family and bring us home the same way we left. My family is everything to me, and taking care of them is where my happiness sits. I like meeting people too, but I have to refocus sometimes because life moves fast and can pull you off track. The most fascinating person I ever met is my wife. I saw her once, fell in love, and waited until she was free to ask her out. Thirty three years later we are still together. We talk things through and find resolution when it gets hard. I try to move through the world peaceful, smiling and saying hello.



Absolutely. I feel fulfilled by the life I am building and I do not say that lightly. Getting here was brutal. I cut out friends who were bad for me, and a few years ago I cut off my parents. My dad held racist ideals and would shrug and say this is who I am, like that made it acceptable. My mom never respected boundaries and expected me to be her best friend, to be a certain kind of feminine, to be who she wanted. I tried for years to set limits, to explain what hurt me, to bring logic and proof, and nothing changed. Every visit left me needing weeks to recover and to rebuild my own values. Therapy helped me follow through and hold the line. I stayed in contact with my brother, but I kept it safe. Now I work with young people and I love it. I am happier without a family I cannot trust.



Yes, I am. It is beautiful outside, my kids are healthy, and I have a good job, and sometimes that is enough to feel in my body before I can explain it. My teenagers, a boy and a girl, are a little crazy, but it is my life and I am grateful. What brings me the most joy is simple, family, friends, and quiet, just sitting and not rushing, a moment where nothing is demanded of me. There was a time I was not happy, in an unhappy relationship and not taking care of myself, and I lost track of who I was while trying to get through it. Getting out was a process, but when it ended it felt like I could breathe again. Therapy helped. Sometimes self care is small, coffee, hot cocoa, or a glass of wine. I still think of Mr. Rogers, and how much kindness mattered to him.



I'm not real happy, and I'm not real sad. I'm somewhere in between. I'm 83, and most of my friends are gone, but I'm still here, so maybe I've got a purpose. I've got a throat problem and had an operation, so I can only swallow and talk one at a time, and I take my time. I keep doing what's in my heart. I paint, I make collages, I work on small canvases I can carry, because I'm confined to this a lot. People steal my stuff. Somebody I trusted took my Bob Marley piece, the one I called One Love, and it never came back. It probably sold for crack. So I make signs and sit there, and sometimes people just hand me a dollar. It's different people every day. I stay hopeful. Not knowing what comes next is the good part, because then I'm not disappointed. It all balances out.



Yeah, I'm happy. A year ago I left home for the first time and I was not in a good place, stuck in a relationship that was not good to me. It took a lot to crawl out of that. I remember feeling like I was down in a hole, trying to remember who I was and find my way back. Over time I did, and I started making better choices for myself. I moved somewhere I only knew one person, and that was not good for me either, so I built my own support system and my own footing. The last few months have been immensely better. I have a supportive partner now, and nothing is perfect, but I do not feel alone, and I do not feel like I am disappearing inside my own head. I am trying to be better about how I talk to myself, because when I end up in ruts, it is usually because I am not treating myself well.



I am happy, genuinely. It is people. When I was three I had a bad asthma attack and firefighters carried me out when I could not breathe. Now I am the one who shows up. I tried to be practical, studied engineering and business, but I was not happy and my days filled with something that was not me, so I came back to firefighting and EMT work. It is not the TV version. It is overdoses, CPR on the highway, long shifts and sleep deprivation, and sometimes I say the wrong thing and want to disappear. What keeps me okay is my crew, especially my partner who feels like a sister, and the dark jokes that get us through thirty hour stretches. I see gruesome things, so I am in therapy. I hold onto small moments that change the temperature of a day, food, a seat, a flower. That is enough for me.



Yeah, I'm happy. I'm enjoying life and I'm getting better. I carry my clothes in a bag, set up on the sidewalk, and sell them myself. I've seen celebrities wear my work, and that still surprises me. Fashion has been in me since I was little, my mom always dressed me sharp, and I stayed pulled toward it. I do event shows, I was in the Jamaican Day Parade, and I keep making new designs, even when a piece is not finished yet. My happiness comes back to keeping the commandments of the Most High and doing His will, and to designing clothes. Opinions can get loud, but I try to stay with what I know. I watch Damon John on Shark Tank, study business and branding, and believe in my halwa, my halwa shai.



I am happy, because it is the little things for me. I have been making candles for over fifteen years, and I write too, because I do not think we relax enough. One morning after getting off work at midnight, I saw an email saying I needed to do an exit interview. I had not been fired, but my body did not know that. I prayed, I cried, I thought about my finances, and I told God I wanted to do my candles full time anyway. When I finally got a call back, she said she accidentally terminated me, one wrong number, and I was in the system like I was gone. I still had to redo paperwork like I was getting hired again, and I still got my job, plus overtime. It was not peace, but it was a piece, enough to keep me from breaking. I go back to candles, words, quiet, and prayer.



Yeah, I am. It is just another day, and I do not always need a big reason. If I wake up in a bad mood, I do not turn it into a mystery. I treat it like a headache, something that can pass if I do not feed it. I learned that a lot of attitude is just thought, and I can shift what I carry. I think about road rage. If I sit there boiling, it does nothing to the other person. It is me doing it to myself, and I am the one who has to live in my own body all day. So I do something. I move, put something funny on, or say it out loud and get it out. A little over a year ago, he spent almost eight months in the hospital. That made every morning real. He is doing good now. Today is here, and he is too.



Yeah, right now, in this moment, I'm happy. I feel free, not like everything is perfect, just like my head is not locked up the way it used to be. I try to stay here, because when I live in the past and the future I lose today, and today is the only part I can touch. I was a sad kid, always alone, figuring things out by myself, and I got stuck in my own mind, mad about things I could not change. Anger just burned up the day, and I did not want bitter to be my personality. I had drinking problems when I was younger, and I am not proud, but I got through a lot because I was not going down like that. There was no big key, just a sense I had a purpose, and that I would be okay. Music was what I had, and I let it be sad too. I heard B.B. King say nobody wrote a blues song from the back of a limousine, and I felt that. So yeah, I'm happy in this moment, and I'm here.



Of course I am happy. I have been married almost thirty eight years, and we are still together. I learned to say yes to my wife, not perfectly at first, but I learned. We met while I was on active duty and she was a nurse, and being apart taught us what marriage costs. Sacrifice, and knowing what is expected when you are not in the same place, and it cannot be one sided. The happiest moment of my life was seeing my wife give birth to our only daughter. We were not expecting a healthy baby. There were issues, amniocentesis, months of monitoring and waiting and praying, so when she came out healthy I thanked the Lord and I still do. Now my daughter has a baby, and we have a grandson. They live far, and what I want most is time with them. I want peace too, and understanding, and God at the center of my home.



Yes and no. I am in between. My marriage makes me happy, and some days money worries swallow that. I love my work and it feels like what I am supposed to do, but I struggle with where I live. After living in other countries and coming back, I cannot unsee the gaps in transportation, education, and health care. We have the ability to do more, and we are not doing it, and that makes me sad. Spanish was my first language and English was my second, and learning it changed my life because it let me truly connect. Teachers who believed in me opened my world. Now I run a literacy tutoring program for kids learning English, many like I was. When you cannot understand the main language, it hits your self esteem and limits what you can reach for. Sometimes I find happiness just standing still, noticing a black swan on the water, and remembering I am not alone.



Yes, I am very happy. My kids are grown and healthy, married and doing well, and I have two grandsons graduating high school this year. I bought my home seven years ago and I take care of it. I am at the point where I can travel and I will not waste that. I wish I had done more sooner, because I have watched people reach retirement and stop. I am not built to just sit. I still want to see more of this country, the Grand Canyon, all the states, and the eastern coast in winter. I did not grow up in a family that traveled, so I turned my family on to it, tagging along on school trips and making memories. My daughter travels to help people, and I have done a little of that too. It was only a day, but it stays with you. I keep moving. I am not stopping.



Yeah, I am definitely happy. My life feels free, like I have room to be open and not forced into what I do not want. I am still working on money and figuring it out as I go, and some days are solid and some days are not, but I am happy with what I am doing. I have dealt with depression for a long time, and there were moments with no money at all, not even anything to eat, where I learned what my mind does when it gets quiet. I try to stay busy so I do not sink, then I look at the reason straight up. If it is money, I ask why, and sometimes it is because I have been sitting too long. A schedule helps. I write goals down, like a house with orange roof tiles and a small garage, or a number in savings. Some days I see life like a video game, and I am the one who has to move it forward.



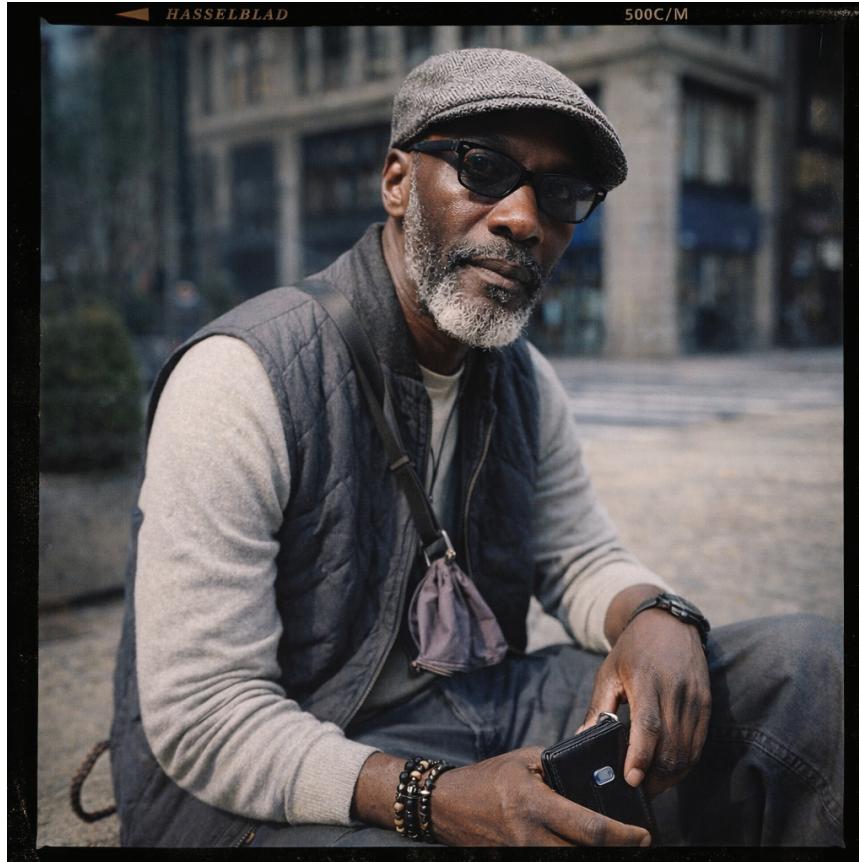
It is complicated. Right now I am pretty happy, but I feel things so deeply that most days are a whole range of emotions. I am happiest when I am in my own world creating, writing my next album, putting the artwork together, building the little universe around it. Sometimes it is just going out alone and doing quiet things that keep me steady. I have had that fire to create since I was little, and what pushes me is sharing an experience and having someone else recognize themselves in it. Making music is how I get through everything else. I have been through a lot, so I write about mental health, traumatic relationships, the things people avoid. Every time I write, it feels like a release, like I am getting that energy out of my body. It took me time to learn to prioritize myself too.



Right now, yeah. It is a beautiful day, and I am here. I grew up in Europe under old communist laws where a little bit of drugs could cost you years, so fear always sat in the background. When I first came to the States, police ran a sting in a bar and I had weed on me, and I truly thought that was it, goodbye to my family, but they checked my ID and let it go, and I did not know how to hold that relief. Now I drive ride share and watch people flip so fast, like they cannot see the next person having a day too, and I know I do it sometimes. I write haiku to keep things small. I lived through a nuclear disaster as a kid, the kind where nobody tells you the truth, and my father kept us home while toxic rain fell. Now I have a baby. Not perfect, just here.



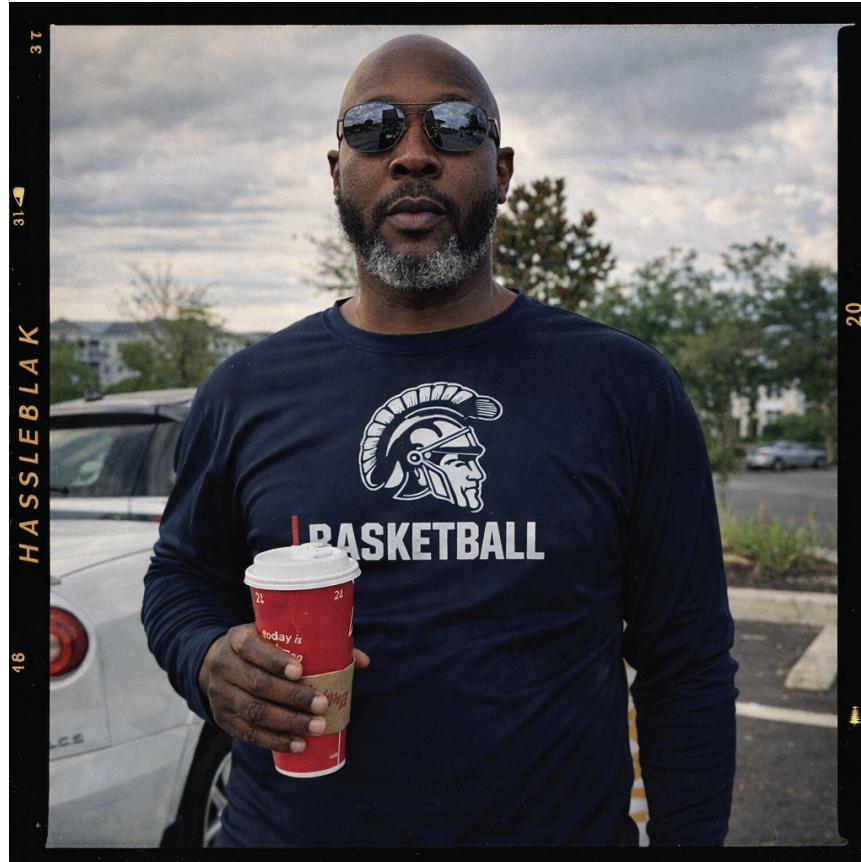
Sometimes. When I think about the people who have shown up for me, I feel something steady. I do not have a huge circle. I keep it small on purpose, about ten real friends. Real is not how often we talk or how fun it is. It is showing up when it is not convenient, being there when there is nothing in it for you. I learned that the hard way. When I got out of the military, I did not have a place to live, and a friend made room for me so I could get on my feet. His family had taken me in before, when I was around nineteen. I am thirty six now. Some of them go way back, and one I have only known a year still shows up like that. My happiness, when it shows up at all, comes from knowing I am not doing this by myself.



Yeah, I can say that I'm happy. The reason is simple: I went through a very bad accident, and I didn't die. So I'm just happy to be here. When you get that close, being here stops feeling normal. It stops being something you assume you'll always have. If I've got one thing to say, it's this: do what you can do while you can, because your time is going by fast.



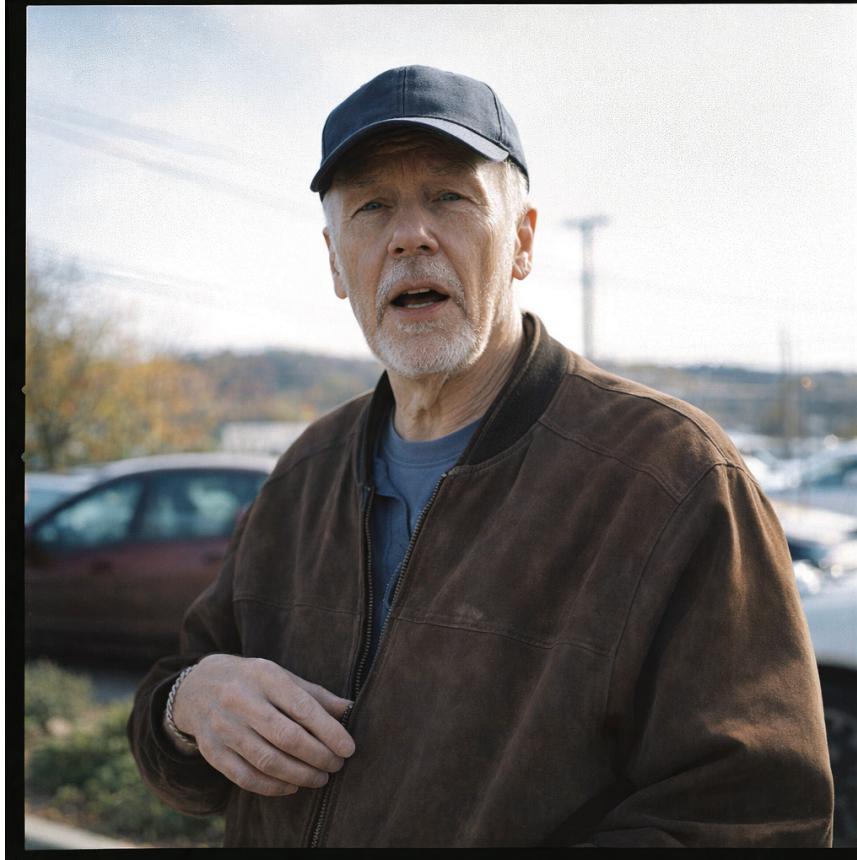
I would say so, yeah. I focus on what actually makes me happy: working out, getting outside, seeing my friends and family, and taking real time alone. When I do that, everything I have to handle feels easier to carry. The sun helps the most. A couple hours outside and I can feel myself recharge. I move my body a lot, take cold showers in the morning, and do my own work trying to heal inner child stuff. It is not always cute or easy, but it is honest. I keep doing it because I know what it feels like when I do not. I used to stay busy with what I thought I was supposed to do, chasing what looked good, and I felt the weight of it. Now I try to choose what makes me healthy first, be kind, and love myself.



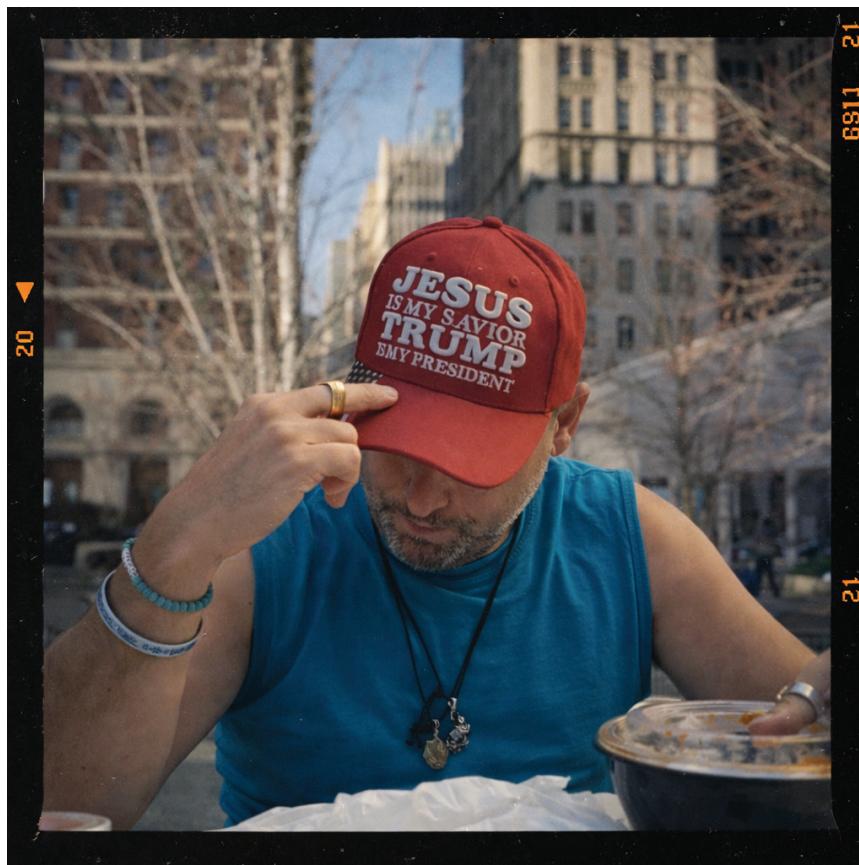
Yes, I am. I am happy because I fell in love with myself again, but it took losing almost everything. During the pandemic I lost my job, my apartment, and contact with my children, and I was out there alone. With nothing left to chase, I had to sit with myself and learn to love the person in front of me. The turning point came when I was broke and depressed and my daughter told me she did not want money, she just wanted my time. That hit me deeper than anything I ever bought. My relationship with my daughters is wonderful now, and I do not take it for granted. I still miss my mother, and thinking about her reminds me how short this is. So I keep going, even when I cannot see what is next.



No, I am not happy. It has felt nineteen years of the worst, and even when something gets better I do not know how to live inside it or trust it. Saying the reasons out loud feels like setting everything on a table. I was sexually harassed and physically threatened at a job. I was abused for five years and neglected for two. My parents died when I was ten, after custody fights started when I was eight. My father was horrible, my mother tried, and then they were both gone. I ended up with families who were cruel, then one that was better, and I still was not ready. I moved out, ran out of money, and became homeless. I act happy sometimes, but underneath the performance I get tired and I do not know what is left. I am surprised I am alive. All I can say is it will be okay, not good or bad, just okay.



Yes, I'm happy. I'm alive. I've got a good life, and I've got a great family around me. I try to laugh. I keep myself busy. That's what I hold onto most days. My wife died last year. Since then, I keep a note on me that I found, because it says what I can't always say out loud. "My mind still talks to you, my heart still looks for you, but my soul knows you are at peace." I don't carry her picture in my wallet. I've got them on my phone, and I've got pictures of her all over the house. But that note stays with me.



I'm very happy, extremely happy. The reason is Jesus is my savior and Trump is my president. On September 10th, my birthday, I asked to be saved because life was not very good, and it felt like the right time to ask. I do not believe I have to be in a building for it to count, because Sunday can turn into a corporation if you think that is the whole thing. I have God right here, right now. When I asked, He came, and He saved my life. The next day I quit drinking, something I had been battling. A week later I stopped obsessing and watching porn. I am a single man, and I was living that life, but I have not been out chasing it. I put God first, I let Him in, and I wake up asking what He wants me to do today.



I'm good. I started this tea shop the summer after my freshman year of college because I wanted to pay my own tuition. The space used to be a bubble tea shop, so we kept the equipment and opened fast. My high school friends were my test group. I made the same drink again and again, changing the tea, milk, and sugar, lining them up and listening to what worked. That is how the menu happened, one recipe at a time, until it felt like the best I could give. People come back for the coffee milk tea. A lot of the shop is me too, the graphics, the walls, the designs, and my friends helped me paint for almost a month. I started it with my mom, and now it is a place people return to, where faces turn into names, and on Wednesdays a sketching club fills the room. Somewhere in all of this, I found what it feels like to be called to something.



Some days I am happy, and some days not so much. Happiness comes and goes, but today I am happy because I asked my belly dance instructor for a private lesson. Dancing gives me confidence, challenge, and emotional release, and it brings me back to my roots. I am Syrian Lebanese, and I have lived in the States since I was eight, so I got Americanized and lost connections without noticing. When I hear the music and my body remembers the moves, it feels like coming home, and it is freeing. It is not about one place being peaceful, it is about vitality, the difference between going home to sleep and doing something that makes me feel something. I want to play all the time, like a five year old. I do not want life to be only work and bills. I want to celebrate and belong.



Generally, yeah, I am happy, even though it can be hard. Life feels unfair in a quiet way because I cannot control much, even when I am trying to do the right things. When it hits, I step back, meditate, and sit with what I am feeling until I see what I can change and what I cannot. Sometimes all I can do is let it ride and protect my mind. What makes me happy is simple: sunshine, family, my girlfriend, and knowing I have love and support. Lately it has been heavy. In the past couple weeks I have had four family members die, relationships have been shaky, and my head has not felt clear. I still wake up and try to notice what is here: my health, my breath, a day I can choose. I hold the people I love close because I do not know how long I get.



Yes, I'm absolutely happy. I believe that spontaneous interactions with many human beings throughout the day are crucial to happiness and longevity. Saying hello to people, like the barista who makes your coffee, spreads cheer and is surprisingly important. I always say hello or compliment someone, and in New York, about 80% of people respond positively. I think staying in reasonably good health also helps. I'm 75 years old, and some days I feel 275, other days 25. It depends on the aches and reminders that I'm not 20 anymore, but in my brain, I feel younger. I was a college professor and still support students in performing arts schools across the country.



Yeah, I'm happy, more than I used to be. It took me a while to see what was in the way. I could succeed, but I was so afraid of failing that even when things went right, I could not enjoy it. I'm a clown, and the job taught me something I did not expect to need offstage: you have to fail for anyone to laugh. When I build an act, I take a prop and mess it up on purpose. I have to be bad at it before I can be good at it. For a long time, I could not stand messing up, looking stupid, being wrong. I fought it so hard I stayed tense all the time. When I finally accepted failure and could laugh at mine, the weight came off. Then when something worked, it was not relief anymore. It was extra happiness on top.



Yes, I am. I am happy because I get to live, breathe, and be with nature, sit somewhere quiet, and make something with my hands that documents what I am seeing and feeling. I lost a close friend to gun violence, and after that my parents put me in art therapy and a mentor started taking me to parks and gardens that felt alive. Those spaces changed me and gave me somewhere to put what I did not know how to carry. A lot of my work comes from that, drawings of gardens, swans, and the people I love, just trying to hold on to what is real. Today I am by the water doing a live drawing, watching the swans move and trying to catch it before it is gone. I am intentional with color, and today the blue feels like gratitude.



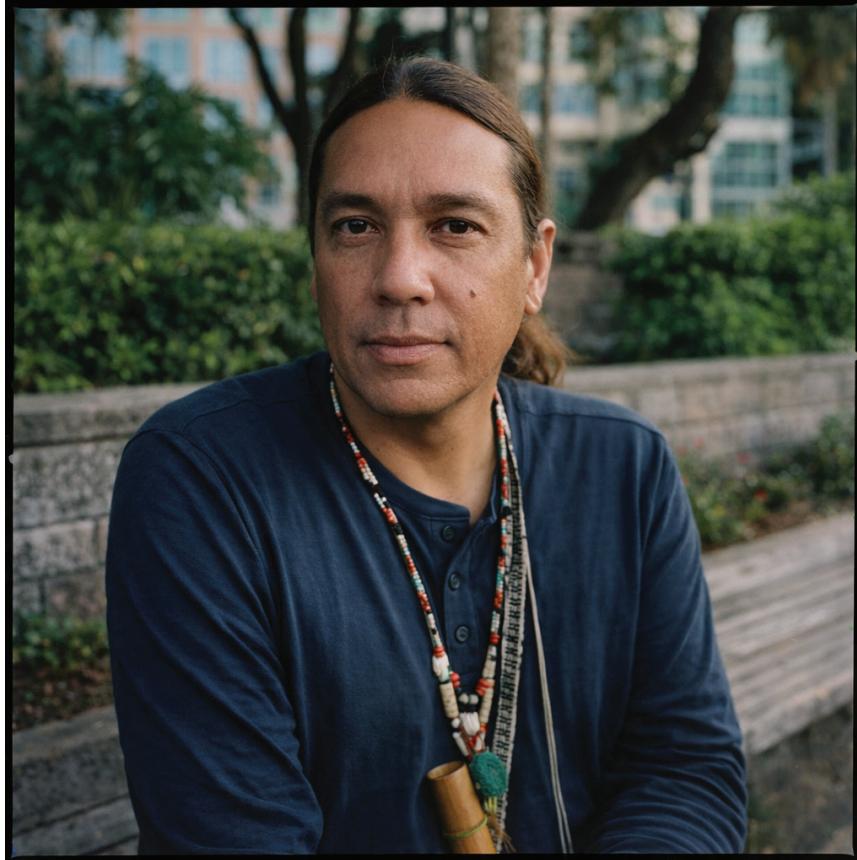
I am kind of happy. Today I saw my brother from the Marines for the first time in two and a half years, and it hit me so hard I thought I might cry. We grew up side by side, fought over everything, then became close. Under the happy is fear, because he is in the military and anything can happen. I do not really pray, so I breathe and tell myself he is going to be okay. I can feel happy and not happy at the same time. I live with PTSD, depression, and anxiety, so even when I am laughing, flashbacks can slide in and flip the switch. Music and art help. I sing, draw, and sculpt. On karaoke nights I reach for Aretha Franklin, and if I get through half a song it feels real. When it is not good, I hold onto the people who love me.



I'm happy. With God comes happiness. I wake up every morning and say a few positive words to myself in the mirror to set my mind right and carry me through the day. I work customer service, and when problems had everybody feeling it, I did not let it get on me. If someone is upset, I do not have to be. I keep it simple and treat people like customers even when we work together. On a scale from one to ten, I am a ten and past it. What keeps me steady is knowing I am the only one inside myself who can get bothered. This is just a body. We live within it and operate it. I remember from before I was in this body being alive, the hands and white gloves, the big white face, the teeth. As long as I maintain my happiness, no one else can affect it. That is what I have.



Yes, I am. I'm happy because I'm here. In late 2022 I had a scary medical situation; my thyroid was poisoning my body, and doctors said if I'd been five minutes later I wouldn't be here. It took a long time to settle, and I recently had my thyroid removed. After that, the little things stop being little: waking up, a cloudy day turning sunny, standing outside and realizing I'm still here. It's easier to let things roll away. When I'm depressed or anxious, the dark can start to feel familiar, like where I live, but I've felt myself move out of that fog by noticing small, simple pockets of light. My job, my partner, our three cats, my mom, my brother, wrestling on TV, a new game, a silly pair of shoes. I'm done silencing myself. Grief and trauma stay, but my life can still grow.



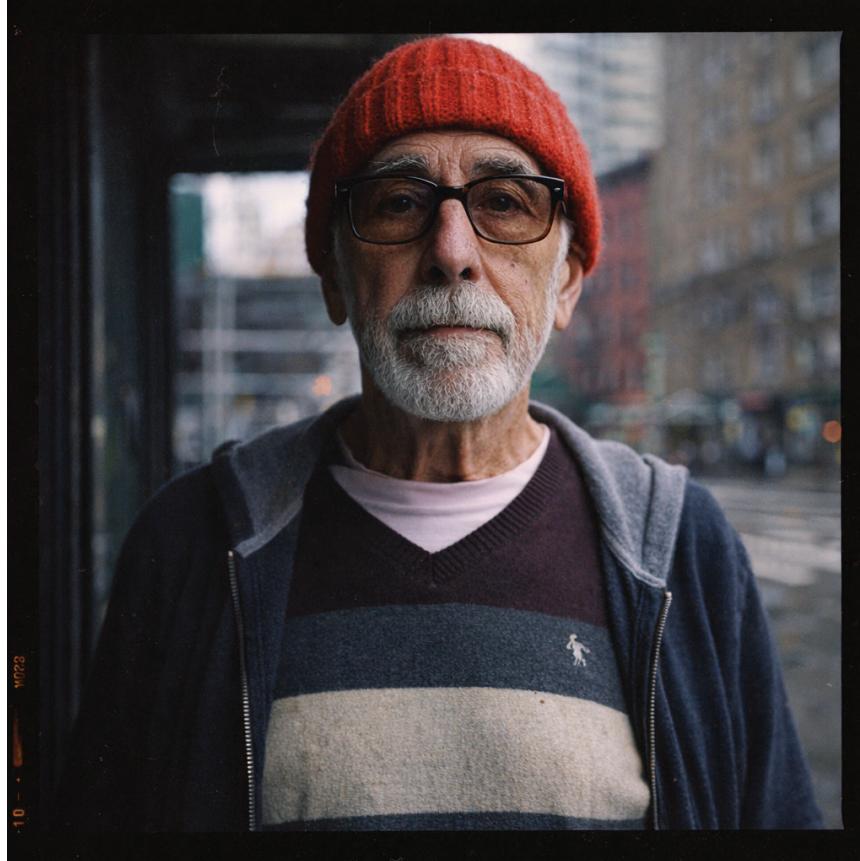
I'm happy because I finally know what I'm here to do. I do not work, so I put my time into God's work, and little by little it stopped being just a feeling and became something I could do with my hands and my feet. I pray over people, give out Bibles, and bring people to church. I found a church for the homeless and I bring homeless people there. I know what pulls them in at first, dinner, clothing, hygiene, and then they sit through the service and hear God's word. It started with six people. Then it grew until I could not count it cleanly, seventeen or more, sometimes a hundred on a Sunday. We started with one bus. Now we come with five, and sometimes we still have to make a second trip. Along the way I saw I had to cover forgiveness too, helping people break soul ties. My name is Sidney.



Not really, no. I am living paycheck to paycheck, and it has been hard trying to make it and be successful, so I feel a slight depression. I keep coming back to nursing. I used to call it a five year goal, but it is really a ten year goal. Since I was little, I wanted to be an RN, to travel, to do labor and delivery. I love babies. The dream is not the problem. It is getting my foot in there and believing in myself enough to do it. I procrastinate because I am scared of failing, and I am such a perfectionist that I worry about not making it, even though I know I can. I want my dad, with his health complications, to see me walk across that stage, and I want my family to be proud. I want more Black RNs and more people of color in hospitals, and I want to advocate when it counts. I am trying to stop letting fear run my calendar and make it real.



Very happy. It is in the daily living, just waking up and being here. Some days I am on dialysis and I watch people expire. I go home, I sleep in pain, and I honestly wonder if I will wake up. So when I do, when I get a day where I am alive and well, I feel it and I do not take it lightly. My success is part of it too. Work makes me happier, being on the register, seeing people come in, being in the middle of the day. The way I talk to people and build relationships comes from inside. I am in touch with who I am. I love who I am and who I am trying to be, and I mean it. I try to live now, because I have seen how fast a day can turn into a last day.



Yes, even though I do not see clear, I am happy. I am still learning. When I learn something new at 79, it feels like an f word, magnificent. I wake up and learn every day, and that tells me I am still alive where it matters. I know I am human and I make mistakes, so I do not hate myself for them. I can tell the truth and look at what I did wrong without running. That gives me power at 79. I can fix things, or at least try, and my life gets better when I face my own mistakes. I still feel fear because that is part of being human. We are not omniscient, and I do not even know what we are evolving into. Sometimes I think our maturity is low, but I believe we are still evolving. I am learning not to be afraid of being vulnerable.



I am happy. I share my life with my wife, and I have a lot to be thankful for, so I keep gratitude in front of me as something I return to, not just a nice idea. I am grateful to wake up and be here, for my family and friends, and for my spiritual connection. Life is not one straight line, and some days are hard, but if I pay attention I can still take something from it, not because the hard parts are good, but because the lesson helps me with what comes next. I have had to learn not to be so hard on myself, to let up and just breathe. Pressure comes from everywhere, even from me, and sometimes praise does not land. I keep coming back to love, and trying to put real actions behind it. It does not fix everything, but it can outlast some of the bad.



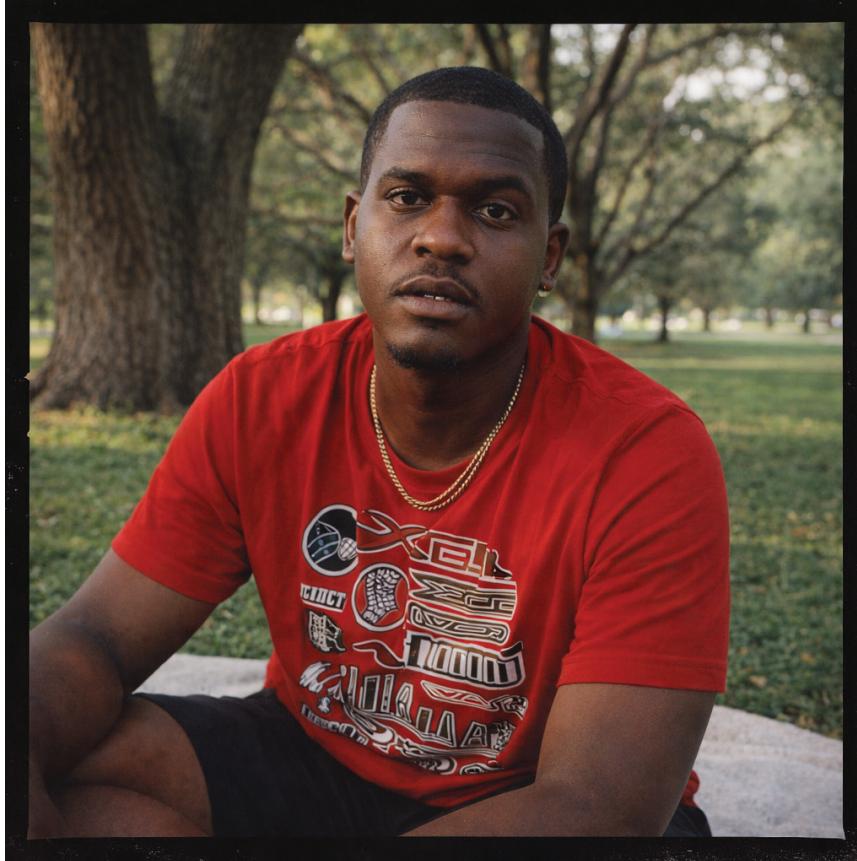
Most of the time. I have a lot to be grateful for, my health, my family, and especially my daughter. I live with a chronic illness and I was not supposed to have children, so when she came along she felt like a miracle. Being her mom was the biggest wish I ever had, and getting to live it makes me believe in a higher power, like something heard me. We have a special bond, not just the sweet moments, but the way she changes me. My favorite part is learning from her. She keeps me humble and teaches me patience, and I am still learning it every day. A lot of my happiness is simple, being able to walk and talk, not being in a hospital room, not having a terminal disease. I love nature too, barefoot on the grass, birds, trees changing colors. Jesus is coming back.



Yes, I'm happy. I have my son, and today he turns one, and that makes everything feel real and worth it. I'm happy just being alive because I got through COVID, and I know a lot of people did not. I lost my aunt, the one who held me and told me not to be sad when I was going through it, and losing her showed me how short life is. Some things happen whether I am ready or not, and sitting in sadness over what I cannot control does not change it. Now when I wake up, I try to make it a positive day, come to the park, get outside, be around people. Having my son made me appreciate who I have right now, my family, my mom and dad, my partner. I moved away and started over, and even with the losses, my dream still came true, and I am here to see it.



Yes, I finally arrived. Good friends, good people, and beer bring me the most happiness. The holidays are especially happy because that is when I see my beer friends. We only get together a couple times a year. We do not keep up much in between, then the beer arrives and we show up. I do not always have a positive attitude, but it is easier when I know what is waiting after a hard week or a heavy day. When I am not feeling it, I read or I spend time with my grandchildren. They bring me up and give me hope. They are innocent and life is simple for them, and it reminds me not everything has to be complicated to be real. I have learned to be careful about who I keep around me, because their energy can get into mine. I wish people were more tolerant and less judgmental. If nobody is getting hurt, let people be.



Yes, I am happy. I cannot dress it up as anything big. It is my family, my girlfriend, my kids doing well. Some days it is just being outside, breathing, not really wanting for anything, glad to be alive today. A lot of it is freedom, not being locked up. I know people who are in there right now, and I have been in their shoes, so it hits different. Inside, your day is not yours. Somebody tells you when to lay down, where to go, what to do, when to be back. Regret runs through your head and all you have is time, so you think and make a plan for when you get out. I am doing better now, staying out of trouble. My kids are good, I have support, and I get to move around. I do not take that for granted like I used to.



I am content right now, I am okay, but I could be better. It has been six or seven months and I am still getting over it, still asking why it is still in me while life keeps moving and my heart feels heavy. I am 34 and I thought I would be further along, married, building a family, but instead I feel like I lost myself. I am creative and I think about clothing design, and somewhere between work, routine, and that relationship I stopped feeding it. We went from best friends to strangers, and I still love her, even after moving from a house into a smaller space with my dog. I do not have a big circle, and with a controlling mom I learned to be alone, so starting over hits harder. Some days I am fine, then a small thing brings it all back. Lately I keep coming back to tenderness, and to how good intentions do not fix inner issues, hers or mine.



Of course I'm happy. I've got two beautiful boys waiting for me, and my wife is right there with me. It doesn't get better than that. What stays with me is watching them grow, seeing who they are becoming, being there for the little changes that add up to a whole new person. One of my favorite memories is a road trip last year, just me and my oldest son, no big plan, just time together. I remember thinking, this is it. When I think about happiness, I think about family. I see people put so much weight on material things, but for me, being around my family is my life. I try to stay with what is right in front of me, not lost in what might happen or replaying what already did.



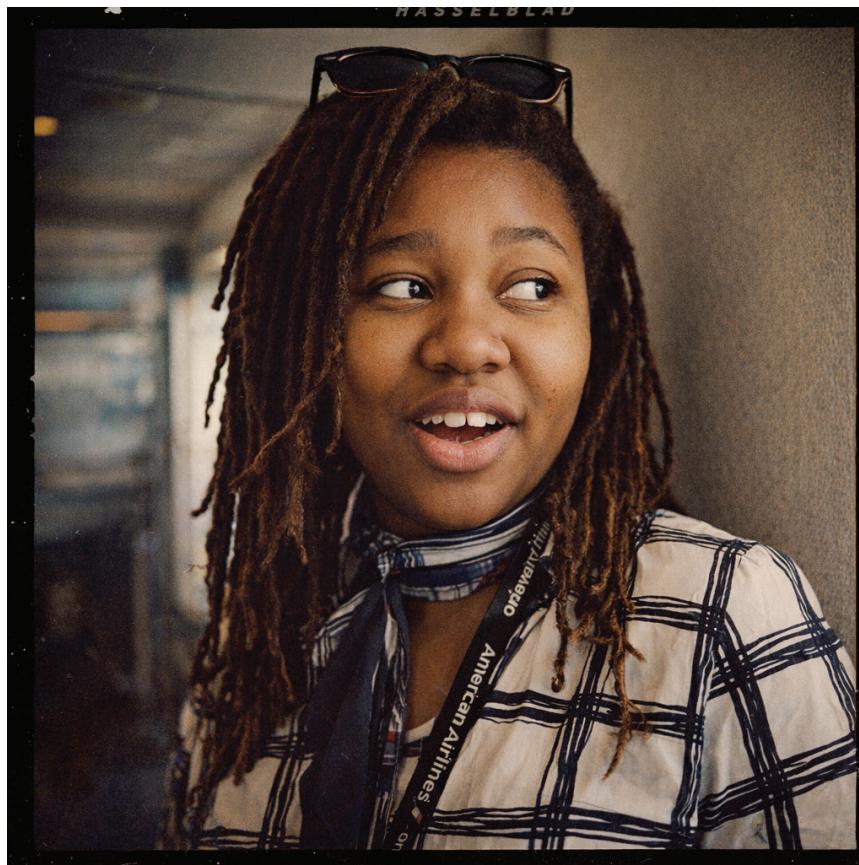
Yeah, always. I wake up, breathe fresh air, and I can see and taste. I can just stand here and be in it, and that is beautiful to me. A few years ago I hydroplaned in a car accident on wet roads with bad tires and hit another car. I knew how easily it could have gone the other way. I could have died. I do not have some big explanation for why I walked away. I think it was God. Since then I do not take tomorrow for granted. I have lost a lot of people close to me, so I have seen how fast someone can be here and then not. On my phone I keep a picture of my wife as a kid. We have been married three years. She is my friend and my fit. I am not interested in letting other people decide who I am supposed to be.



I am happy. I was not always like this. My son died when he was seven months old, and I hit hard times. I sent my other children to my parents and lived in depression for a while, not taking care of anything the way I needed to. Then I stood up and moved forward because I still had kids who needed me. Prayer helped. Friends helped. Family helped. But I also had to rely on myself to show up for them, and knowing they were waiting gave me something solid. I do not have many memories of the baby I lost, but I have memories with my other boys that feel like proof we made it, like the trip we took after my oldest graduated. I do not take time for granted. I just got off work and I am headed to the park to play with my babies, and that is enough.



I am happy. Not every moment, because I do go through sadness, but I try to look on the bright side and leave room for good things to happen. I work at a psych hospital, so I have to keep it together, and it is fulfilling, but it can weigh on me. Watching people suffer is draining, and sometimes I carry more of it than I realize, yet I am grateful I can be there when someone is in a dark time. I have had a lot of bad things happen to me. I lost my mom. I lost my little sister. There has been a lot of death in my life. Some days I get up and go out, feel the air, and remember I am here. Other days I do less and just make sure I am still living. Traveling, my dog, and helping people bring me joy. Helping someone else helps me too.



I could be happier, but I think I am alright. I have a hard time being satisfied, because every time I get what I want it still feels like not enough. My childhood was not terrible, but it was not the best, and I spent a lot of it fantasizing about adulthood, like I would have the world in my hands. I do love my life. I am young, single, I have my own place, and I am doing pretty well. It just does not live up to the fantasy, especially the part where I thought I would have control. You grow up and realize there is always something deciding for you, work, family, the world. I never really saw eye to eye with my parents, and I often felt around people but not fully in it. I want my life to be mine. I am tired of adjusting myself to other people's expectations. I do not want anybody else running my life for me.



Yeah, I'm happy. A lot of it is simple right now. I have friends overseas and I cannot wait to see them again, just catch up and walk around and see what has changed. I love being there, the food and the culture, Christmas lasting forever, people singing to themselves, hanging out at the mall and meeting new faces. It is not as wealthy as here, but people seem present, smiling, close with their families, and that closeness makes life feel good. Here, people come and go and it can be hard to build something lasting, and I work 12 hours a day with everyone rushing. I try to step back and ask what I did today that actually mattered to me, because when I get old I do not want regrets. Money and careers fade. I remember experiences, new places, nature, and being with people I love.



Yes, I'm happy. I'm happy because I'm still here. My fiancé passed away a year and a half ago. Then my sister passed away nine months after that. Life will do that--you never know what's coming next. So I hold on to what I can hold on to. I'm able to wake up and live. I'm able to see my grandbaby. I'm able to take care of everybody in my family. I'm able to go to work and do my job. That's enough for me to say it out loud: I'm happy. Life is short. I've seen how fast it can change. Be happy. Live your life.



Yeah, today I am happy, because I woke up on the side of the grass. I have my girlfriend, I have my family, and I am still here to say that out loud. I just lost my son, and I am glad I am not falling into that desperate grief. I am handling it the best way I can. Some days it comes in heavy and I feel my anger wanting to jump in front of it. I know my trigger, so I watch it and I do not let it take over. What keeps me grounded is finding something to smile about, something stupid enough that I can laugh, even for a second. My family worries about me, they call, they check on me, they still want my decisions. That makes me happy because it means I matter. I am crazy, that is the truth. When I can laugh, I can breathe, and I can make it through today.



Sometimes, but not all the time. I am getting there, day by day, and it has improved as I get more mindful and stay present with what I am thinking and feeling. When I notice negativity, I sit down at home and start with sensations, just the physical part, and stay there. After a while the thoughts rise up, usually tied to a bigger belief that is usually negative, and then I see how it has played out in my life, the same themes, the same loops, the same evidence I have been using to keep it alive. I do not rush it. I wait until I am done feeling it, then ask if I am ready to work on it. If I am, I question it and look for real evidence against it. The feelings fade, gradually. I used to walk through a park and feel much worse than I do today. I cannot drown it out. I have to meet it fully.



Yes, I am happy. I am happy because I woke up this morning, and that is enough for me. I say it over and over, like I am reminding myself, and sometimes I dance and laugh and call myself the boss because it feels simple and real. People bring me the most joy. I have been here 40 years, meeting everybody, new faces, new voices, new stories, and I like interacting and getting to know people. A couple years ago was the worst time for me when my mom and dad passed away. I was close with them, and losing them shook me up inside. I doubted myself and did not feel like a good person. What got me through was me. I learned who I am, learned from my mistakes, and I did not stay stuck. Now I keep coming back to what I say without thinking, I want to be happy.



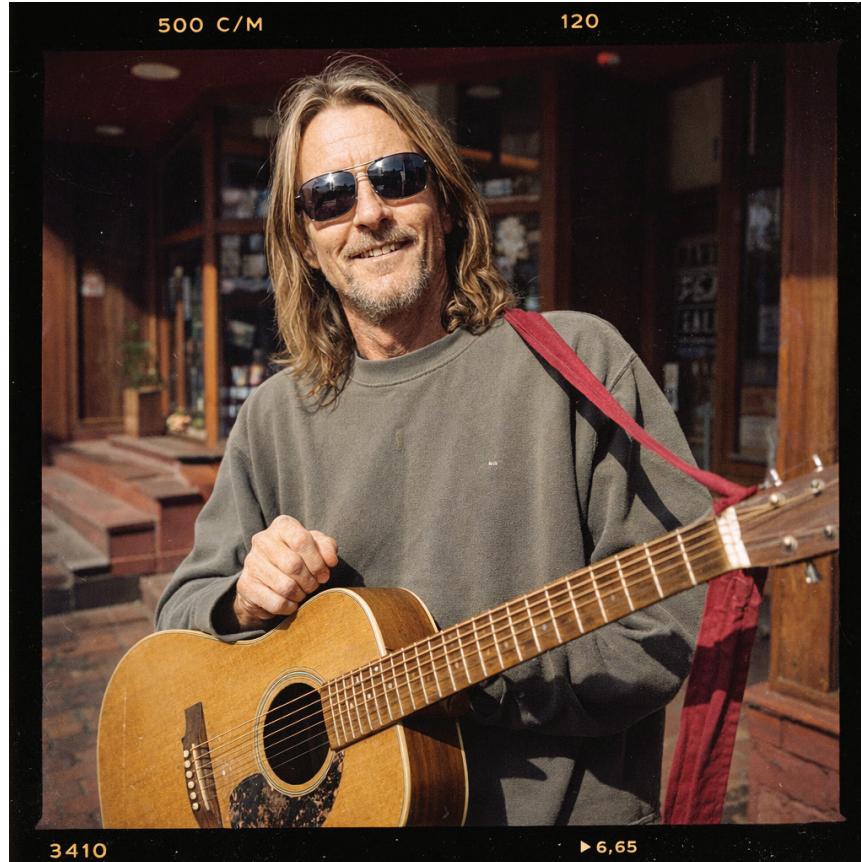
Yes, I am happy. I am happy to be here, able to move around and do for myself, and grateful for my family. I have always been that way, even as a kid. I do not do anything special, I just be myself, and my mama raised me to be easy with people. She raised all of us, nine sisters, and we were taught to stay close, help, and love. We were thirteen altogether, and now we are ten. I have eight sisters living, and I lost one sister and two brothers. I carry that, but I still have what my mama gave me. I worked nearly forty years caring for older folks, and being around people taught me how much someone can need you just to be there. I am retired now, and I still hold on to my faith and to showing up for people.



Yeah, I would say I am happy. I grew up fast, and at 19 I moved away and started living on my own. It is incredible, but it is intimidating because when you fall, you fall alone. Back home I felt lonely all the time, depressed and anxious, walking around like it was only me. Moving did not erase that, it just made it impossible to avoid. There were nights where it really was just me, and I realized that does not have to be a bad thing. I started to like who I am. I started to believe I am a good human being, and I stopped reaching for people who left me empty. I found people who challenge me in a good way, and I built a new family. I still have days where I look at everything and think this sucks, but I still feel like life is beautiful. I want to leave the world better than I found it.



I'm happy right now. I do not carry happiness like a permanent label, it comes when a few things line up, and today they did. I ate well, went to the gym, and kept my mind pointed in a better direction because the basics give me better odds, even if they guarantee nothing. My family and friends give me energy, and I want to show up as my best self, not just take from the room. I have not had the easiest life. In 2019 my car broke and I walked to work while living with random people, watching other lives look like a straight line while mine kept getting interrupted. My mom and aunt told me to stick it through, it would not always be like this. When it gets tough, I focus on what is right in front of me, food today, a place to sleep, and I try not to forget what that means.



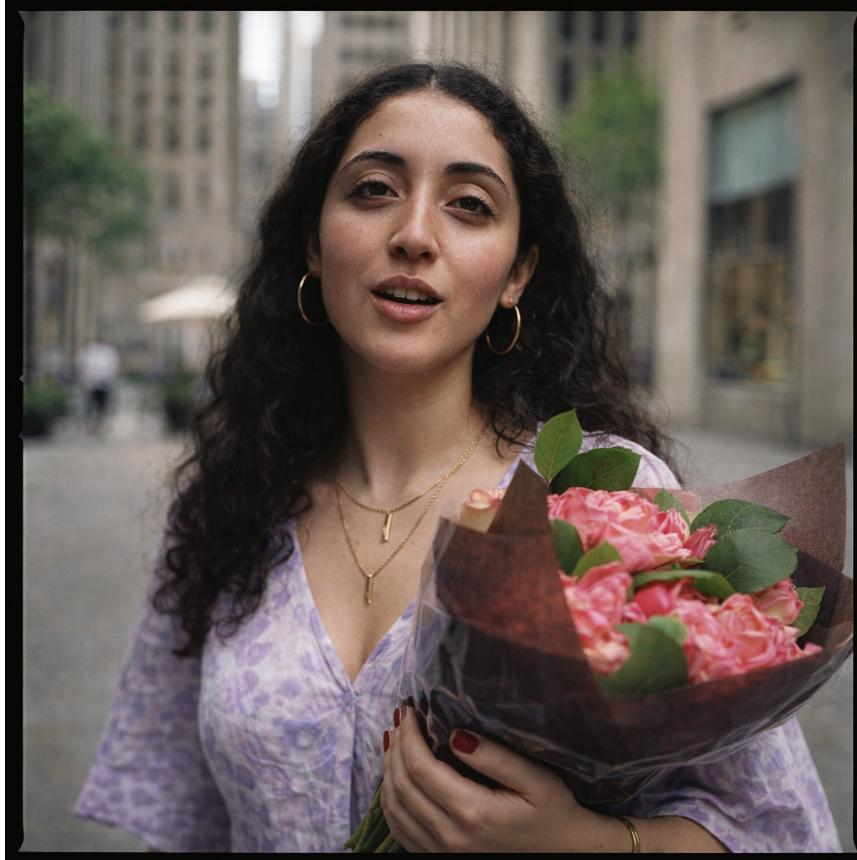
Yeah, I'm happy. I've got nothing to be not happy about. I'm golden, I've got what I need. I make money playing guitar, but it is not the money. Playing out here feels fulfilling. Sometimes it is something small, like playing Old MacDonald for a little kid and seeing the smile on the mom's face. That is most of it. As long as I have a roof over my head and enough to take care of myself and keep going, I do not need more. I started guitar around eight, dropped it, came back at thirteen, and I have been playing ever since. Music is my life and my life is full of it. I think about companionship too, maybe a wife, maybe not, and even that feels like a question mark. A big part of what makes me happy is making my mom happy, letting her know I am okay and I can take care of myself.



I'm very happy. I'm finally back in my craft, the thing I love, after years of stopping myself out of fear and inhibition. So much happened that I reached a point where I thought, just do what I can, and even trying again makes me happy. I feel peaceful working outdoors, even when I am alone, because being outside makes me feel part of something bigger and I can breathe. I went through something traumatic, and I believe it was tied to not having nature in my life. I started hiking slowly, then I walked eleven hundred miles on a long trail, and it changed my perspective and my mental health. Nature taught me acceptance of my age, my white hair, the extra pounds, my mistakes, and to keep going without being perfect first. I carry a saying now, the trail will provide. My work is about aging, two versions of me becoming trees, and the peace of receiving what falls.



Yeah, I am happy. Even with the horrors in the world, I can still get up and keep fighting for something better, and that gives me clarity. Some mornings it is as simple as looking forward to breakfast I love and a couple cups of coffee. I am retired, and I do not take for granted that I can move through my day. I can go out, show up at demonstrations, keep my gym routine. I still have a body that lets me participate. I have hope right now, and as long as I have hope, I can say I am happy. That does not mean I am always content. For me, happiness is wanting what I get. I have to accept the cards I have been dealt, stop measuring my life by what did not happen, and notice what I can still do with what I have. Gratitude helps, and so does being connected to other people.



Yes, I am. A lot of it comes from time alone. I learned to love my own company. I meditate, I dance, I get lost in small hobbies that matter to me, and I pay attention to the people I keep close. More than anything, it is my mindset. When something negative happens, I try not to lock onto it. I let myself feel what I am feeling, I am not pretending it is not there, but I do not want to live inside it. I cannot let it take over my whole day or my whole life, so I work on releasing it so I can move on. I remind myself I am doing my best, and my best is not perfect. It is the energy and headspace I have right then.



I'm not really happy, not here anyway. I do not like this job anymore, but I have bills, so I show up and get through it. If work was not in the equation, I would say I am happy. My boyfriend, my dog, my siblings, my mom, my grandma, they are my people, and it goes both ways. When I leave, I think about going home, eating something, and being done for the day. In college I was a full time student working three jobs, two part time and one under the table, and I was tired all the time, but I kept going. I started here right out of school because of the pandemic, and getting into production without experience is hard. I use what I have on my demo reel and keep applying. This job serves a purpose. I do not think happiness is constant, so when I feel it, I notice it.



Yes, I am. I am very happy. My happiness comes from being alive and doing what I can do. I have cerebral palsy, but I get up and live my days. I walk everywhere, I go where I want to go, and I do what I want to do. I do not let it get me down. I know people with disabilities can feel shut down and discouraged, like they are not worth anything, but I do not see it that way. I do what I have to do with what I have, and you never know who somebody is going to be. When people see me graduate and keep moving forward, it makes them excited. I have spoken to kids with disabilities, and it mattered to me to help them feel like they are part of this world. I want to be treated like an adult, seen for who I am. I tell myself to keep going.



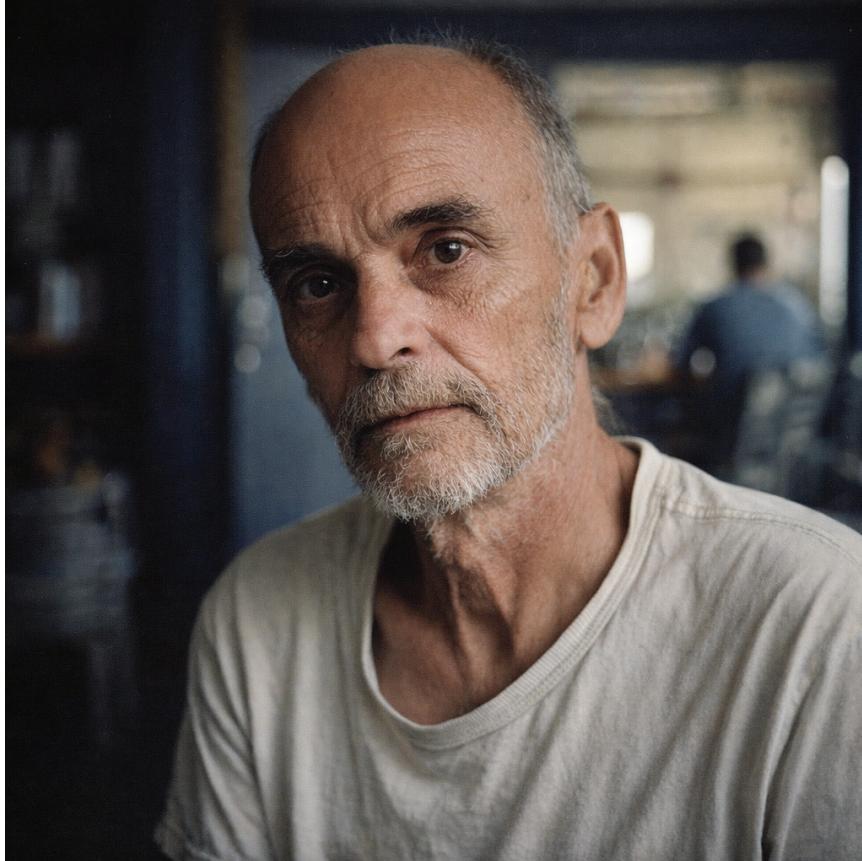
I'm more than happy. I'm alive, and that is everything. I have air in my lungs, legs under me, and choices left to make. I have seen life get real short, real fast. Once I jumped off a boat and came up to nothing. I thought, I guess this is how I die. I stayed calm because I am a Marine. My buddy jumped in after me with a life jacket even though he did not even know how to start the boat. I did not have one. Another time overseas, in a sandstorm, I had to decide whether to keep moving or stop and recover. I called it and later learned we would have stepped on a bomb. In the moment it was not dramatic, just a decision. I do not believe in perfect choices, only learning from what comes. Being alive means I can still serve, and that is my purpose.



I'm happy most of the time. Happiness, for me, is pursuing goals and feeling like what I do matches my passion and purpose, and right now I feel on my way. I also know it is easy to invent a point in the distance and tuck happiness inside it, like it only counts later. Still, I love my dog, I am in a new relationship that feels good, and I am starting a new career I am excited about. I am getting there, but I am also here. I do not expect to be happy all the time. The lows show up, and some pain and struggle is just part of it. What I want to leave behind is simple: when I meet someone, I want them to feel better after. That is why I bring people together for social hikes, to connect, have fun, and notice where we are.



No, I am not happy right now. I think happiness comes from me, but it starts with contentment, and I am trying to get back there. I just got out of something that drained me, and I keep putting other people first until they take it for granted. A month ago a would be boss assaulted me, knocked my glasses off, stripped me down to my boxers, and left me in the street. I got him arrested, then dropped the charges because I could not keep dealing with him. I am shaken, but I am not trying to spread misery. Around the same time I got pulled into talking to someone who only wanted money, and I ignored what I already knew. The fog is clearing. I am rebuilding from scratch, appointments, birth certificate, social, ID. I still want to work in health and help people before things break. Kindness is not weakness, and I have been a bully and bullied. I could use help, and I am trying to get it together this year.



Absolutely. I do not have a big reason, I just feel lucky living by the ocean, especially in winter when it is quiet enough to hear myself think. A lot of my happiness is my dog, Laila. I asked God for the right woman to skateboard with and got an Alaskan husky instead, so I trained her to pull and ride and we traveled up and down the coast for miles, mostly at night in the heat, sometimes fending off loose dogs with a stick. She is my best friend and also an alpha, hard headed, and now she ignores me unless someone else calls her name. When she got sick the vet bills climbed to nearly everything I had, and back home people handed me cash until it was covered. I do not forget that kind of place.



Yeah, I am happy. My joy comes from my family, my wife and my two kids, a four year old son and a ten month old daughter. Becoming a parent changed me. I thought I had life planned out, but now everything I do is for them, not in theory. I will go through hell in a handbasket, work the extra hour, do the extra thing to put food on the table and clothes on their backs. If my last ten dollars can buy ice cream and a smile, that is where it goes. That is where my happiness lives. I also want people to see souls before color or culture. We get lost in politics and religion, like that decides who matters. It does not. Cut any of us and we bleed the same. Most of us just want to enjoy life and give our kids something better.



Yes, I am. I got a chance to wake up today, and to me that is God's blessing, so I cannot act like I have nothing. Some days are not positive, and I have to pull myself back. When I get low, it is usually family stuff, like me and my mom arguing about a decision, feeling like I am supposed to trust her but she does not trust me. Then I remember what I do have. My daughter is 14, and thinking about her can change my whole mood. Work helps too because I meet different people and sometimes you can feel you relate even if you came from different places. I am human. My mind gets dark sometimes, and I still have to choose what I hold on to. I want people to really listen because racism is still here, and I do not want to move with the crowd. I want to think before I put something into the world.



No, I am not happy. I grew up believing community, honesty, and hard work mattered, but I have watched liars and cutthroats get ahead while everyone acts like that is normal. I have lost friends to heroin, ordinary prescriptions turning into street pills, and by twenty some of the kids I grew up with were gone. I have seen homelessness up close, people panhandling all day, buying liquor at night, chaos in the street, and then getting brutalized by police. I watched a man overdose and die in a parking lot and people walked around him like he was not a person. I see the same numbness toward the environment collapsing, like it is all background noise. Happiness feels impossible unless I delude myself. I think what actually fills the void is connection to God, not political religion, just a creator and the chance to learn how to love in a world where we can choose otherwise.



Yes, I'm happy. I'm happy because I'm alive, and I can stand out here and sell my flowers. I woke up this morning and I can walk, see, talk, think, and do what I have got to do. I got my vendor license and I work for myself. I have been my own boss for 33 years. I make people happy with the flowers. Every time somebody buys one, they smile. Every day, for 33 years, somebody comes by and gives me a hug, or tells me something, and the flower is still alive. They take pictures and send them to me. I like seeing that. I like flowers because they can harm nobody. I hate when somebody tells me they are allergic, because a flower is not going to harm me. If I got one thing to say, it is buy somebody a flower.



I am, yeah, right now, absolutely. I am away from work, it is my wife's birthday, it is warm, and nothing is squeezing me, so I feel free and present. I have let go of the idea that some day out there is better than today. There is nowhere else I would rather be than right here, right now. That did not drop into my lap. I have suffered a lot, and I learned not to treat suffering like a failure to dodge, but something to acknowledge and accept, even embrace when I can. That is why I can be on a beach and actually be on the beach. I have bipolar disorder, so stability is hard, sometimes I am happy and sometimes I am not, but I am grateful for my life. When something really happens, a plane into your building, a pandemic, the practice has to get real. Right now, I feel in sync.



I'm happy. God loves me, and waking up still feels like a blessing. I'm partially paralyzed. My right foot does not move well, and the right side of my body is weaker than my left. I have been like this since I was three, so it is normal to me, but it is still a lot to carry. I have been through a lot of crap, and I know some people would be miserable if they felt what I feel. It gets under my skin when I see people without disabilities not trying, because I know what it takes just to try. I lost 250 pounds and I feel better than I ever have, and I want to keep going. What gets me up is having a job to go to, something to do, something that gets me out of the house and keeps me busy.



Yeah. Extremely. Most days it is simple: being alive, meeting people, making something, eating good food, movies, music, a book, even a nap. Today I am heading out to fish at sunset, get a couple casts in, maybe catch something, maybe not, and if I do I will throw it back. I like waking up not knowing where the day will take me. When I was about twelve I decided nothing matters at all and everything is the most important thing, because what is small to me can be someone else's whole world. I learned that watching people complain their lives away. I am forty five, I have lived a lot of places, worked a lot of jobs, traveled some, and I still do not get bored of how different we are. I keep books close, like Frederick Douglass and Anthem. I spend my day saying hello.



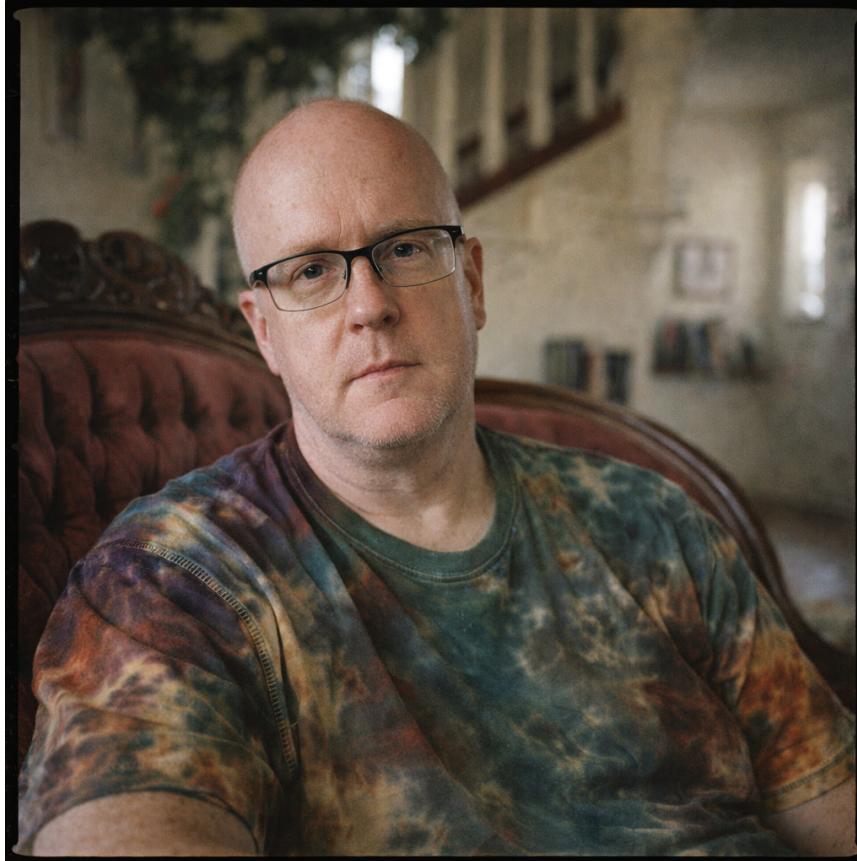
No. I live with clinical depression. But I am happy right now, with my family outside, looking at lights, breathing air I can actually feel in my chest. My wife is here, and being near them steadies me in a way I cannot always explain. What keeps me balanced most days is making art, staying in motion, being productive. I am a mixed media artist. I curate spaces, run a small gallery, own a tattoo shop. I design, paint, build, install. I do not sit down with a theme or a message. I make things to make them, and when I am done, they are not mine anymore. It took me a long time to see the process is what I love, the work itself. It pulls me out sometimes, even if needing productivity to feel okay can turn on me. I will still take it.



I am happy. I am claiming my life. At 50 I decided to work with animals, and at 53 I am finally doing what I used to only think about, moving toward starting a nonprofit animal hospice. For a long time I was tired of other people making decisions for me, and tired of the excuses, mine and theirs. I reached a point where I had to take action, make my own choices, and be a strong woman. I was afraid for years, and I was in a bad relationship with domestic violence. It is hard to get away from, and it makes your world smaller than it should be. Animals gave me peace when I was young and alone a lot, and now I see even more clearly what they give us, therapy and love. Taking care of the voiceless makes my life feel like it matters, and I want that to stay with me when I am gone.



Yes, I'm happy. I'm alive, I woke up, I have a roof, a bed, a car, and a little cash if I need to eat, and when I sit with that it is hard not to feel grateful. The clearest shift was coming back from Afghanistan and seeing my family, just glad to be breathing, and it changed what a good day means. I did six years in the military doing air transportation and logistics, moving things where they needed to go, and I learned it was never just me holding it together. Everybody contributed. I notice that what I put out comes back, so I try to be careful with what I give. When happiness feels far, it is usually because something is disrupting me and I keep trying to step around it, and I cannot do that for long. I fail sometimes, but I count the wins too.



Yes, I am happy. It starts with contentment in knowing God through Jesus. That is the center for me. I have been given a good life, a happy family, and a big family I am close to. I know where I come from, and my roots ground me more than I used to admit. I feel content with this stage of life, and even when I am not on top of things, God is. I learned I cannot build happiness on what wears out. My body taught me that. I have had cancer before, and I am fighting cancer again now. Treatment seems to be going well, and I am grateful, but I know my body will wear out one day. I do not want my happiness tied to what my body can do. What lasts for me is an eternal relationship with God through Jesus, and I am not alone in this life or guessing at what comes after.



Some days I am, and some days I am really sad. I feel good around friends, and sometimes I feel good alone, doing exactly what I want. I am happiest in nature. I have to leave the city sometimes. I need space where I can hear myself think. What makes me happy is simple: doing what I want to do right now, not someday, not after I figure everything out. If I get the feeling to do something and I can do it immediately, there is relief in that. It can be as small as booking a flight in an hour, going away for a couple of days, and coming back. Just deciding and moving. I like feeling like I can steer my own life. I think that is beautiful. If I have a light, I am going to shine it.



Yes, very. I have marvelous parents and a best friend I love. I get to sit outside, feel dirt through my jeans, and read a book I actually like, then do a project from it. If I had to put a word to it, it is gratitude, to my parents, to God, and to whatever in me can still find a bright side even when it is not easy, even when my brain is scrambling to explain it. I love my mother and my father, and I want to say that out loud. My mother has a terminal illness. She has cystic fibrosis. Growing up with that made me pay attention, really pay attention, to how fleeting the people we love are, and how fleeting it is to do even small things, like touch dirt and like it. It makes time feel short, not heavy, just real.



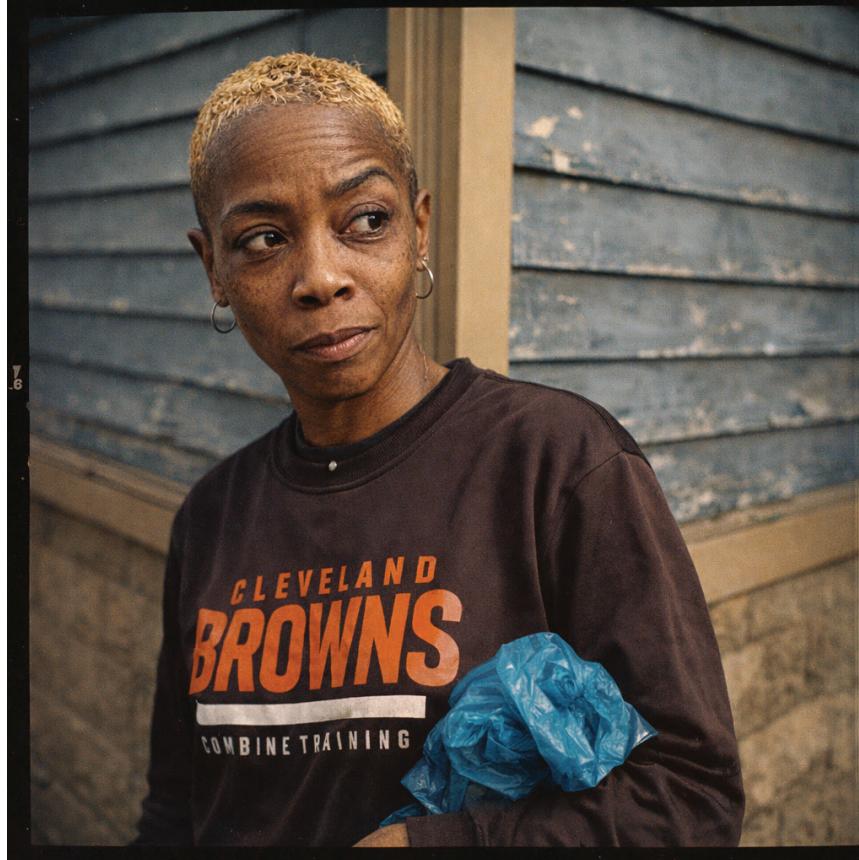
I'm very happy, yes. My career, my relationships, my family, what I worked for is finally giving something back because I paid attention to what I was doing and who I was doing life with. I've been lucky, but I still carry moving by myself at 15, leaving home and everyone I knew, and having to figure out how to be okay. I still carry losing one of my best friends when I was 10 or 11 in a motorcycle accident. I did not know how to process it or what it meant to say goodbye, and it still hits when his birthday comes around. If I could go back, I would just say thank you for the time we had. Joy is sun on my face, walking my dogs after a long day, and being around the people I love. I got taken advantage of trying to be friends with everybody, so now I choose.



Yeah, I'm happy. I'm out at the park taking pictures, and a nice day can be enough. I'm in school for photography, and I don't have a business yet. I can't even say I love it yet, but I'm starting to find a passion for exploring and really looking at what people rush past. My camera is secondhand, a little rusty, covered in stickers, and I love it like that. I shoot whatever's around, swans, ducks, turtles, even a turtle getting chased by a duck, and I just watch and hold onto it the only way I can. Near my school I've photographed firefighters training, jumping from buildings and practicing rescues while everything stinks of smoke, and it makes me realize how hard that work is and how little they must be paid. I try to keep my eyes open, because small details can disappear, and I don't want to look back and realize I never really saw them.



No. I look at the world and it feels like everything is coming apart. When I was in school, you worried about getting your nose busted, not somebody walking in and killing everybody. I watch kids and it always feels like it starts at home. When a kid learns they can call the police on a parent and the parent goes to jail, the authority is gone. Then they get a phone at five or six and it is like nothing matters. Kids are a sponge, whatever you put in is what you get back. If the front room is getting high and the back room is violent games, I do not get shocked when it comes out later. I do not think you can fix somebody after they are already messed up, like me. I wish we would go back to loving people. Hate is taught. I do not understand how racism is supposed to be progress.



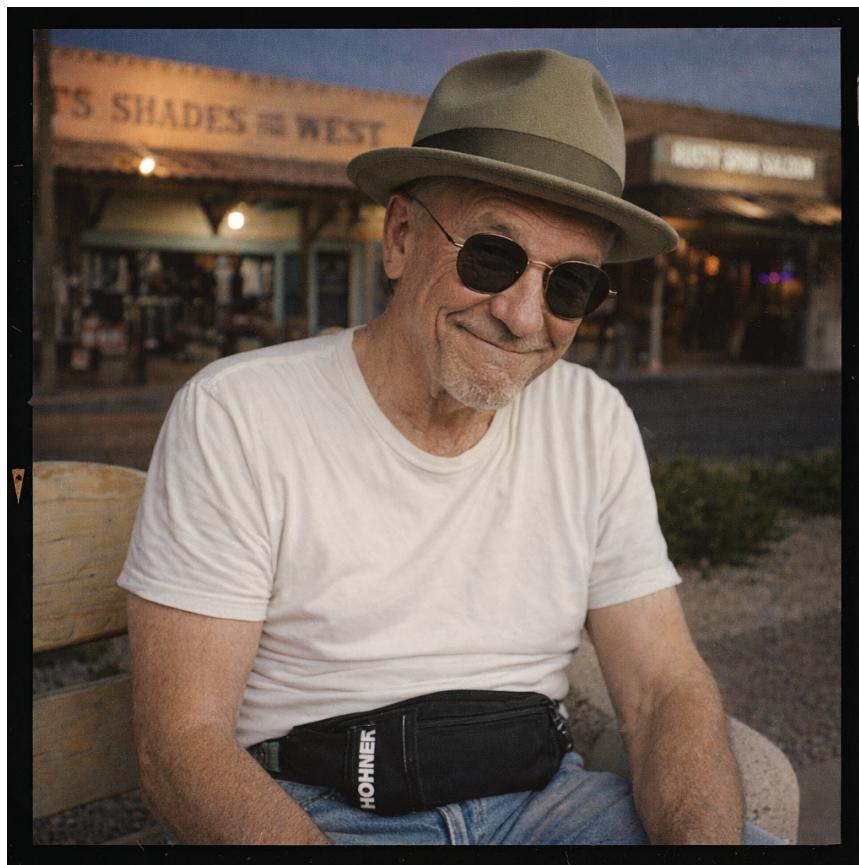
Yes, I am. I love nature, and as a cat mom I notice small things like people walking their pets or a friendly face passing by. I feel how much we need more love, because there is too little. I have been singing all my life. I am 53, a veteran, and a former welder, and I still say go girls, whoa man. Music is not self gratification for me. It is something I give away, and somehow it replenishes me. What makes me happiest is sharing what I have, my love. I have also been through something hard in the military. I am a rape survivor. I do not live as a victim. I hold on to my relationship with God, my love for people, and even empathy for people who hurt others, without excusing it, because I want the cycle to break. I try to be resilient and bring out the best in me.



I am happy. I am on vacation with my wife and daughter, eating fresh popped caramel corn, and it does not feel small to me. It is the holidays and we are together, not rushing for a minute. My favorite thing is just hanging out with them. They are kind of mean to me sometimes, but I love them anyway. Even when they give me a hard time, they are my people, and I share the popcorn. Lately I keep thinking about time. It goes fast, the sun goes down, the day is over, and you do not get it back. It hit harder as I got older, and when my daughter went from a tiny baby to getting ready for college. I do not like how fast it goes, but I have a lot of good memories, mostly from traveling together, even just the long drive to get here.



Yeah, I'm happy. My joy comes from God, and it comes through my family. It is the relationship, being close, making time. I care about actually being together, not just saying we will and letting the days get away. That is why I am at the park tonight. I could be working, but I stopped on purpose. Most of what I do, working, building, chasing the next thing, is for the closest people in my life, and if I miss them while I am doing all that, it starts to feel meaningless. Some of my best memories are not about a place. Recently we took time off and traveled, and my sister flew in from far away. I do not remember every stop. I remember us together, the conversations, choosing the same space on purpose, and getting to know their heart while there is still time.



It is complicated. Some days I feel alright, and some days I wake up like I am still missing air. Lately I say whatever I am thinking and get sharp around the edges, then try to pull myself back. My daughter is like me, smart and quick to call out what she thinks is BS, and when I tell her to calm down I hear my own voice. I carry harmonicas and keep boxes at home, different keys and moods, and I like knowing where things come from. I think about Little Walter and how a small instrument can fill up a room. I wrote a song I do not play for just anybody, about my girlfriend who died and a woman I met years later who looked exactly like her, born two weeks after she died. She is 27 and I am 63, so I say out loud it could never be. I call her bumblebee. I dream of her, wake up alone, and still I keep playing.



Most of the time, I am happy. Not because life was easy, but because I am still here and I can still be around people. I was shot in the face walking into my own business. I saw a flash and went down, and they were on top of me asking where the money was, like I had hundreds of thousands hidden. They took a bullet out of my throat, and it wrecked my head, my leg, everything. I spent over three years in the hospital, surgery after surgery, and eventually I said I cannot do any more. What people do not see is the rest of it: post traumatic stress, no job, trying to carry it like a man. The pain pills kept progressing until I needed something just to get through the day. Now I go to a methadone program every day. It keeps me off heroin so I can function.



It depends what happy means. For me it is geese and birds, the sun coming up, and my friends, one small thing at a time. Today it is just being with them. Show tunes have always been my way back to myself. I grew up loving theater, and those songs still do something to me. The radio feels like the same beat over and over, but show tunes land different, like they are speaking straight at me. I love *My Shot* from *Hamilton*. I cannot sing, but I know what it does to me. A friend took me to see it live on my birthday, and it changed my life, the passion, the orchestra right there. I resonated with people who do not look like everybody else, still pushing through. I am trying to make it too. Life is hard right now, so I wake up and keep moving, with friends, family, and outside help. Love is hard, and as big as I can.



I am happy. I have my family, the people I love, and a job, and most days that feels like enough. When I look at what is good in my life, it is my friends, my girlfriend, my nieces, the simple stuff. Some of my happiest memories are from being a kid by the water, waking up before school to build sand castles on the beach every day, not knowing how lucky I was, only knowing it felt right. I try to keep an open mind with people and find common ground even when I do not know them. I do not mean pretending everything is fine. I get sad too, and I think people get stuck when they hide it so they will not burden anyone. Sometimes it helps just to say it out loud to somebody.



Yes, I am happy. Almost two years ago I tried to end my life. I will not go into details, but I know that if I had succeeded I would not have met my niece, and I would not be here with my family or the friends I have now. I still remember how it feels when the sadness gets so heavy I am sure it will never move. It can feel permanent, but it passes. I do not think the storm makes me someone else. I am the same person in it and out of it, I just learn different things while I am in it. We lost family, and grief makes happiness hard. I am grateful in a way I did not understand before, not because everything is fine, but because I am still here to notice anything at all. When sadness comes, I let it pass and hold on to my niece, my family, and my friends.



Sometimes. Right now I am okay, I am hanging in there. I have been through a lot, and I still struggle with childhood trauma. This year has been hard. I lost a close childhood friend to suicide, and that loss does not stay in one place. It follows me into normal moments, especially when it is quiet. Still, there are happy moments. My nephew was born this weekend. He came early, and the fear was in the room with us, but he is here and he is healthy. My mom is healthy too, and being with my family, just sitting in the same space and looking at his face, helps me hold on. I do not like reaching out. I tell myself I am a burden. Then I think about my friend, and how she never would have been a burden to me. I keep coming back to believing I matter because I exist.



Yes, I am. I am happiest when I can breathe in nature and make something with my hands. I grew up around artists and art therapy, and being taken into different environments taught me to draw what I saw, my family and the people I love. Losing a close friend to gun violence pushed me into grief and imposter syndrome, like my voice did not count, and my parents and mentor kept telling me to own who I am. Being that close to losing slowed me down and showed me how art can pull people together. The real joy is when someone smiles, or tells me my work lives in their home. Today I am drawing on a vintage plate, choosing colors by how I feel, seeing mostly blues that look like gratitude. I want to travel widely, and I am learning that my voice is still mine, even when it feels quiet.



Yes, I am. Just being alive, being able to breathe, get up, and live life does it for me. Today I woke up, ate a full meal, and took care of what I had to, even with rent due. I have a family that loves me, and I love them, so I cannot complain. They motivate me because no matter what I do, they have my back. Even if I fail, even if all I can say is I tried, they are still there. I remember when my vision got so bad people thought I was going blind, and in my head life felt over. I thought nothing would change. My family got me to appointments, kept lifting me up, and reminded me that God has me. I had surgery, and my eyesight is a lot better now. I see great, and I do not forget what pulled me out of that place.



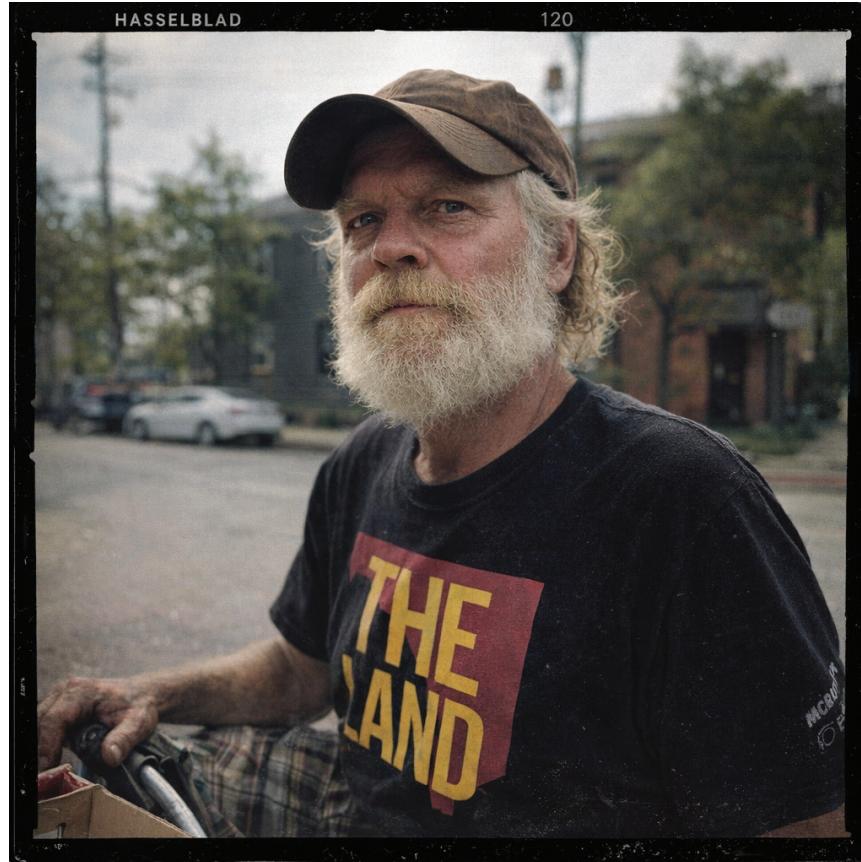
I am happy, I'm extremely happy. I moved recently, and the change did something to me, new streets and a new rhythm that makes me notice how happiness can show up in small places. I teach dance, and I also work with cancer patients, and after almost twenty years of seeing people who would give anything for one more month without pain, it feels wrong to sink into feeling bad about things that are not taking my time away. Time matters, and I do not take it lightly. Dance is one of the clearest things I have, watching students of all ages step into themselves, even in their seventies. I was painfully shy, I used to feel like I would vomit just thinking about being on stage, and I'm gentle with that version of me. Little by little, it changed my whole life. When I'm moving, I'm not waiting to be approved of, I'm finding myself.



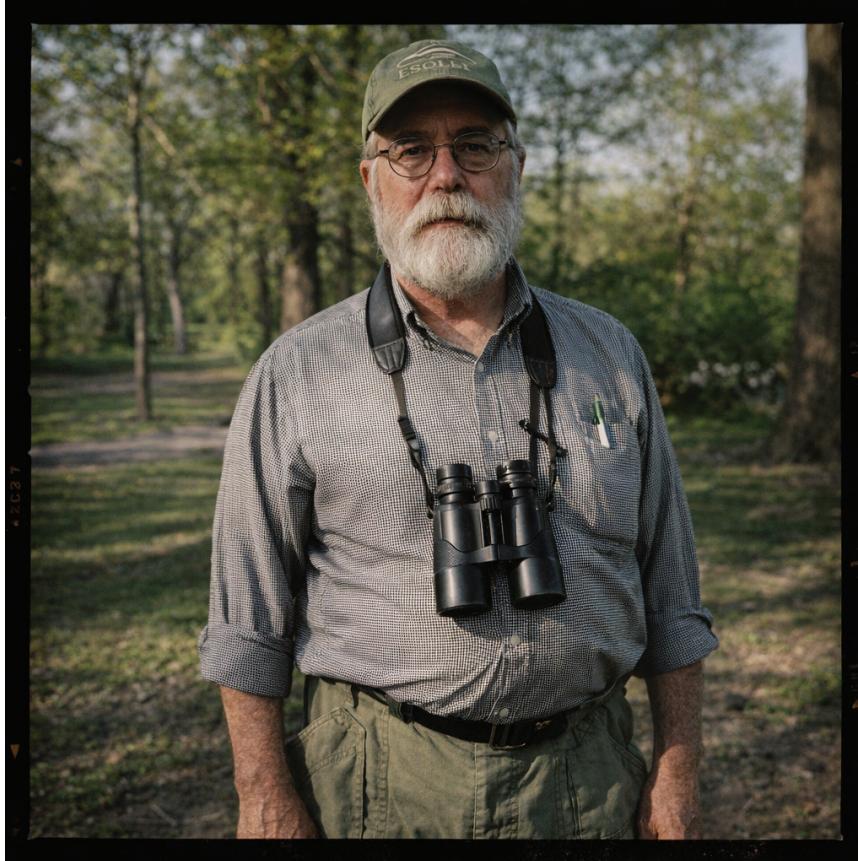
I don't know if I'm happy. Two nights ago my wallet got ripped off, my suspended license and my food stamp card, everything. I spent 25 years roofing, fast enough to win trophies, then the work chewed me up and my drinking finally showed and I got fired. I have been sober three years, but the wreckage sticks. I am 48 and my youngest is 13. He needs me and I have not seen him because I am ashamed and there are legal steps before I can even visit. I promised him a place with me, then the relative I was staying with got arrested and I disappeared. On the street I get pushed along and robbed when I sleep, and people look at me like I do not respect anything, even when I clean up after others. Most days the only thing I am doing wrong is not having a home. I miss my son every day.



Yes, I am right now. It is a beautiful evening and I am out for a walk, so I can feel happy. But I am in a rough time. My hip has been giving me trouble. I just had an injection and I am trying to get back to doing things, frustrated and hoping to postpone what I know is coming, a hip replacement. It weighs on me. When I cannot do what I want, I have to adjust to a version of myself I did not plan on. Three weeks ago I was active and then suddenly I was not. My grandsons keep me moving. I play with them as much as I can, and they keep me from sitting down feeling sorry for myself. Even when I am frustrated, I try to smile so I can carry it. I keep coming back to peace and understanding.



Yeah, I am happy, because I have my boy. I found him about six months ago while someone was kicking him down the stairs, and I lost my temper and took him. For a while he clawed me and bit me, because that was all he knew, and I just kept loving him until he purred and understood I was not going to hit him. I have always loved animals. People have betrayed me. With him it is simple, just his actions and my actions, and I feel the love and the loyalty. I have been living in my car for 90 days, trying to find any work I can, and I have gone without food for days. I walk all day begging for work, get rejected, ridiculed, robbed, beaten, and I pray and keep going. I work hard for my money.



Yes, today I am. I am out birdwatching and it is migration season, and that alone can carry me. There are birds here that were just born, like the little geese over there, and others that have traveled up from far to the south. Some will nest here. Some are just passing through, working their way north like they have somewhere urgent to be. I have probably seen thirty kinds today. It sounds small when I say it like that, but it is not. It is thirty different ways the world is still moving. Family makes me happy too, and I love that these parts overlap. We can stand in the same spot, look at the same patch of sky, and notice the same flash of wings, even in the middle of a park.



No, I am not happy. It fluctuates with my BPD, and my brain does not do steady. I can feel fight or flight in my body. When I am low, sometimes I drink, and I hate admitting that. Other times I try to help myself, take my dog out, sew again, think about fashion and the clothing line I still want. I know I am beautiful, but depression makes it hard to believe, and I catch myself defending my feelings like I have to prove I am not too much. A few days ago a homeless person pepper sprayed me out of nowhere. I was blind and stumbling in a parking lot, trying to call my girlfriend, and nobody helped. After thirty minutes a woman came over, held onto me, got me inside, got milk, stayed close even though it burned. That is what I mean by something real.



I'm the happiest I've ever been, because this morning I found out my girlfriend is cancer free. I didn't realize how long I'd been holding my breath until I could finally let it out. I'm grateful for her, grateful we even got to hear those words. For a second, everything else gets quieter, the noise, the stress, the tough time the world's in, the tough time I'm in. It doesn't erase any of it, but it puts it in its place. Lately I've been holding on to small wins, the little victories I can actually claim in a day. Sometimes that's all I've got, and I take it anyway. Hope is how I keep moving, still believing in myself, still working toward what I want even when it feels slow. Today, what I reached for was gratitude.



Yeah, I'm happy. I'm about seventeen months in recovery. For a long time I was not living right, drugs, alcohol, chasing things I thought were supposed to mean something. I had money and the image, and I have been rich, poor, and in between, but I was still miserable inside, like I could have everything on the outside and hate who I was on the inside. These days I have a little God in my life, a little spirituality. I work my recovery and try to help other people. I am prior military, and I have seen combat and hate and how fast people turn on each other, so I do not want to add more judgment. I do not have the flashy stuff now, and it does not bother me. Money never fixed me. I think what is missing is faith, happiness, love, and compassion, and I want to carry that into whatever comes next.



Yeah, I am happy. In this world right now, I am happy because I just had a baby. My joy is my baby, my wife, and the life we are building. Being a new mom is overwhelming, exciting, and unexpectedly crazy. One day everything is fine, then she is growing, teething, and it all hits at once. Every day is different. Lately my favorite moment is simply getting out of the house. After having her, this world scares me, so coming outside and getting one good day with her and my wife is when I feel the happiest we can be. I am a woman, I am colored, I am gay, and I do not have a place to care what anybody says. I try to live authentic, lead my own path, and let that be enough.



Most of the time, yeah, I'm happy. It's complicated because it shifts minute to minute, but when I look at my life as a whole, I feel steady knowing I'm making choices that move me toward what I want. I'm in law school, and getting older makes every decision feel heavy, like you are locking in your future. After my first semester, I felt this real confirmation that I'm where I should be. I want to be a successful attorney, maybe work in policy, and I hope that becomes its own kind of happiness. For most of my life I sang, danced, and acted, and I thought it had to be one or the other. I wrestled with that for two years, then realized one decision does not erase the rest of me. My friends and family help, not by fixing me, but by loving me when I am messy.



Yes, today I am happy. I like the sun and the way the air feels, and nothing is going particularly wrong. Most days it is more complicated. I have had serious mental health struggles, and I was only recently discharged from the hospital before school started, still trying to find happiness when my brain does not want it. I feel pressure to be happy because not being happy can feel like a warning sign, and I end up trying to prove to myself that I am okay. It can take real effort to believe I even deserve happiness, and to let myself reach for it. When I am in a dark place, being here reminds me how much I have, and how much beauty I could miss. Sometimes it is small things, like taking pictures of leaves changing, or walking past a police officer watching a presidential debate in his car and realizing we were all in the same moment.



Yeah, I'm happy. Nobody's happy all the time, but I'm happy. Money does not buy happiness, but it can make you smile. The newest part of my story is I opened this shop during the pandemic. I was supposed to open April 1st, 2020, and that did not happen. Nobody knew what to do, and that first month was the hardest, but regulars and neighbors got me through it. Somehow we made it, and now it has been four years and some change. This place matters more than people expect. They sit here and suddenly see someone they know, and it hits them that their whole building is right here. Friends run into each other. Faces become familiar. That feels good. If you are having a bad day, a haircut can make you feel a little lighter. We sell peace of mind. If I have anything to say, it is this: do not f***ing suck, and do not hurt nobody.



Of course, I'm extremely happy. This is like the happiest day of the year for me. My best friend is right here. That's the source of it. And being surrounded by queer people who've lived it--really lived it--and still love it. There's something about being in a place where you don't have to explain yourself. You can just exist, and it's enough. It's more than enough. If I had one message for the whole world: be happy, and mind your f***** business.



I would say I am. My joy today is my baby, how happy he is, mixed with simple things like the sun on my face and my mom's voice on the phone. I love his spirit most. He is healthy, vibrant, joyful, and he brings happiness into our lives just by being himself. I keep thinking about the first time he said Mama. I had handed him to family and walked away, and I heard him call for me. Mama. It was small, but it landed big. It made me feel chosen, like I am his person. I try to be present, not living on my phone, not carrying tomorrow around all day, not replaying the past like it is still happening. Yoga helped me practice that. I remind myself to feel flow, feel to heal and heal to feel, because what I push down does not disappear.



I'm happier doing this than I ever was doing other work. I'm mostly pessimistic, and I carry anger and anxiety around, like it just sits in my body. But when I'm playing music, it does something to me. It's therapeutic. It gets quiet inside for a minute. I've done electrical work and a lot of bad jobs, mostly for a paycheck, just trying to get by. I'm not pretending I'm above money. None of us are. But if I'm going to be poor, I might as well be poor and happier. This fits me, not in a perfect life way, in a mental health way, in an I can breathe way. I look at how hard people chase money and it messes with me. Where I live now, I actually see people doing what they love, and I'm trying to let myself ask for that too.



Yeah, I'm fulfilled. I found purpose serving a community, waking up feeling like what I do matters to me and to the people I serve. I make musical instruments, handpans, and it feels special to be one of the only makers around here. Sometimes it comes with suffering, but I take the good with the bad. I love music and what these instruments stand for. They bring people together. I hear stories about the ones I have made being shared, how people gather and community forms, and those sounds become part of their lives. Lately I have been carrying delayed gratification. You might not feel good in the moment, but you keep going, and you wake up and it is a new day. There is always resistance, and patience is part of the process. Making these things has driven me crazy, so I tell myself tomorrow is a new day. After over a decade, it is worth it.



I'd say I am. It comes from my own resilience and what tough times taught me. I learned humility, and I started to believe there is a bigger picture, even when it does not match what I thought my life would be. I have a lot of stories, but the biggest was being homeless for nine months. It forced me to break some of my dependence on other people and sit with myself long enough to see what was really there. It is a weird paradox, and I still do not know how to explain it. I just know I looked hard at my strengths, my weaknesses, and my faults, and tried to sort them out. My family has taught me a lot too. I am still figuring out what it all means, but I keep coming back to patience.



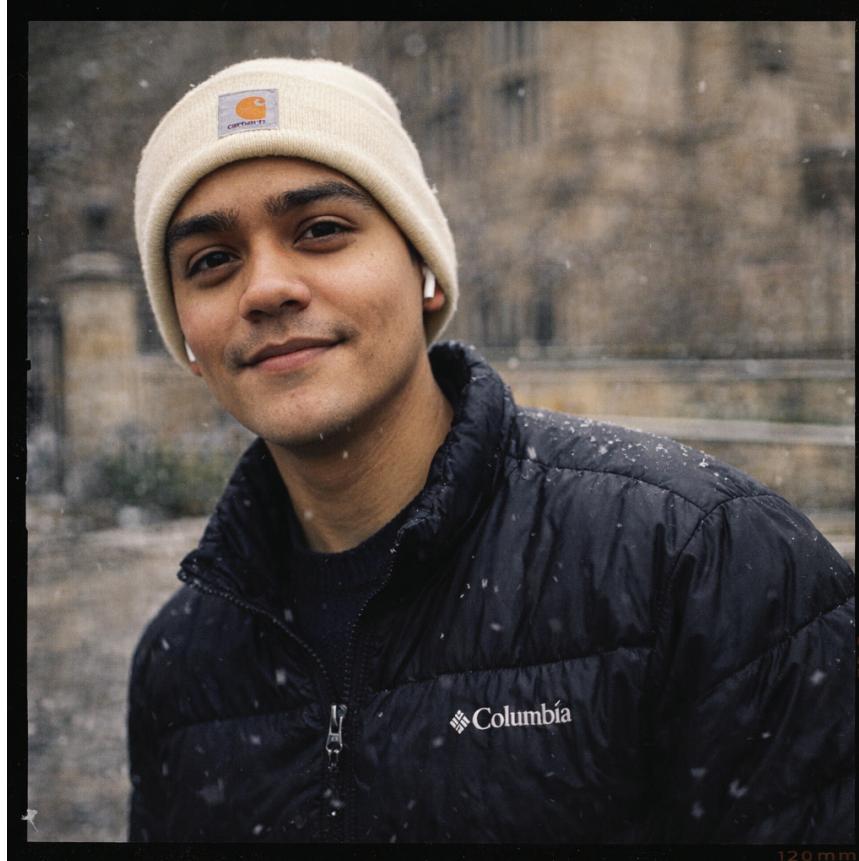
Yeah, I'm happy. I've got a wife and a family and three healthy boys, and they're grown now, so I made it through those tough teenage years where you pray they listen and stay out of trouble. I was honest with them. I told them I did not have bailout money, and if they did something big, I could not come save them. They messed up some, but not in a way that wrecked their lives, and I had to be tougher than I wanted to be. A lot of my joy is simple: my health, my wife's health, everybody being okay. I work, I put things off, and after three boys I feel like I lost ten percent mentally, but I am good. I have learned to stay calm and control my temper, especially in marriage. Sometimes I yell. I should not. If I cannot help my neighbors, what are we living for? And if I do not like them, I build a fence.



At times I'm happy, and at times I'm not. I get depressed because I'm not where I want to be yet, my living situation, not working for myself, all of it. I would rather try and mess up, even go broke, than sit still. I am not okay with being a failure, but I do not go to a suicidal place. I ride it out, change my mind, watch a movie, reset. I stay thankful for a roof and for waking up, because I have seen how fast your body and your life can get taken. My kids keep me moving, and I have something to prove. I install appliances in big places and I see the quiet and the space and I know what I want. I believe in God, even when I question. I hang with older heads and I hear things I replay. I just keep going until the job is done. I'm still working.



I am very, very happy. I love life because it was almost taken from me three times, and it changed what I notice. When I was about seven, a virus went to my brain, I lost my eyesight, I could not walk for months, and then I died. I flatlined. I remember someone over me, and I remember thinking, no, I am not done yet. Another time a drunk driver came the wrong way at night and missed us by inches. Another time I had a gun to my head. I am grateful for every day I get. What I carry most from that first time is not fear but an extreme peace, and I have been trying to build that in my real life. I am not afraid of death. I just want to give enough to my kids. Today I feel proud watching someone learn a new skill and get so good at it I cannot do it. That makes my day.



Yeah, I'm happy. Some days it fluctuates, but overall I am. A lot of it comes down to what I keep around me. I try to stay close to good people and step back from anything that feels toxic, whether it is a relationship, a job, or just a situation that drains me or brings out something in me I do not like. Simple things help: good food, traveling, meeting new people, seeing new places, expanding my horizons. When I am not having the best day, I do not overthink it. I get outside, go for a walk, move my body, cook myself a hearty meal. Recently I went through personal challenges where I honestly thought my world was over, and then I realized it was not as bad as it felt in the moment. I found the right people, and I found it in myself. At the end of the day, I am my best caretaker.



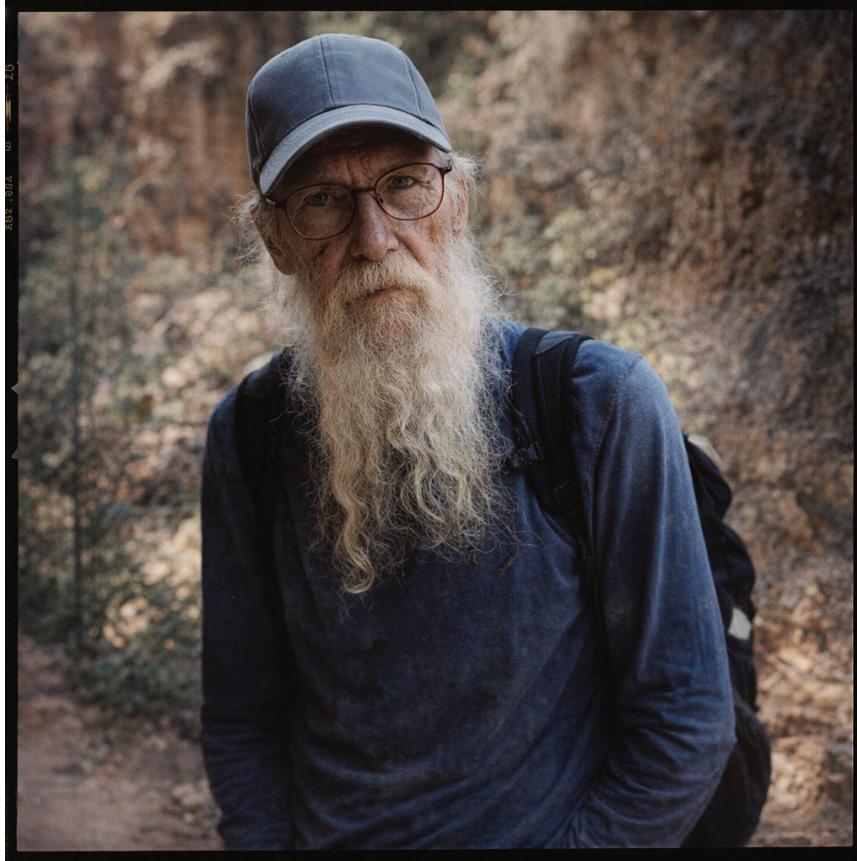
Yeah, very happy. Maybe it's that can't go a day without eating pickles. If I don't eat pickles, my anxiety goes through the roof. It keeps my mind from being cloudy. I don't know, it's just, it's something about pickles. Pickles are the best. *bites a pickle* I can feel my anxiety going away now. My message to the world would be: peace. Just all get along. It's a lot of war going on right now. I wish we could just have all peace and love.



For the most part, I am happy. Ever since I had my son, he has been the highlight of my life, all day, every day. He is about a year and three months, and honestly he is the reason I feel this way. Before him, I just went through life. I was always depressed, and the closest I got to joy was making other people happy. With him it is different. It is the thrill of knowing I made him, knowing he is half me, and feeling something real that I cannot fully explain. I think about what I get to do with that. I want to teach him everything I can and help him be better than I was. I try not to care what people think of me, and I do not want him to live for that either.



Yes and no. I am happy I am alive, and I do not take that for granted. But I am not happy with where I am right now in life or career. I feel stuck in between, seeing where I could be and knowing I am not there yet. I keep moving by looking at my situation, then my potential. I know what I am capable of, and I hold onto the end goal even when the results are not in my face today. I want to move somewhere new that feels like home and become a pilot. I am close, but there are hurdles, and I will not feel satisfied until I am living there and flying. People talk about the pressure, but in the air it feels freeing. Then I land and everything comes back. I am not where I want to be yet, but I am on my way.



I'm very, very happy. A big climb today, and walking for the last month and a half, does that. Being out here makes it simple but not small. People say everything is falling apart, but if you went back a hundred years you would beg to come back, and I am not insane for believing it. They call me Tinker because I used to be an engineer and I have always fixed things. I started late, did a few hundred miles on my first long trail, retired for good, then came back and finished the whole thing. The trail is pain and joy and something beyond both, and I would not give up a single pain. In my 70s, good health turns this into a party. Bad health does not. I am not out here to find myself. I am out here for the experience. It is not fun. It is richer than that.



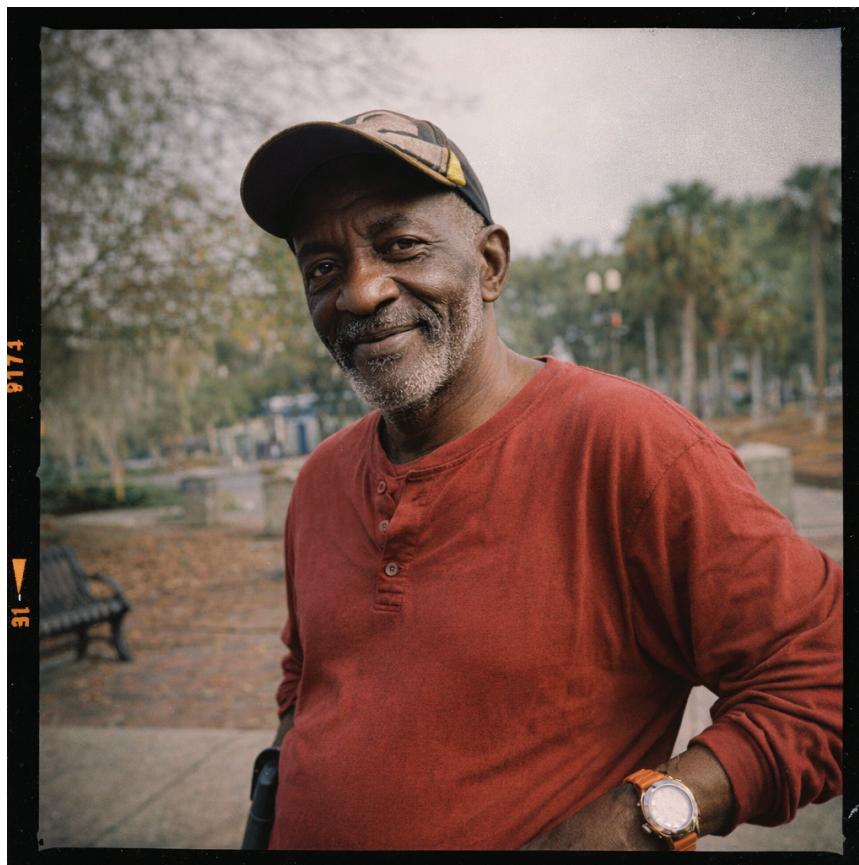
Yes, I would say I am happy, more recently. I finally started taking care of myself, going on walks, doing my skincare, letting myself do what I actually want. In school I thought I did not have time, but I just graduated and I did not realize how much it was weighing on me until it was gone. I lived in the library, always chasing the next test, telling myself I could not spare an hour unless it was productive. Now I slow down and it feels like I found time I did not know I had. I am a morning person, and having my morning time changes everything. I drink water before my walk, try to eat better, and I am more honest about what things cost and what they are worth, including my time. When I walk, I make myself look up, be outside, and notice the sky and the trees. I put effort into how I look too. It all adds up.



Yes, I am happy. I choose it, even though I still get sad and some days I am not the happiest. Most of the time I am content and I try to make the most of the moment. Today I am happy because I am surrounded by people I love, and I woke up. Even when things are not going well, I can usually find something to hold onto, and I try to learn from what happens, even when I did not want that lesson. Losing my grandma did that. I did not realize how much I took her presence for granted until she was gone. Now I hold the people I still have very, very dearly. She was my best friend, and she always preached giving people their flowers while they are alive. So I say I love you, out loud. I practice gratitude, even when I do not feel like it.



In general, yes, but right now no because I am grieving my grandma, and it is my birthday so I am trying to feel happy but it is hard. She was my best friend and she raised me. I got a tattoo that says I love you to infinity because that is what we always said, every time she left or we got off the phone. When I look back, she is in all of it, the parks, errands, school, the pickups, the showing up. She was the person who made me feel like I was going to be okay. I miss how excited she got when I called, her voice, and just hearing her love. I think she would tell me she loves me, and that she is not suffering anymore, and it is okay to be sad. I am still trying to keep going and not spend my life worried about how other people see me.



Yes, I am happy. God is in my life today. I got reborn again, and it changed me. I started following Him instead of following the devil. I am not out doing alcohol no more. I am not out doing drugs. I am working on getting a place now. I did not wake up and become somebody else. I saw my church doing outreach and I saw the smiles on those people's faces. I wanted what they had, and I could tell they had the Lord in their lives. I tried everything else, so I tried the Lord. Right now I do not feel broken no more. I still got problems, but I got peace, and peace feels like happiness. I can look at you and smile all day. I used to know that wide road. It took me a moment to learn the narrow road, and for me the narrow road is the Lord.



Yeah, I am happy by a lot of people's definition, but I do not chase happiness. I chase what I call meaningful suffering, a struggle tied to something worth paying for. When I choose something hard, it strips away what is not real, and what survives is what I keep. I can walk into the gym feeling fine and walk out wrecked, then show up the next day sore and still do my job, and over time I feel stronger and calmer, like my mind gets quieter because my body knows I can handle something. I have moved to new places with almost no money and no job lined up, just a pull to go, and I have watched myself make it through uncertainty. I learned most of what I believe through failure. My faith in God helps me step back and ask what this means across my whole life. That is the happiness I recognize, satisfaction after something costs me.



Goddamn right I am happy. Every day. I feel lucky just to be here, catching the light when the sun drops and everything softens for a minute. I am happy because of my husband, and it still surprises me when I say that. We have been married six weeks. We met on an app and it was not staged or cinematic, it just moved fast in that way where you think you should slow down, but you do not want to stop. Early on I showed him a document I wrote about my life and where I am headed. I did not do it to test him. I wanted to be seen clearly. He had his own version, and I felt that quiet click of building something similar. Being happy does not mean we float through it. We fought two hours ago. I keep coming back to the sky, sunrises and sunsets, the day ending whether we are ready or not, and then another one.



I don't really call it happiness. I have joy. Happiness feels tied to circumstances, but joy is what is left when life does whatever it wants. I grew up in a Christian home, but it did not feel real for a long time. In college I was starting quarterback and I thought I was on top, cheating, skipping class, chasing girls, always needing the next thing. The night before a game I sat in my room and admitted I did not feel God anymore, asking if He was even real. The next day, last play, I tore my ACL. It was the week of my 21st birthday, and my parents did not come because they were disappointed, and the empty space in the stands hurt. Everything I chased could be gone in one play, and somehow I still felt peace. I train quarterbacks now, and I am not trusting circumstances to hold me together. I am trusting Jesus.



Yeah, I'm happy. I'm coming into this year with things changing in my life, and I can feel it. It is not a magic switch, but it is movement. I have spent almost five years where I am now, and before that I came up straight from living in the streets, doing what I had to do. Now I work a steady job and I make legit money. I am not in trouble with the police, and I keep myself out of trouble in general. A big part of my happiness is being able to live without looking over my shoulder. Happiness is not one thing for me. I feel it when I know I am improving, when that motivation is in me, when I can stay positive even when life tries to pull it out of me. I am becoming something I did not have growing up. I am becoming a father. I just want more peace, more happiness, and more time, and less hate.



In this moment, yeah. I'm happy because I have a job again. It sounds simple, but it isn't. This is the first time I've worked in about a year, and having somewhere to go, something that's mine, feels like a step back toward myself. It makes me feel closer to the person I want to be. For a long time I couldn't even picture her. I was in deep depression and I let it run everything, what I could handle, what I deserved, how far I could go. I did not fight it. I just lived under it. Now I'm finally climbing out. I'm proud I'm here. I'm proud I'm trying. A big part of what dragged me down was trying to meet society's standards, trying to look right and be the person I thought I was supposed to be. So yeah, f the status quo. I'm not handing my life over to other people's rules again.



Yes, I am happy. My joy comes from Jesus. In my twenties I chased relationships, trying to get someone to fill a void, and I stayed empty and restless. I got so brokenhearted I did not know where else to turn. I met a woman who had a steadiness I did not, and she told me how to be saved. I got a Bible, started reading, and gave my life to the Lord. Before that it was darkness. I felt dead inside and I wanted to die. The more I tried to make something or someone save me, the more it fell apart. I still go through hard things. My son struggled with drugs, my husband struggled with drugs, and fear sat in my chest. I prayed when I had nothing else, and I watched my son be restored. Joy does not erase suffering. It is knowing He is with me in it and He does not leave.



I am learning to be. I am trying to let go of what I think happiness is supposed to look like on me, and I am tired of measuring myself against an idea I did not even choose. When my anxiety is not running the whole show, when I get past the self doubt for a second, I feel it. It is not loud. It is just real. Today I sat in a coffee shop for three hours and had three panic attacks, and strangers still helped me through it. Even something small like noticing a cute outfit pulled me back into the moment. It reminds me that what I mess up does not get to be the only thing I remember about myself. Five minutes can change without warning. For me it is letting people show up and taking accountability for myself.



Yeah, I'm happy. I love my job as a regional manager for a pet food company, and I try to treat life like the gift it is. I'm an animal lover with three cats at home, one adopted a little over a year ago and two littermates that came later, and the house feels full in the best way. Animals give me simple trust and love, and taking care of them keeps me grounded. When I was 15 I had a spinal cord injury, and after that a positive attitude did not feel inspirational, it felt necessary. I still lean on that. I remind myself tomorrow is a new day and I get another chance to keep moving. I work hard, eat well, and stay fit because it helps. Even on an ordinary errand, I notice I get to be here.



I'm f***ing amazingly happy. A lot of it comes from how I think about what's next. Every day I manifest, I get clear on what I want, picture it, and live in a way that matches it. Sometimes it is simple, like spending time with my best friend, meeting people, being outgoing, actually enjoying being here. I'm happy to be alive, healthy, on this earth. I've got two beautiful kids and they are my life. What matters keeps coming back to family, love, relationships, knowing who I am, and not wasting my energy on people who do not accept it or appreciate it. I have struggled too. I went through a divorce after fifteen years and I was one hundred and fifty thousand in debt. I cannot change the past, so I focus on the future and I enjoy now. Peace, love, unity, respect is still how I try to move, because you do not know what people are carrying.



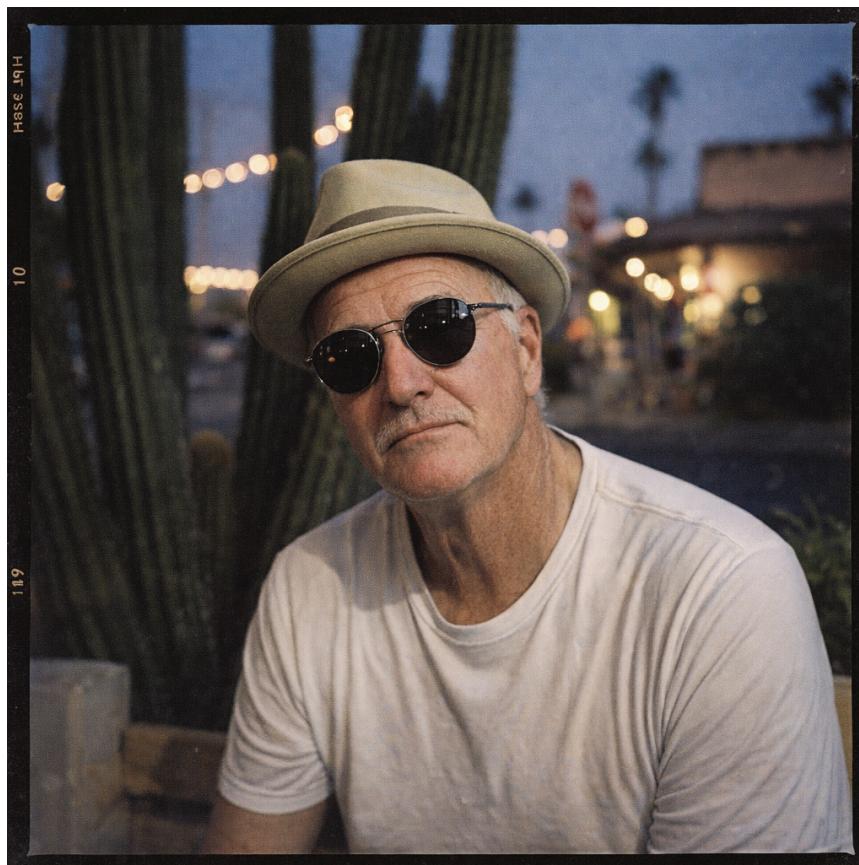
Yes. I'm happy. I'm happy because I'm alive. That's really it. I've got breath in my body, and I'm still here to use it. I'm 39, and I don't pretend it's happiness every second of the day. I have moments where I'm unhappy, like anyone does. Then there are moments where I feel really happy. I don't think it stays on one setting, 24/7. What keeps me steady is remembering how quickly things can change. You never know when your time's going to be up. That's why I pay attention to the time I've got. I try not to waste whole days without noticing I'm living them. Today I'm out here doing something simple--encouraging people to read. It's not a big speech. It's just me, making the most of a day I was given.



Yeah, I'm happy. Not like nothing ever hurts, but my life is going amazing, and even the hard parts are moving, sometimes slowly. I am grateful for my family, especially now that I am finally connecting to them, and for my daughter, my girlfriend, my friends, and the way love has been showing up with room to breathe. For a long time I did not have that. I lost my career, got into a situation that changed everything, spent over a year on bond, then five years on probation. You cannot shortcut time like that, you just sit with yourself, and I did a lot of self healing and asked questions I avoided. Now I am free. I learned accountability, my blind spots, what I bring to the table. I believe in Father God and Mother Universe. I am working on music, putting on shows, building, and trying to be kind to myself as I do it.



No. Happiness is vague to me, and this generation feels heavy. Money, family, friends, it stacks up until I feel alone. I do not think I have ever been fully happy all the time, and I do not even know if I believe in that. I get moments, a few minutes, maybe a week if I am lucky, but not consistently. Most days I feel numb, like I am on autopilot doing what I have to do to survive, not even sure what I am chasing. Sometimes I think it would be easier if I was not here. What I want is freedom, to be my authentic self without fear. Here it feels harder, especially if you are a woman, gay, or not white. I do not get judged much because I am not fully myself. I mostly talk to myself and put on a smile, hoping one day it will be real.



Yeah, I'm happy. I'm retired and I do not have to do anything, and that lightens my whole body. My time is mine now, so I play music on the street, and I go home to my dog, my little mijo. I have had a great life, but my career was rough. For seventeen and a half years I was a death investigator with the medical examiner, almost seven thousand cases, and I saw things I wish I had not seen. I am still proud of it because it was public service and it took years before I felt steady in it. Before that I worked with juveniles in long term treatment, and now I do it one night a week again. I also lost the love of my life when my girlfriend died suddenly, and it took me years to climb out. When I look back, I think about all the time we wasted fighting over dumb stuff.



Yeah, no, I am definitely happy. You caught me at a good time, building my work and finally letting myself look ahead. I am going away to get married, and saying that still feels unreal. I am excited, but I am not pretending I do not have fears about leaving. Last year I traveled and while I was gone a hurricane came through and wiped out my whole warehouse. I came back to a mess, like everything had been rearranged while I was not looking. This time I am trying to do it differently. I want to let it all go for a minute and be in the moment. We met through wine, and it started as business until it did not. What it gives me is stability, comfort, and a kind of home I can exhale into. I play tennis, toss the ball up, look at the big sky, and take it in, because we are only here for a blip.



Yeah, I am happy. I started my own landscaping and pressure washing business, out here with the rake and blower and bags, and it is mine and it is moving. I got sober too. I used to be an alcoholic, stuck in the same day over and over, staying negative and sliding downhill until I got tired of it. I woke up and stopped drinking. Nothing turned perfect overnight, but little by little I built something different. This is probably the best time of my life. I had liver problems and I used to drink and smoke. Now I do not. I run and work out and I can feel my body coming back. It changed how I am with people too. I used to swing up and down and wreck relationships without seeing it. Now I am more levelheaded, more patient, and I can trust myself again. I still see the issues in the world, but people are what I love about it.



Yes, I'm happy. This is one of my bucket list items. I had a hip replacement and heart surgery a couple of years ago, and this has been one of my goals. So I am very happy. There's a song by Toby Keith called Don't Let the Old Man In. It goes for the woman, too. As you get older, I'm 72, you can't let the old person in. To anyone struggling with happiness: I had severe depression at one time, and for me the only thing that worked were meds. I don't believe in counseling too much.

