HAPPINESS REFLECTED:
A COMMUNITY POETRY PROJECT

Collected by the University of Alberta Days of Action International Day of Happiness Working Group
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Preface and Acknowledgements

Many hearts, minds, and voices made this project possible, and we are grateful for each person's thoughtful contributions.

To our poets: thank you for seeing value in this project and trusting us with your creation.

To our readers, we hope that you find what you need in these pages, be it refreshment, inspiration, consolation or solidarity. We wanted to bring this project to our community as a way to remind ourselves how powerful happiness is, and to encourage each of us to seek it out—particularly as we learn to be present with ourselves and the ordinary moments in life.

This chapbook is part of a larger initiative for International Day of Happiness. To get more information and learn about other ways to engage with the poetry collection go to uab.ca/happy.

In your light I learn how to love.
In your beauty, how to make poems.
You dance inside my chest where no-one sees you, but sometimes I do, and that sight becomes this art.
—Rumi
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It's the small things
By Rebekah van Bruggen, she/her
Staff, Department of Cell Biology

An unexpected, rambling, chatty letter from a long-distanced friend
Hot from the oven, a chocolate chip cookie - with a glass of milk
Woodpeckers knocking on old, gnarled tree branches
Early misty morning rambles through the river valley
Laughing children swinging on creaking swings
Delightful encounters with random strangers
Garrulous magpies chasing scolding squirrels
Late night strolls on rain-dampened streets
Fresh produce stocked on market stalls
Conversations that wander and weave
The smell of old, much-loved books
Frost fractals fringing the window
All the dishes done and put away
Cool breezes on a hot day
Framed old photographs
A hot mug in cold hands
Snow ladened branches
Crossed off To Do lists
Shared moments
Sunbeam naps
A warm bed
New socks
Simpler
By Amy Bacon
Undergraduate student, Department of Chemistry

I have never been
Happier
Than the times
I am not cognizant
Of time passing
Slipping past me
Carrying me along
Its tide

Never been
Happier
Than the times
I am merely another
Creature
And I simply
Exist

Absorbed
Wholly
My mind consumed
By the rumble of the car
Underneath
My seat
The sound
Of their voice
The smell of
Pasta
Cooking on the stovetop
The taste
Of evergreen
On my tongue
The soft embrace
Of larches
In between my fingertips
And the sight of
Beauty
In my eyes
Why all the fuss?
By Rebekah van Bruggen, she/her
Staff, Department of Cell Biology

Pursued and chased,
A destination or the journey?

They say, “Happiness is a warm puppy”
But what if I’m allergic?

I like sad songs,
Can that bring me happiness?

They say, “Happiness is homemade”
But what if you’re home-less?

If happy is a choice,
What were the options?
Winter Solstice 1986
By Rebecca Graff-McRae, she/her
Staff, Faculty of Arts (TRAS)

Midwinter. Northern Alberta – not quite North of 60 but nearly – far enough to feel like the whole world was south of us: nothing nowhere darker. I was three. My father joyfully offered a midnight ride at 6pm atop a skidoo that roared dragon-fierce and rumbling. The moon might have been full (or memory fills it) casting enough brightness to sparkle diamond tesserae across the snow, a crust above the crust of the earth.

We race, the four of us astride, faster than any reindeer. I am up front, safely wedged between the throttle and my father’s arms. We whoop – my sister and I – as dad sails us over windrows and snowdunes delighted squeals that amplify beneath our toques before stealing away on the wind…

Until
the sled launches and spins
mid-air, a high-dive. My family
a quartet of Icarus falling like
snowflakes through the black night.
I land and gravity
presses me deep into the
cold, apprehension heavier than the weight
of the sled I am under.

Muffled voices echo: my sister crying
out; mom and dad alright and laughing, already
composing the jokes they would tell
to friends when morning came.
The crunch of boots shatters the crystal
silence of the night. Poised, still
winded, I wait, wondering. They call
my name but still
I lay a second, feeling
the love of being
lost, a little longer.
it is in the smallest of things
By Lorelei Loveridge
Alumni, Department of Education

it is in the smallest of things:

each bristle on the brush
that cleans the grooves
between my aging teeth

dirty this food that i eat while
the price of dairy shoots up
thirty percent here in the desert

arabian hospitality put into
my hands in the form of a
traditional bahraini dish

imported from pakistan
the sounds of nusrat fateh ali khan
in my head, how this all started

the lock on my suitcase
lime green, bold as the
declaration: i am going

aloos basheer, deep fried potato
in a gold souq and the memory
of my father talking to the

asian men he met everywhere
in dubai - the taxi driver, the
hotel porter, the lungi seller
the flowers sent to my parents’
hotel room as thanks, the merriment
of my dad before he died a traveler, too
the way my stray cats purr
when I place my hands on them
they stretch their legs like arms

as if to say ‘rub me’ and we
are not alone though the rain
has driven us inside ourselves

gutters whisk the water away
the heater has an automatic switch
and the placement of the clock

on the upper right hand corner
of my computer and the warmth
of this tartan fleece on the sofa

remind me: it’s time for bed, so rest
and when the sun comes up
the venetian blinds will help you

hibernate and recuperate
from the agony of being
6778 miles away
from your Canadian home

sold in the aftermath
to family friends at least
this much is a blessing

for happiness
it is in the smallest of things
The Junkyard
By Jerry Iwanus
Alumni, Department of History, Classics, and Religion

I want to go to a junkyard
strewn with hollowed husks
of Sunday drives to church
first dates and shyness
maybe second and third dates, too – less shyness
and secrets kept from prying parents

I want to go to a junkyard again
with the old shiplap garage
that has a potbellied stove in the corner
mismatched chairs all around, pin-up calendars
and twin tanks for the acetylene torches
that effortlessly slice through the stubborn angle iron

I want to go to the junkyard again
next to my parents’ house
where George would pay for whatever scrap copper we collected
at thirteen cents a pound
so we could buy the newest Mad Magazine
and the kind of ice cream that had a gumball at the bottom

I want to go to that junkyard again
where George would give my mother half his yard every year
to grow a garden where the earthy aroma of dill and tomato
permeated the oppressively humid Winnipeg summer air
and the spray from the oscillating sprinkler
refracted the sunlight into ineffable rainbow hues

I want to go back to that junkyard just one more time
but not for too long
as the garden has reverted to lawn anyway
and the burn barrels have all been taken to another junkyard some-
where
Scrap copper is well over five dollars a pound now --
we may have been wise to hold on to some over the years
Soul Season
By Julie Claire Ma, she/her
Alumni, Departments of English, Speech-Language Pathology

The days lengthen
But the cold wind strengthens

This winter has been too long
So we turn to song

To guide us into spring
Hoping it will bring

Something new
Like fresh morning dew

On a flower that hasn’t bloomed
Or your soul that you assumed

Would be happy

Once spring comes
To My Son
By Natasha Nunn, she/her
Librarian, University of Alberta Library

Today you rescued a small brown bird
stuck in chicken wire. You brought it to me shivering
in your gentle hands.

Your hands have grown so
quickly. And your legs, and your feet.
Your heart hasn’t caught up, struggles to pump blood
through your long-limbed body
making you dizzy, prone to falling.

The fledgling keeps its wings tightly folded,
peeks up at me through the space between your fingers.
You ask, “what should I do, what should I do?”

It’s been one week
since I took an exacto knife
out of your shaking hand and washed
the cuts on your wrist.

I lead you outside,
you open your hands slowly. The bird
doesn’t move, stares at us, its tiny chest pounding.
Then suddenly it
flits away into the daylight, we
laugh with delight that it can still fly.
Breathe
By Zyesa Lo, she/her
Alumni

It’s been a long day
Breathe.
So much noise in my mind
Breathe, 1,2,3.
I watch the leaves fall off the trees
Breathe.
I focus on the flutter, the colour and the breeze
Breathe, 4,5,6.
The small joys of life
Quiet the noise
And I smile
Breathe.
A smile
By Carmen Person, she/her
Counselling Therapist, Augustana Campus

A step forward
looks from
the outside
as movement
in a particular
direction.

A step forward
from
the inside
feels like
movement
yet maybe
you feel it more
fully
than that.

You take that
step from within
and like the
frost on the trees
there is a visible
union of the outer
with the inner.

The movement
in the step
is like the
joining of
beauty from
within
and
from outside.
You know the curling of the lips that seems like the movement of a smile. Like the frost it too can be placed there by the outside. Teased up in the motion of a smile.

What a delight to feel the movement of the curling lips upward as similar to a step forward.

Frost on trees, edges of lips, a step with the foot, you are aware of the joining that you feel as wonder full.
On the axis of suffering
By Jon Lai, he/him
Graduate student, Department of Human Ecology

could there be more to the day
subsumed by discontent
than to reflect
on the time spent

might we uncover
the root of disassociation
and live to experience the grief
that has yet to manifest

your attention will pique in unexpected ways
those feelings and thoughts
that ought to be repressed
will dissolve

the happiness that is sought
may be in the rough
of our kinship and relations
which will not be forgot
Eye Smile
By Ebun Akomolafe, she/her
Undergraduate student, Alberta School of Business

That our skin should stumble and fold and trip over itself
    in its excitement to express our joy
is perhaps another reminder that beautiful things
are most often not made perfect.
The Morning of the Poem

After James Schuyler

By Madeleine Nattrass, she/her
Faculty of Arts, Faculté Saint-Jean, Education

enough
to sit here
hand-me-down table’s
familiar slab of oak      old-fashioned
chairs huddled around its sturdy
burled poster-bed legs   rounded
backs of chairs    their carved
pattern Braille'd into my fingers
from years of Saturday dusting
hours of hidden      played
under its flat roof

enough
to settle in sunlight
in an all-to-myself house
clutter of pens and pencils       untidy
magazines       newspapers       books
fitting bits of reading
into every sitting minute
on this exceptionally warm
October afternoon

enough
that there is a bird at the feeder
pecking with greedy satisfaction
at the on-sale suet
I put out yesterday
a treat
this finding nourishment
in the open book
of a fine poet
I’m happy to get to know.
Puppy Love

By Belle D., she/her
Undergraduate student, Environmental Science, Augustana Campus

My body was my cage
Showing me my limits
My rusty hinge joints squeaking loudly at me
Making me mourn the things I can’t do
Until her.
Her big brown eyes
Her wiggly bum
The way she bolts to just me every time I open the door
She takes me on walks, happy to stop and sniff when I need a break
I learned joy again, learned how to focus on the fun
The way everything in her little puppy eyes shone with curiosity
I became her protector from the vacuum cleaner
And she became mine against my mind
I now see a field of flowers as a thing of beauty
Instead of seeing an unattainable space, I can not run in
She runs it for me, She does the things I can’t
But the joy I feel is all mine
on washing dishes together
By Alexandra Horrigan
Undergraduate student, Department of Earth and Atmospheric Science

another dish. *plunk*
“plonk”
“ohhhh! pish-posh!”
splish, splosh. happiness
Through my cloudy eyes
It’s light when you know you’ll see him again.
Briefly fading to gray when you realize
that you don’t know when.
Its electric, bright as lightning
June fireworks reflecting in her eyes.
It’s Atlantic depth when you kiss her.
Velvet almost black the texture of memory, the night you gazed at stars.
All crammed into the bed of a cobalt truck
Glowing numbers on the dash
music from the right side speaker.
Warm hearts and hot tears of parting
The vibrance of a Midsummers sky, and cotton candy at the fair.
A reflection of youth in our favorite lake.
Vast as the Pacific when you feel
like seventeen might last forever,
shallow as what we were told was sin.
Tinted with nostalgia
my treasured indigo moments.
Cornflower dreaming such fleeting joy
the bliss of my mediterranean memories.
Blushing all through winters frosted reunion
I had never forgotten the blending shades
of their souls dancing together.
Memories of Northwest
By Michael Przystupa, he/him
Graduate student, Department of Computing Science

Whether a drip or downpour,
Coating the world in mist,
In the cold or hot weather,
It sends the earth its kiss.

It forms friendless puddle lakes,
Swelling with lost interactions.
While we weep into streams,
Our sorrows flowing to the drains.

Stay indoors if you wish!
Lock eyes with the cobwebs.
The pitter patter sonata,
Lulls you to sleep in bed.

But in my clothes, it seeps.
No umbrella fella am I!
Permeating into the skin,
Soaking into the blood inside.

As a drenched dress shirt,
Gives you a friend’s damp touch,
Their embrace cools hot skin,
While warming my soul much.
As your wet grinning face,
Has washed away tears with it.
There’s happiness in store,
With smiling dripping droplets.

The tree’s dew shines through,
And green leaves absorb it in.
The air full of fresh wooden smells
From moist soils on mountains.

As the drizzle’s fizzle ends,
I love it when it rains.
A tearful sky’s reminder –
Of being home again.
Instead
By Iris Lau, she/her
Alumni, Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences

Not big bold beautiful
Gilded gold and flashy bright
Preplanned star event
Years in the making

I.
Four housemates, four corners of the world
I hold those nights dear
When once we spoke of dreams
long past midnight, impromptu kitchen meetings
Now,
Though rare,
We make it work
Through time zones and life
Our faces blurry pixelated quadrants
But the banter still echoes the same

II.
Unexpected, your name
Flashes on the screen
“I’m so sorry this is last minute,
but would you have time…”
For you?
Always.
It is me that fear to impose on you
You, now mother to a child
Was it so long ago that we were children
Laughing at our shared secret
Now I in one city
You on a surprise layover
One long evening, we laugh and walk and eat three ice creams
How often this occurrence, every handful of years perhaps?

III.
Mundane commute
Punctuated by jewel toned skies
A rare spectacular sunset in the gloom of rainy winter
Hummingbirds deign to visit my feeder
Eleven floors above ground

Instead –
Your smile
That warmth
Splashes of colour in the quiet of my life
Fills my heart still
My flavour of joy
This and many
Chillin’
By Siri Iris, she/her
Undergraduate student,
Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation

Talking is cool
And I do it a lot
But I also love when the talking stops

And you just sit in each other’s company
Working on your own tasks
Body doubling

And out of the silence
Something comes up
And you laugh at a meme
Or a discussion starts up

These are the times I feel seen
And heard

And happiness
Is more than just a word
At the end of a day
By David Sulz
Librarian, University of Alberta Library

At the End of a Day as at the End of a Life;
Look back on your Actions, your Efforts, your Strife;
All Justified then but when Accounting is Made;
Were the Results and Achievements worth all that was Paid?

The Inferno of Sunset, the Arc-light of Dawn;
All taken on Faith and Childhood Memories long Gone;
Head bowed in Haste, Brain ruled by Important;
Eyes, Heart, and Soul cut off from the All-Potent.

Freedom sold to the Masters, so to Belong;
and Buy back the Rights that were Ours all along;
Find the Essential so at the End you won't Say;
One Day never Done before the Next in its Way.
Some of us just grow up wild  
Beyond the imagination of those around us.  
What they thought was a songbird  
That could be caged to sing for the perpetrator  
Turns out to be an eagle  
Destined to soar over treetops.  
A ruler of the skies Flying to the tunes of no one.  

Years of my childhood  
Were spent under an umbrella,  
Told not to escape the border it outlined  
For the rain would drench my dress.  
Yet what can I say  
Standing on the side  
Admiring from a distance  
Had never been my way of happiness.  

Eventually, I started resigning  
From the role of the well-behaved daughter  
To stand at the edge of the shore  
To feel the cold sensation on my bare feet,  
Being told it was cold was never enough.  

Today I often think  
About the many cages that play a role in our lives,  
Their foundations placed  
From the moment we set foot on earth.  
We inherit the trauma of others  
Each with its unique borders,  
Like of nations at war with each other,  
Keeping us huddled within,  
Guided by fear.  
Happiness then becomes like a star  
Whose warmth is felt from afar  
But yet we never become one with it,  
Since the star resides outside the iron bars  
And above the glass ceiling.  
Souls that are like stars ablaze
Are unapologetic for their brightness.
Stars are meant to shine
They are meant to be seen in all their glory.
As my fingers met keys
100s of pages were written
It was never explicitly mentioned
Yet I had often been smitten
With the quest for happiness.
Stars can not be dimmed
Just as oceans can not be shrunk.
Souls are meant to shine like stars
As they are
Where they are
Without permission.
We must step bravely into the power
We possess to heal
When all the layers choking us
Are peeled.
We must break the shackles passed on to us
Sometimes disguised as a facade of shining heirlooms.
Happiness thrives in authenticity.
We glow brightest when we shine for who we are.
Hope on the Line
By Katherine Koller
Faculty, Department of English and Film Studies

Hardwired for it
we know
yellowed leaves fall
dying eyes close
books burn to ash
fireworks explode
but hope
antennaes another leaf
anticipates one more day
fingers the next page
beholds the
wings of a bird.