

Pearls : An Anthology on Happiness

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Preface

The essays in this book were inspired by lay people, students and patients I have met during my career as a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. I refer to these essays as “mini-lectures.” They would occur to me during sessions with patients, diagnostic conferences, meetings or lectures. Once during a diagnostic conference a student asked me if I had written down any of my “mini-lectures” to which I replied, “No, I hate to write and when I try to write it seems to invariably come out poorly.” She responded by suggesting I record myself when I am teaching and then just transcribe what I was saying. Most of these essays come from such recorded presentations. I have taught many classes and given many presentations in many different settings: individual consultation and supervision, classes, conferences, and church and lay small groups. I have never given a speech or presentation from a written copy of the speech. Rather I talk from an outline. I fill in the details as I talk. This comes very easily to me. Indeed, the ideas and stories just pop to mind. The first time I did this was when I was in high school when two friends and I were asked to give a presentation to the congregation during the worship service regarding our thoughts about the Vietnam War. The three of us met several times with the minister before our presentations. The other two boys seemed to be well prepared and have specific written notes and ideas regarding what they were going to say. I had some ideas but felt very unsure about what I was going to say. I was scheduled to speak last. We were each to talk for 5 to 10 minutes. As I sat listening to the other two boys, and when my turn came, I was very anxious before I started to talk but once I started talking the words just flowed into me. My anxiety evaporated and I found myself very energized and excited about what was coming into my mind. I connected the thoughts of two boys who had preceded me with a few thoughts of my own and ended in a manner that was very well received by every one. It almost felt like it wasn’t me who was talking. I have listened to presentations I have recorded and had the odd sensation I was learning something from what I had already said before, as if it were coming from someone else. These essays have come through me from the many thoughtful, sensitive and insightful people I have had the good fortune to meet throughout my life.

The book is titled “Pearls: An Anthology on Happiness” after an idea I learned during my medical training. “Pearls” are important, central, and valuable specific ideas helpful to know in order to optimally practice in a particular area of medicine. These essays discuss how to be happy in life, what makes us happy, and how to pursue happiness as I have learned it from my life, my teachers, my patients, my students, my friends and my children. These “mini-lectures” were first central to my struggle to live my life fully and I have found them also to be helpful to others.

The stories in these essays come from experiences I have had and experiences I have learned about from people I have worked with. When the story comes from clinical work which is confidential, I have made a significant effort to disguise the source of the story by changing details and components of the story so the identity regarding the source is well hidden. Most of the stories are generic enough. The story often comes from multiple sources and is thus a condensation of many different sources. There are other stories I wish I could tell but the necessarily specific nature of the details would violate

confidentiality and thus must remain only between me and the person who shared it with me. Not all stories after being converted into a generic form still maintain the important truths the stories would otherwise communicate.

These essays are addressed to a “lay” audience. I have attempted to avoid complicated technical terms as much as possible. For readers who are familiar with a particular topic an essay will likely appear to be over simplified and lack the depth and breadth a topic deserves. I have purposely tried to keep the ideas simplified to introduce and promote the reader to further study in areas he or she may find intriguing.