

BY GRANT HENRY

**(S)CARE OF THE SOUL**

## How I became The Happiest Man Alive

**DEAR HOLLIS:** Lately, in this column, you've been trying to pinpoint when it was that I became The Happiest Man Alive. In "Suicidal Tendencies" (Sept. 11) you insinuated that my happiness is a mask, a misguided reaction to the death of my neighbor, Papa Smurf. Like I am in shock or something.

Papa Smurf saw much joy and pain in this life. He entered the Great Unknown, on his knees, with a smile on his face. And now, for some naïve reason, you're worried that I am a candidate for suicide. Me! Grant Henry! Sister Louisa! The Happiest Man Alive! As if seeing Papa Smurf smiling in the face of death was the first time I had embraced such a paradox. Get to know me, Hollis, and let go of your deep-seeded fear that my happiness is built on such a tenuous foundation.

In fact, my happiness is built on the balance of a lot of paradoxes: entering the darkness to find the light, finding great joy through suffering great pain and remembering that behind the fear of struggle is exactly where happiness order, and inner peace is found.

Actually, I was bopped over the head with the Hammer of Happiness at birth. I was born happy. Another bop came,

ironically, at 12, when Mother announced that my two brothers and I were going to the beach for the weekend ... but on the way out of town, she was going to stop and show us a surprise. Having always loved surprises, I was excited to take the detour. All three of us boys were on the edge of the seat looking forward to this "surprise."

Then Mother stopped the car in front of an apartment and chirped in a sing-song-y cadence, "This is where your father is going to be living from now on." What?

We four made the long walk up to his door and in went my mother and brothers, but I couldn't bring myself to go in. I just wrapped my arms around a cold concrete column outside of his apartment and did some serious dry-heave wailing. I died that day. Not like Papa Smurf died, but I died to all of the illusions that kept me blinded from the reality that CHANGE HAPPENS.

After all, we *were* the perfect family. Mom and Dad *had* the perfect marriage. I *was* the perfect child. Dad was a school principal; Mom was my third-grade teacher. We went to church on Sundays — even Wednesdays! That day I was unable to build



a bridge to connect the ocean of despair that divided this news and our former reality. Hanging on desperately to my soul outside of his door, I could hear Mom gleefully giving my brothers a tour of Dad's

new place as if it were on the Spring Tour of Homes. "Look here! A pull-out bed!" For God's sake, my life was over and I was supposed to be happy about a pull-out bed?

This, Hollis, was the day. The first of many that I remember. I am just lucky I survived that day. Life has taught me to accept the good with the bad. I have learned that there are more options than "A" and "B."

Hollis, baby, I am 46 years old. I have had three stepfathers, two stepmothers, 15 some-odd stepbrothers and stepsisters, two marriages, two divorces, two stepchildren and a child who has transformed pain herself ... the list goes on. How could I take life seriously enough to commit suicide?

Face it, Hollis, I truly am The Happiest Man Alive. It is obnoxious, and I know it is difficult, what with all you have to live with. I have learned to let go of anything in my life that isn't healthy and whole — with the exception of Krispy Kreme doughnuts, sangria and Mexican sailors.

The only constant in my life is change, which just may be the point. I've learned to embrace the paradoxes instead of trying to fight them. I anticipate the wisdom and insight that comes from the pain of living fully. I've finally accepted that there is nothing to fear in this life, including my lack of control over it.

I live each day in the La-La Land called the Present, which is all well and good for my soul. I'm a happy idiot. I'm not sure what this means financially for retirement, but that is another story. Having no fear of the future, I can't worry about that today. What if my money runs out before I do? Option "C" is suicide!

Sincerely,  
Grant Henry,  
aka The Happiest Man Alive. ♦

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*Hollis Gillespie is on vacation, during which time her recurring "characters" have taken over her column to give their side of the story.*