

# In pursuit of happiness

## New books to help you find, then follow your bliss

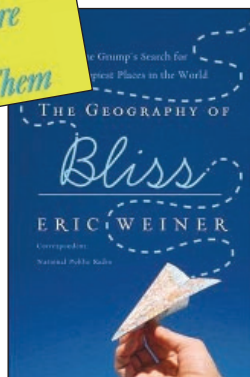
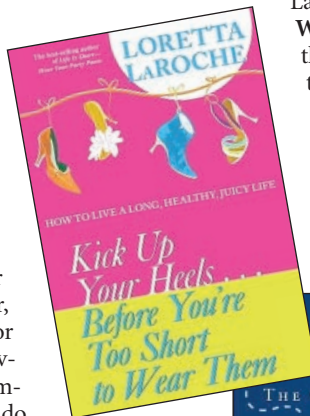
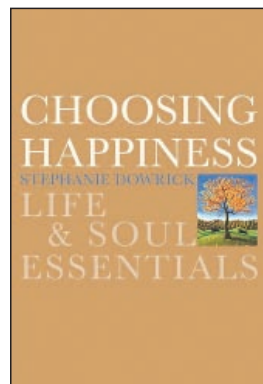
BY LINDA STANKARD

Along with “life and liberty,” the Declaration of Independence declared our right to the “pursuit of happiness” back in 1776, but offered nary a clue as to where to look for that elusive butterfly, how to recognize it or how to hang onto it if we found it. But don’t worry (be happy): Here are four books that light the trail!

### Best foot forward

We’ll start with **Choosing Happiness: Life and Soul Essentials** (Tarcher/Penguin, \$16.95, 512 pages, ISBN 9781585425822) by Stephanie Dowrick, because its title implies a premise that runs through all four books: that happiness is a choice, not something to merely be hoped for, stumbled upon or given to a lucky few. In fact, “no one can give you happiness,” Dowrick asserts. “People, situations, events outside yourself will affect you,” but ultimately, “you are responsible for your own happiness.” A former psychotherapist and a spiritual retreat and workshop leader, Dowrick explains that by making choices that are right for you and your values, happiness becomes “more a way of living that can also . . . encompass the times when things do not go right or well.”

She ends each of her seven chapters with a summary section, listing “Essential Insights” and “Essential Actions,” such as these from chapter four, Building Self-Respect: Insight—“Self-respect and respect for others live back to back. What’s more, self-respect brings peace of mind, as well as happiness.” Action—“Encourage yourself as you would a good friend. Focus on your strengths.” She divides each chapter into brief segments with subtitles such as “Workplace Values,” “The ‘Too Busy’ Excuse,” and “Better Than Fighting” which make it easy to dip back in for a quick “refresher” on a particular topic. You’ll be glad



this book is in your knapsack as you explore the many hills and valleys of the happiness trail.

### It's never too late to start

Dowrick would undoubtedly concur with author and PBS personality Loretta LaRoche, who writes early on in **Kick Up Your Heels . . . Before You're Too Short to Wear Them** (Hay House, \$18.95, 176 pages, ISBN 9781401906177) that in order to thrive we need to “increase our spiritual path by learning to forgive the past, love the present, and create a future that resonates with our deepest values.” LaRoche’s book focuses on how to age with gusto, or as her subtitle puts it, “how to live a long, healthy, juicy life.” She cites many role models of “juicy living” such as Lily Tomlin, who at age 61 was doing a two-hour, one-woman show on Broadway “portraying a dozen characters in a demanding act of physicality and stamina,” and other actors, writers, physicians, etc., who dive into new projects “with passion and enormous curiosity.” If you want to wind up *dried up*, however, LaRoche wryly offers numerous “Ways to Wither”: “Don’t sit down to eat. Walk around the house or office while you multitask. Leave the cell phone on at every meal as if you were a trauma surgeon.”

Staying vibrant requires other choices and LaRoche supplies plenty of “Juicy Tidbits” of advice. “Get lots of massages,” she urges. “It’s a great way to get touched without having to do anything but lie there and enjoy yourself.” Or simply “watch some fun, sexy movies starring juicy older men and women.” Aging beats the alternative, and while “You can’t stop the inevitable . . . you can reinvent yourself in many ways.” With warmth and humor, LaRoche helps light the happiness trail past the 50-year demarcation line.

### Where the happy folks are

In **The Geography of Bliss: One Grump’s Search for the Happiest Places in the World** (Twelve, \$25.99, 352 pages, ISBN 9780446580267), NPR correspondent Eric Weiner shares his experiences and insights as he traverses the globe on a quest for a people exhibiting signs of contentment, peace, serenity . . . in other words, happiness. Although a self-proclaimed “grump” (note the coincidental irony in the pronunciation of his last name) Weiner’s writing is rich with deadpan humor: “Clearly, some words can elicit instant joy. Words like ‘I love you’ and ‘you may already be a winner.’ Yet other words—‘audit’ and ‘prostate exam,’” he notices, clearly have “the opposite effect.”

As he ventures from places like Bhutan, where “Happiness is other people,” to less enchanting nations like Moldova, where unfortunately for its inhabitants, “Happiness is somewhere else,” Weiner also comes to the conclusion that “happiness is a choice.” Despite living in a “brutal climate and utter isolation” he finds Iceland to be a delightfully “quirky little nation” where “everything wise and wonderful” about it “flows from its language.” When they greet each other, Icelanders say “*komdu soell*, which translates literally as ‘come happy.’ When Icelanders part, they say *vertu soell*, go happy.” They could have faced the terrible dark and easily chosen despair and drunkenness, he writes with his characteristic comic flair, “but these sons and daughters of Vikings peered into the unyielding blackness of the noon sky and chose another option: happiness and drunkenness. It is, I think, the wiser option.” As you settle down for the night along the trail, **The Geography of Bliss** will be a joy to pull from your knapsack.

### Go in good spirits

Designed like a workbook, the **Field Guide to Happiness: Finding Happiness in its Natural Habitat** (Lyons Press, \$14.95, 224 pages, ISBN 9781599211848) by Barbara Ann Kipfer, Ph.D., will help light your way as you learn to write your way to a happier state of being. Kipfer, who listed *14,000 Things to Be Happy About* in a previous book, explains in her introduction that by noting the things that make you happy and “setting yourself on a course to ‘choose’ happiness” you can virtually re-script the “plot of your life.” Her book offers more than 200 suggestions for “creating lists, journals, diaries, memory books, and/or mind maps” such as “Make a List of What You Have Endured in Life That Has Made You Wise,” or writing a journal entry about things that make you laugh. Completing even a few of these exercises should make you feel grateful for all you have to be happy for and lift even the most downtrodden spirit. So grab your knapsack, head for the bookstore and happy trails to you! ♥



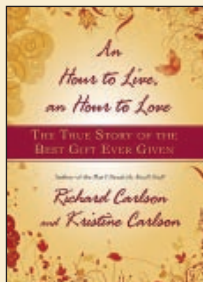
### INSPIRATION

## A moving tribute to Richard Carlson

Until his untimely death at age 45 from a pulmonary embolism in December of 2006, Richard Carlson lived his life according to the motivational yet down-to-earth wisdom he penned in the best-selling *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*. While dealing with her grief, Richard’s wife, Kristine, read through 25 years’ worth of their love letters. One in particular, a letter Richard gave her on their 18th wedding anniversary, stood out and became the basis for this passionate account, **An Hour to Live, an Hour to Love: The True Story of the Best Gift Ever Given** (Hyperion, \$9.95, 96 pages, ISBN 9781401322571).

Eerily written only three years before his death, Richard’s letter centers on his favorite quotation by author Stephen Levine: “If you had an hour to live and could make just one phone call, who would it be to, what would you say . . . and why are you waiting?” Looking back on his life, Richard reaffirms dismissing all of the day-to-day “stuff” and concentrating on the moments with the people you love. He describes how he would live his life over, listening more, loving more and not being in a hurry. Richard concludes by suggesting that we should all find what makes us happy and question whether it is worth talking about in the last hour of life.

Following her husband’s letter is Kristine’s equally moving response, which serves as a tribute to Richard’s life and work and their marriage. It is also a call to readers to develop and nurture relationships and leave the world complete, just as Richard strived to do. Followers of Richard’s books will learn more about this extraordinary man, and will continue to be inspired by his love for life. Those suffering from the loss of a spouse or partner will find comfort in Kristine’s grief process. ♥



—ANGELA LEEPER

Linda Stankard pursues her happiness in Piermont, New York.