

# **This I Believe**

- Elsa Richardson-Bach

Happy.

It's such a simple emotion. Perhaps you could say jubilant, or rapturous, or euphoric. They all sound a bit more detailed, a tad more exciting. But in the humblest, meekest terms, all those words mean happy.

I used to wonder when happy started to be not an emotion, but a trophy. Something that I had to claw and scratch my way to, cling to with sinuous hands once I'd found it. Was it back in fourth grade, the year learning became a chore? Or was it in sixth, when people changed? I agonized over it, suffered through fantasies where I did one thing differently, where I was just a tiny bit prettier, smarter, better. Of course it didn't work; I was digging myself deeper while dreaming of the fresh air on the other side.

Be happy. I'm sure everyone recognizes this, from a song, or a postcard, maybe a faded bumper sticker. I had seen it in enough flowery fonts to want to hurl the letters into the sun – because how can you just "be happy?" It doesn't work like that; someone can't just choose to be happy. Unless they can.

I remember standing in the local CVS, staring at the bright, gaudy pair of flip-flops with the peace signs and smiley faces and the block letters that spelled out: "BE HAPPY," and I remember thinking, I am going to be happy today. I am going to think of positive things about what I see. I like the color of that nail polish on the shelf. That woman's hair is curled very nicely.

Because the only way out of the hole is up, and I was digging down with the hot sun on my back, but maybe, maybe if I turned to look at it I might think the light wasn't scorching. I might think that the warmth on my face was welcoming.

I bought a candy bar for my brother that day. Kind of mild, not thrilling, but he was excited at the prospect of a sugary snack when I offered it to him. He was happy, and it made me happy. Such a small thing – a thing that wasn't even for me – and it made happiness.

I believe there are many things that I do not have a choice over. Tomorrow is another day, and clouds might be covering up the sun. I believe there are things I do have a choice over. Rain makes a rather cordial noise if you're willing to listen.

I believe that happiness is not a trophy, it is a product; it is created. I can create happiness, if not for myself then for others – and somewhere along the line, it will come back around to me. I believe that happiness has no limit; it is one of the renewable resources in the world. I can be happy today and I can be happy tomorrow.

I believe that happiness is different for everyone – whether it's a candy bar or a bright, gaudy pair of flip-flops with two simple words on them – and I believe that everyone can be happy.