

Know (Rodale; 256 pages) and Seligman's *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* (Free Press; 336 pages) buttress their pep talks with frequent citations of supporting studies and thoughtful hints for getting—and staying—happy.

Seligman defines three categories of happiness. "The first is 'the pleasant life': the Goldie Hawn, Hollywood happiness—smiling, feeling good, being ebullient. The problem with the pleasant life is that not everyone can have it." And that, he says, is a matter of genetic predisposition. Perhaps half of us have it, which means the other half don't ever get to feel like Goldie.

But, says Seligman, "these people are capable of the second form of happiness: 'the

sives who dealt with it by having good and meaningful lives."

Circumstances don't always define emotional states. Seligman acknowledges that extreme poverty is a downer, but says, "Once you're above the safety net, people in wealthier nations are not by and large noticeably happier than those in poorer nations." Climate isn't a crucial factor: "North Dakotans are just as happy as Floridians." Nor is money. "If you look at lottery winners, they get happy for a few months. But a year later, they're back where they were." Even a catastrophe—cancer, say—does little to alter one's overall outlook. "On average," Seligman observes, "people with one life-threatening disease are not more unhappy than the rest

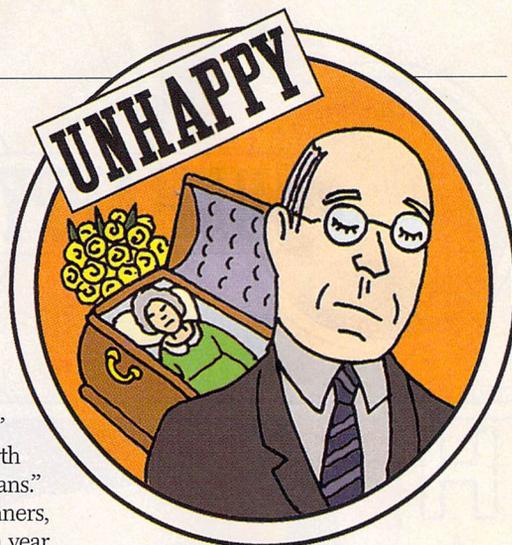
of the population. Of course, a cascade of bad things happening can make a difference. But if you have one really bad thing, generally you're not more unhappy."

The two factors that may matter most

are marriage and religious belief, Seligman says. "Married people are happier than any other configuration of people. And religious people are usually happier than non-religious people."

Are you single? Agnostic? You can still beat the odds by lowering your stress level, says Dr. David Spiegel, director of Stanford's Psychosocial Treatment Laboratory. "We did a study of metastatic-breast-cancer patients in which we measured diurnal levels of cortisol [a stress indicator]," Spiegel says. "The women who had the

highest levels had survival rates a year and a half shorter than women with the lowest cortisol levels." He also cites a study of psoriasis patients: "Half were given their salve treatments listening to music while the other half listened to meditation tapes. Those who learned meditation healed faster." The deductions? Don't worry, be



happy. And hatha yoga is better than none.

Baker had a good reason for having stress, depression and neurosis: the death of his infant son. Yet he says he used his own techniques to put his personal anguish in perspective. He cites the national tragedy of Sept. 11: "In its aftermath, we know that many people have a greater sense of what's truly important, a greater awareness of their relationships and values."

To Baker, happiness isn't so much a woozy state of self-satisfaction as it is a full-time job. It can be practiced and mastered. "A lot of people think you can't manage emotion," he says. "That's baloney. Look, we can manage our behavior: eat healthy, exercise. We can manage our thought processes: bite our tongue, curb our anger. I think that people even in a painful situation can begin to manage their grief, agony, sadness—keep it within sensible limits and not let it overwhelm them. Happy people are very good at managing emotion."

And what makes us happy? It is "the ability to practice appreciation or love," says Baker. "That sounds sappy, but studies show that when people engage in appreciative activity, they are using more neocortical, prefrontal functions—higher-level brain functions." There you go, skeptics: happiness is an exercise for smart people.

So, is the glass half empty, half full or, as the engineers say, twice as big as it needs to be? Happiness may consist in recognizing that we can't always be happy; that ambitions are worth fighting for but not dying for; that a sense of humor, even of the absurd, is necessary for a lifesaving sense of proportion. Consider this as well: that we can work to attain happiness, but that it can still sneak up and surprise us ...

... for instance, when we finish reading a brisk, informative article on happiness.

—Reported by David Bjerklie/New York

People can learn to manage their grief, even in the face of tragedy, and not let it overwhelm them

good life.' It consists first in knowing what your strengths are and then recrafting your life to use them—in work, love, friendship, leisure, parenting. It's about being absorbed, immersed, one with the music."

Seligman calls his third and ultimate level "the meaningful life." It consists, he says, "in identifying your signature strengths and then using them in the service of something you believe is bigger than you are." And you don't have to be conventionally happy to achieve it. "Churchill and Lincoln," Seligman says, "were two profound depres-

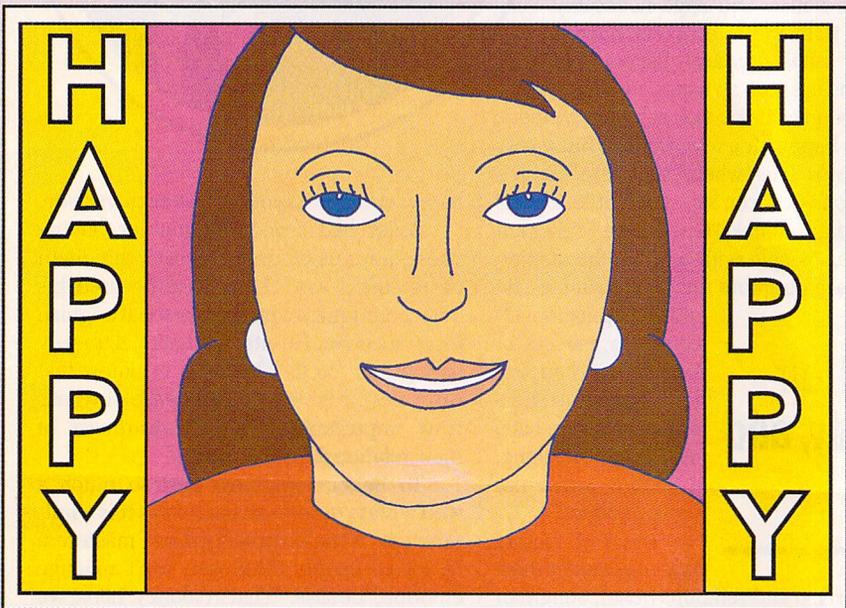
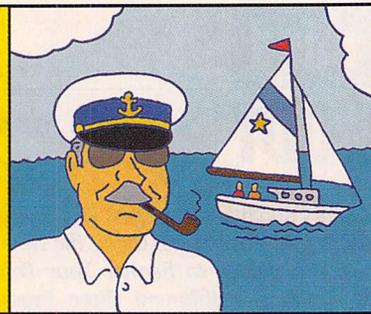




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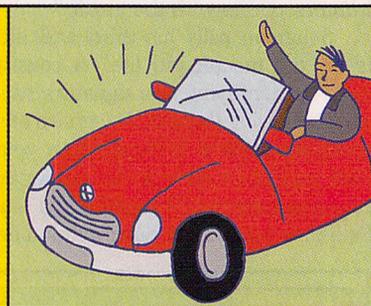
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UNHAPPY



HAPPY



of happiness. They see the happiness industry as a case of the bland leading the bland. Happiness may be an American doctrine, but it also triggers images of a blinkered, *Father Knows Best* '50s and of TV news anchors grinning through the latest report of troop movements or a lagging economy. To the army of skeptics, happiness is forgetting that a billion people go to bed hungry each night. Happiness is being too shallow to realize how miserable you should be. It's cocooning yourself from reality. When displayed wantonly in public, it is the cause of other people's unhappiness. Happiness, the argu-

ment goes, is abnormal—can it be cured? For something so widely desired, so hotly derided, happiness hasn't got much attention from researchers. One reason is the difficulty of quantifying happiness: it is a condition that is diagnosed and defined not by the doctor but by the patient. Another is the medical community's tendency to study pathology, not normality. "In spite of its name and its charter," Seligman avers, "the National Institute of Mental Health has always been the National Institute of Mental Illness." He notes that when the NIMH was created in 1947, "academics found that they

could get grants if their research was about curing mental illness." Dan Baker, a psychologist who directs the Life Enhancement Program at Canyon Ranch in Tucson, Ariz., supervised a survey of the mental-health canon. His team found 54,000 studies on depression and only 415—less than 1%—on happiness. Even today, Baker asserts, "the medical establishment continues to pooh-poo happiness, because there's no money in it." He means grant money. A serious researcher into happiness can still get a book deal. Baker's *What Happy People*

IS THERE A FORMULA FOR JOY?

New books tout the secrets of happiness. Here's a look at how their recipes compare

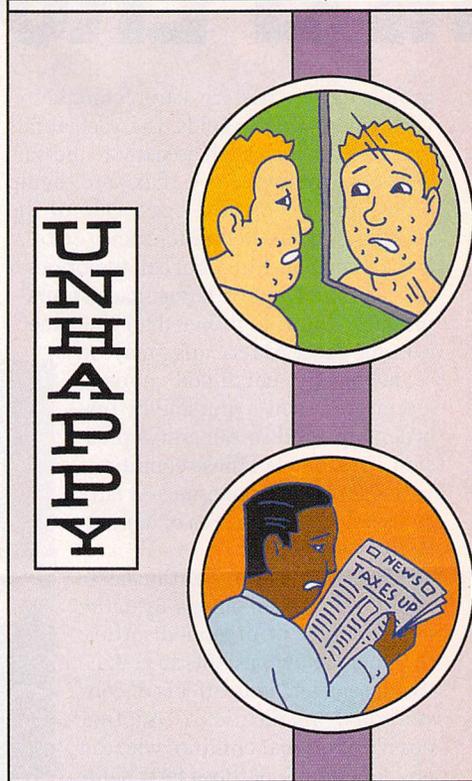
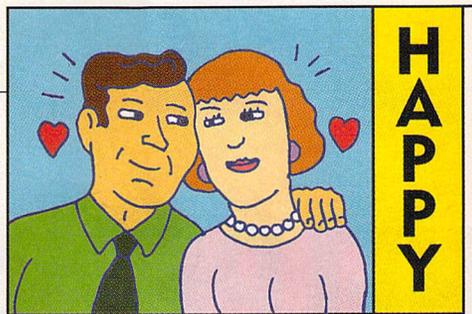
By **RICHARD CORLISS**

IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS, WE'LL BET 150 people have wished you happy New Year. And at the supermarket or dry cleaner, someone wanted you to "have a nice day." The Democrats used to chorus, "Happy days are here again." The noted self-help guru Bobby McFerrin counseled, "Don't worry, be happy." Other pop singers tell us that happiness is "a thing called Joe" (Judy Garland), "what my life's about" (Vanessa Williams), "when you feel really good with somebody" (Al Green), "a warm gun" (John Lennon), "an option" (Pet Shop Boys). The old saloon singer Ted Lewis used to ask, "Is everybody happy?"

No. But enough people want to be—and will pay for the chance to forget their troubles, come on, get happy—that a huge industry of

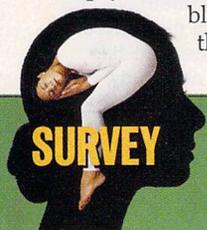
happiography has sprung up to feed the need. From *Wholly Joy: Being Happy in an Unhappy World* to *The Lazy Person's Guide to Happiness*, from the Buddhist *Eight Steps to Happiness* to *I'd Rather Laugh: How to Be Happy Even When Life Has Other Plans for You* (by Linda Richman, Mike Myers' mother-in-law), hundreds of books purport to help you feel a bit better. They speak to a primal yearning in the species. "Human beings want to have meaning," says Martin Seligman, University of Pennsylvania psychologist and director of the Positive Psychology Network. "They want not to wake up in the morning with a gnawing realization that they are fidgeting until they die."

Some of the happy-talk books may help their readers get through one or two dark nights of the soul. But the wisdom they ladle out is often scattershot, anecdotal, an Oprah



sermon in paperback. Few of them are written by psychiatrists or psychologists; few are based on solid research.

That could be due to the suspicion with which health professionals—and many other educated adults—view the systematic pursuit



SURVEY

TIME/CNN POLL

People should solve their own problems; psychiatrists are a last resort

56%*
(1978: 60%)

There is still a lot of stigma attached to mental illness

82%*
(1978: 77%)

If people were more concerned with others, there would be less mental illness

54%*
(1978: 73%)

Have seen a psychotherapist or would under some circumstances

77%

*Agree strongly or somewhat. From a survey of 1,006 adult Americans taken by Harris Interactive in December 2002 and a TIME poll conducted in 1978