

“The Road to Happiness - You’re Gonna Make it After All”

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Do you recall “The Mary Tyler Moore” show? “Who can turn the world on with her smile? Who can take a nothing day and make it all worthwhile? Well it’s you girl and you should know it. With each and every little movement you show it. Love is all around, etc...” It was one of my favorites growing up.

The lyrics to “The Mary Tyler Moore” theme song are the lyrics I sing whenever I’m faced with having to get through an obstacle, a struggle, or have to overcome a challenge. Like anyone else, I’ve had my share of these, and singing the song helps to assure me that I will make it through somehow.

To give you an example of some of my own obstacles and struggles in life, sharing a little of my own background and personal history with you will give you a better perspective of my own views on happiness and life.

I grew up in what most people would regard as a “happy childhood.” My parents were very affectionate, loving, and supportive. They provided me with the tools and education I needed in order to achieve my goals.

I came from a family of educators. My Great-Grandmother was a chemistry teacher, my Grandmother, a voice teacher, and my mother, an elementary teacher. Following in their footsteps, I became a high school Spanish teacher and college professor. The importance of education was a value instilled in me from the time I was very young. However, I can remember all the way back to elementary school struggling with my studies the first couple of years.

The biggest obstacle that was facing me at the time was that of the language barrier. You see, English is not my first language, nor is it my second. Today I speak five languages. English is my third. But with a lot of hard work and by applying my best effort to earn good grades, I managed to finish high school early, and at the tender age of sixteen, I graduated two years ahead of my class.

I graduated from the University of Minnesota with a Bachelor’s degree in Spanish Education and a Masters degree in Second Languages and Cultures Education. Although it seems like I’ve been on the fast-track with regard to reaching my goals, nothing that I attained in life was without its own challenges, sacrifice, and struggles.

I’ve managed to secure high-paying administrative positions in the field of education, as well as lose them to consolidation and state-wide reorganization. I won several scholarship programs, beauty and talent pageants that made me eligible to compete at the 1990 Miss Minnesota/Miss America state level pageant. Although I didn’t win, I was pleased to have placed as a top-ten semi finalist and was proud of the accomplishments

that my hard work and effort had earned. Additionally, I've managed to start a business from the ground up, (an accelerated language school for business people and interested adults), and kept it operating for eight years, only to be faced with having to close it due to a personal crisis that forced a shut down of it all.

That brings me to one of my toughest challenges and what I would describe as one of the darkest periods of my life. The personal crisis I was referring to was that of my divorce. Throughout my life, overcoming obstacles and achieving goals was something to which I had always been accustomed - so you can imagine my shock, when my husband of nearly seven years woke up one Saturday morning, turned around to look at me and said; "I'm not happy. We fight too much. I need more time and space. I'm leaving this marriage."

Now, I knew we had our disagreements, but hey, that's normal. And yes, the arguing and fights caused some "ups and downs" in our marriage, but I thought that had to be normal too, right? After all, as long as we knew we loved each other, we were of course "happy."

When my husband said, "I'm leaving this marriage - I'm not happy." That was the first time I viewed myself as having failed at anything. I felt anger, sadness and terribly depressed over my failed marriage. For a while I thought that its demise had to have been my fault. I thought, at least according to what **he** said that it was **my** responsibility to make him happy, and apparently, I had failed.

Now although he was only 39 at the time - just between you and me, I think he was going through an early mid-life crisis. As for me, it became serious depression. I felt as if I had hit the lowest point in my life. For nearly three months, I never turned on any lights in my house, never opened a window, and couldn't even get to sleep without crying myself to it. I had a lot of financial obligations and responsibilities which was my only reason for ever stepping out of the house, and after work I'd come right back home to a miserably cold and dark hole.

My temporary job as an adjunct Spanish Instructor was quickly coming to an end and I needed to look for another job to be able to support myself. However, I knew that no one would hire me if I were to continue in this depressed state. Then I recalled something that my mother once said. It had something to do with a lesson on setting goals and achievements. She always reminded me of the saying, "If it's going to be, it's up to me!"

I decided that I needed to be happy again. Happiness was all around me. I discovered that I could find happiness anytime right where I was. Location is irrelevant. No matter where I am, it's up to me to create my happy life. I am the author of my happy life story. I write the chapters and create my own destiny, my own happiness, and the outcomes of my life! And nowhere does it say that I'm responsible for the happiness of others!! We are all responsible for our own lives and we are each responsible for creating joy in it. The "Road to Happiness" begins with each one of us - the "Road to Happiness" is up to me.

While I was managing my business, I had no time for another job (except for the part time temporary adjunct Spanish teaching position) – so when my husband walked out, there was no additional income. That situation forced me to shut down my school to keep from financial ruin, and I began looking for full-time work so that I could support myself. My job search resulted in securing a full time teaching position requiring me to relocate the following semester from Minnesota to New Jersey.

On November 9, 1999, when our divorce became final, I informed my “ex” that he was finally going to get more “time and space” – (about 1100 miles more space!) – I was moving to New Jersey! The news hit him like a ton of bricks – oh, you just had to have been there. The shock and disbelief on his face was priceless and it caused him to realize just how hasty he had been to walk out on the marriage.

Well after many tears and apologies, and I mean apologizing profusely to both my parents and me, he begged forgiveness and once again got down on his knee. Six weeks later we remarried “Vegas” style! I joke with him every now and then just to remind him, “Happy wife, Happy life.” “No happy wife, no happy life.”

I don’t know where the road to happiness will lead, but I do know the road to happiness begins with me. During that entire dark period of my life (the summer of ’99), I had one song that kept replaying in my mind. The last line of the song is “You’re gonna make it after all...!”