

So... Why Me?

I should make this clear from the start. None of this is easy. The first chapter of this work starts out saying exactly that:

This will not be easy.

I tell some hard truths. Don't be misled by the mirthful lilt of my title. Uncle Bob here will do his best to help you be happy, but none of this means diddly-squat if you can't face harsher aspects of our everyday journey.

It might not even be safe. I don't know. I can't really say what is right for anyone else, sometimes even myself. As those of you who honored me by reading my book, *The Great Book of Bob*, are aware, I'm kind of a special case. I would never claim to be better than others. I just think all of us need to consciously endeavor to be a little less foolish and a lot more happy. It's something we all need to work on.

I'm sure not complaining.

I'm not hungry when I go to bed at night. How many precious beings upon this diverse planet can say that with any regularity?

I'm not cold or damp or lost to the shifting hell of homelessness this day.

I've had a good education, have had some decent jobs and career opportunities, have a reasonably strong back for an oldish fellow and can still drive a nail or a truck or whatever. I have enough at this phase of my life to afford to sit in a coffeehouse and drink \$3 coffee, eat an oatmeal-raisin cookie, and expend bodily and spiritual energies fully engaged in the non-profit enterprise that is my life's work and art.

I'm not alone. Carol is my wife and ever my best friend. Kristin is my daughter and ever my other best friend. My sister Nancy and all her progeny are wonderful. I have friends who are smart and funny and willing to help me with heavy lifting. I'm not alone.

So, who the hell am I, clearly blessed among humans upright upon the Earth, to preach to anyone about happiness? What do I know about the crap that brings you down when I have it all so good?

Hey, I've had every bit as much opportunity to be miserable as most of you. I could be mired by layers of debt and insecurity. I could be hungover this bright autumn morn. I could be crushed under the brutal thumbs of pitiless authority, misspent love, and oppression. I could hate myself for the sins of some allegorical Eden dwellers or the sins of my own flesh and mind. I could be miserable.

Misery is an equal opportunity provider.

Here's a fast version of a sequence of happenstance and decision that describes a phase of my life. A real stickler for accuracy could point out certain flaws in this chronology, but as a concoction of approximation, it's all somewhat true to the times, the people, and yours truly.

When I had a condo, I had a mortgage and, thus, I had a job I couldn't quit. When I had a job I couldn't quit, I loved to drink beer and simulate inklings of freedom to get me through the evenings I put in between shifts at the workmill. When I spent my days at the workmill (often begun with a hangover), I had to kiss ass like all of us who don't own the workmill have to do. When I kissed ass I felt like less of a valuable and honorable person, I misspent the trust and belief of love and got my butt dumped. When my butt was dumped I said the hell with nets of obligation, sold my debt-ridden condo, worked myself out of debt (cheap apartments, beat-up old cars, Goodwill clothes etc.), moved high up into the wild mountains and lived in a tipi for five years. When I lived in my Tipi, I talked to my spirit guide Crow and to my friend Dead Jack and to his cousin God, and I laughed and wept and danced and found moon-star nights and storm-raged days and bitter-honest cold and the soul of three-chord banjo tunes and the Love of it all. When I found the Love of it all, I found my loved ones still waiting for me. And here I am.

(Of course it was never really that simple. I never did abandon any of the important elements of my life. My wife Carol remained my best friend throughout the ten-year hiatus of our vows—we kept the family love and just took a break from the rest. All of it, the jobs, the expectations of others, the journey from Condo to the mountain was more complex than needs to be told. But the gist of this progression is true. True enough that I can say, as of this day, no one in this world owes me a dime, an apology, or a moment's infusion of obligation; nor do I owe a soul in this world a dime, an apology, or an iota of my *self*. If I give you a buck, it is payment due or gift bestowed; if I speak of regret, it is honest contrition, not penitence; if I help you or comfort you or love you, it is not a debt I pay, it is a blessing I give.)

So...like so many of us, I could be owned by banks, damned by preachers, nightly drunk and daily despised by myself.

But, fortunately, I am not.

I would never be so presumptuous as to try to prescribe a course of action for anyone. My own way has been, and still is more a matter of happenstance and luck than good sense anyway. No. I won't waste your time with advice. I've got nothing here but some good tales to tell, some ideas about the ways of the world, some heart-felt good wishes for your life, dear reader. That's all.

Listen. I know that everything is bullshit until it is life-proven and believed by experience. I know that. My happiness is just that: *my* happiness. Your happiness, misery, joy or depression are all your own. I don't make claim to any of it.

I write this book in hopes that my stories, theories, blathering bilge and sublime prayers may be of help to you in avoiding the burden, the curse of bitterness. It's no fun living in a world of bitchy whiners, angry jerks, and cranky bastards.

You know what I mean.