

This historic fictional work explores the search for personal happiness.

**Happiness**  
By Michael Pauszek

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# HAPPINESS



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## Chapter 1

The dragonfly hovered in front of the waterfall just beyond the spray. It appeared to float on the air, its wings motion blurred, its body nearly motionless. It hung two feet above the backyard pond's rippling surface. Hovering there, it is a living cliché of life. The dragonfly testifies to the effort necessary to stay stable or to make an activity look easy.

To a human mind it might seem that the insect was there to enjoy the view. But that is too narrow, a purely human perspective.

The multifaceted eyes of the insect were taking in a much broader field than just the water and waterfall. The iridescent purple-blue dragonfly was not savoring either the vision of the falling water or the resulting rippling pond surface. In fact, both the water movement and the sound of the small fall would be perceived as distractions to the insect if it had reasoned perception. Its pressing goal at the moment was procreation. Dragon flies are associated by humans with ponds, lakes and streams. But that association is a human creation. The species only goes to water as a site of rendezvous, an open space in which to find a mate. It's only investment at this moment is to see and be seen by a potential mate.

The waterfall and pond had been built in a backyard, near the back door of a home in northern Virginia, outside Washington DC. The pond measured seven by

nine feet and reached a depth of thirty-seven inches. It was dug into the earth and lined with a waterproof rubber liner. The liner's edges were hidden by a covering of landscaping rocks. The waterfall was formed of rock stacked to a height of thirty nine inches above the water surface. The rock of the falls fronted and therefore hid a water filtration system for the pond.

For seven years the small pond had become a stable water source for several species of amphibians, birds and mammals that lived in the suburban area.

From its vantage point in front of the falls the dragonfly could see and be seen by several full figured goldfish below the surface.

Atop the falls a white pine bonsai added a flora perspective. Other bonsai flanked the falls and dressed the landscaping stones. Like the falls, the carefully nurtured plants offered nothing to the insect visitor.

This particular pond had been built by the homeowner as a backyard focal point purely for aesthetic pleasure. It added an additional dimension to the private space satisfaction for the human builder. Did owning the yard, working every day to pay the mortgage or sweating to build the water feature produce any human happiness? Maybe but probably not really. It did give a sense of accomplishment as the pond was being built and fulfillment at its completion, but not happiness. Did it bring happiness to any of the other residents, the birds, fish or other mammals that used it as a water source? No, just water access, but that makes this

suburban habitat livable. After mating, it provides a place for the dragonfly to deposit its egg. The eggs hatch to a larval stage which grows to be a nymph. The nymph emerges from the water, sheds its mantle and becomes the mobile and iridescent adult. It lives for the remainder of the season, trusting its legacy to the backyard water.

The dragonfly hovered for a few more seconds than without any other dragonflies in its multifaceted sight, it moved, as if floating, to the right, deeper into the backyard. It would feed now and find a mate later.

Copulation might produce the illusion of transient happiness in a sentient being. For the insect, it is the species' destiny, fulfillment.

## Chapter 2

### Northern Virginia

“I don’t know Curt. I try to see the positive side of everything but I don’t see an upside.”

“That is because you’re not being open minded, Don. You say that you are open minded but you aren’t.”

“I am very open minded. I always consider all possibilities before acting.”

“Don, you are the classic bull in a china shop. You always crash forward and then occasionally look back to see the effect.” Curt stopped and took a sip of his tonic water, the pause giving his comment the opportunity to float and be absorbed by the friend he faced. The setting was perfect for the exchange of the most sincere ideas. The two were sitting on the backyard deck of Curt’s home, talking about the challenges to medical practice and watching a dragonfly hovering over Curt’s backyard pond. It is a lovely Saturday afternoon in late spring. Verbally challenging Don in this way is not a personal interaction problem. Not only do the pair work together at the CIA but they have also enjoyed each other’s company and trust for decades, a friendship fired and honed in the trenches of medical school and residency. They are more a pair in spirit than many married couples. “Don, you wouldn’t know an open mind if you tripped over it.”

“I know that you have an open mind.”

“Thank you for correcting me.” Curt held up his glass of tonic, in a sarcastic salute to his colleague.

“Maybe you are right about me, Curt. But why should I be open minded about many things, especially customer satisfaction surveys? When did it become the job of a sales person or nurse to make me happy? It is their responsibility to be courteous and to give quality service but satisfaction is intrinsic to me.”

“I agree with you Don, but it still is a topic ripe for discussion. It has two vastly disparate dimensions. First by pushing customer satisfaction to everyone that works in service industries, theoretically, it should make the quality of service go up. That is a great idea. But second, by continuing to push it and advertise results to the consumer it is just another marketing tool. It is just another sales technique to garner market share that medical institutions harvest from consumer sales techniques.”

“Curt it was Margaret Thatcher that said ‘If I have to tell you that I am a lady then I am not’.”

“That is correct.”

“Why isn’t medicine smart enough to just skip over this patient satisfaction idea and move on to the next great marketing idea? Medicine doesn’t have to mimic everything marketers do. This one doesn’t work well in health care. The only ones that benefit from this are the consultants selling their books and pushing these concepts. Are there any controlled studies showing that



this is good for a patient's health? This sounds like just another of the self-promoting bureaucratic programs that feeds the medical bureaucracy but no one else. You and I have been in medicine long enough that we have lived through so many of these. Bottom line, look at the theme message of the Ten Commandments, just do what is right and the rest falls in place.”

“As always, you are right, Don. Funny that you should mention the bible, the first truly destructive bureaucracy was the Christian Inquisition, a papal program designed to eliminate church opposition. Medicine has now been taken over by the administrative bureaucracy. It is just like the church in the 1200s. Fight the commercialization as a doctor and you may become a victim.

“The true irony is that by working for the government, you and I, thanks to Congress, are held above or at least parallel to the rules that badger and cost private physicians so much. Ironically we work for a huge bureaucracy that in many ways is a ‘do as I say not as I do’. We are exempt from the screening imposed on our peers.

Do you want some more ice tea?”

Don nodded, “Yes. I come here to relax but you are making me feel like one of the pigs in Animal Farm. But enough Curt, it is Saturday and I want to watch that dragonfly for a while instead of listening to you. He knows what is important in life.”

Curt refilled their glasses. The discussion, now ended abruptly by Don, had begun, innocently, with reference to a call one day earlier to Ed Small, a friend and the medical director of a national staffing company in Washington. Curt had called him from their office in Langley to invite him to a cookout.

The cookout was something that Don had labeled “man day” or more sarcastically “Y day” because only men were ever invited. Man day had become a yearly Spring luncheon in Curt’s backyard. Despite the hedonistic potential of the label, it was a very benign event with lunch, beverages and conversation.

During the phone call one day earlier, Ed had complained about all hospitals’ focus on patient satisfaction surveys. That was the nidus and fuel for the day’s current discussion.

“Don, accept them for what they are, non-statistically significant studies, conceived by business and then imposed on medicine by CMS as a government mandate, endorsed and supported by prior hospital administrators turned paid consultants and authors, produced to appease CMS administrators who have drunk the Kool aid of market share like hospital certifying organizations and third party payers that use the non-statistical studies to justify their own role in their policing and squeezing of hospitals and doctors. The results are shuffled so many times, it is like laundering money. Forget it! Don’t let it eat at you. As you would say, blow it off!”

“I have no problem understanding what is and what is not. My problem is that, like Ed, I see how important it is to carpet alley. (Carpet alley was a term that Don had used for years to describe the carpeted area of hospitals, the administrative offices.) And that is what bothers me. In the end it is just one more step, one additional point of pressure on how medicine is practiced. Isn't that how we got into our current narcotic dilemma. I agree with Sam Quinones' premise in his book, *DreamLand*. Medicine, in placating the governmental concept of the fifth vital sign, pain, got people hooked on narcotics and then the easy availability of heroin further fed that hunger. Why would anyone bother to get a medical degree anymore? Instead, why not move up the authority ladder and become a hospital or insurance administrator and boss around employed doctors.”

“I understand what you are saying Don. It is important, it is just another of the boulders on our life path. But you alone cannot solve this problem. Anyway, doctors that bought into that fifth vital sign nonsense did it because they are lazy or greedy. You would never have been a prescriber of narcotics. Also you are smart enough to outwit any mandate that the government bureaucracy can create. I know that you would just do what is right.”

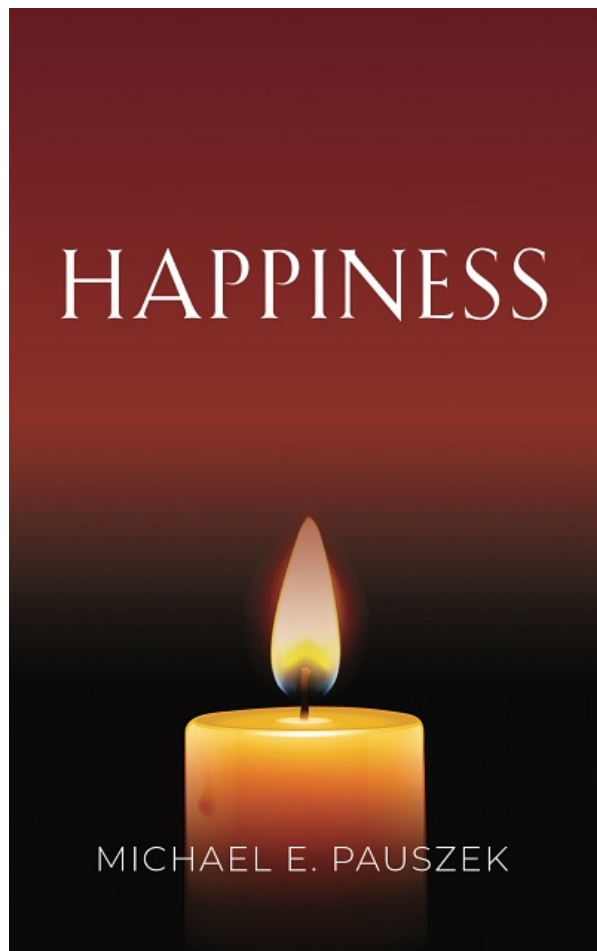
Don took a drink of his tea and looked off into the back yard, following the flight path of the retreating dragonfly. “Agree to disagree about accepting this as

just another problem to face in health care.” Donovan York, M.D. stood up, as a physical mark that the discussion was over, and stretched. “I think I will make like the dragonfly and fly off. See you Monday.”

Don was not leaving because he was angry with Curt Kolber. They had first become acquainted while in medical school at Indiana University in Indianapolis. They became friends late in their medical school years and then Donovan York followed Curt Kolber into Internal Medicine. Curt was an outstanding student and Don was very solid. They were both accepted to the Internal Medicine program at Indiana University. As residents their bond continued to grow.

Upon completion of the residency, Curt moved to South Bend, Indiana to practice. There he met his wife. Donovan joined an HMO and stayed in Indianapolis. They gradually lost touch. After several years Curt and his wife gave up their marriage façade and divorced. He answered an ad in the NEJM and applied to the CIA to be an embassy doctor. Instead, because of his training, he was offered a new position based in Langley as a consultant to the field doctors. Unknown to him, Donovan York had grown tired of his HMO practice and had also applied for what he called the CIA, the foreign legion. He simultaneously was offered a position on that same newly formed consultant team. It was a surprise when they were reunited at CIA headquarters in Langley.

The rest was what Don would call *history*.



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