

BLISS

YOUR SOURCE FOR ALL THINGS HAPPY

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DEFINING HAPPINESS

THE NEUROSCIENCE OF HAPPINESS

FINDING HAPPINESS

THE POWER OF MUSIC

CREATING HAPPINESS WITH OUR PETS

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Photo by Jill Utrup/USFWS

About The Piece

It seems today that everywhere you look, there is a whole lot of negativity in the world. All that exposure to hostility can certainly take a toll on the human spirit.

This antipathy reminds me a little of the infamous pink slime in “Ghostbusters II” - bubbling up and making a whole mess of our lives.

I’m not sure when exactly it may have really crept into prominence - was it the advent of the 2016 election? Was it way before that mudslinging cycle? Who may know for sure, but one thing that we do know is that all that incessant negativity requires a certain T.L.C. for the soul.

My goal with this piece is that, taken as a whole, it can serve as a both an explanatory and antidote of sorts to the negative influences we are exposed to. The plain truth is that there is so much darkness in this world and my hope is this piece illuminates some methods people might employ in finding happiness in these stormy weather times.

Initially I looked inward and thought of ways I have found to be useful in warding off the world’s antagonism, but the fact is that happiness isn’t a one-size-fits-all. Everyone uses different techniques that work differently for others, but the point is to find that one (legal) thing that you can add to your toolbox to put a smile on your face when the world may get dim.

While having a variety of techniques is important, also having an understanding of the science and psychology behind happiness can help us to perhaps better understand why creating and maintaining happiness can sometimes feel like a battle.

The important takeaway from this piece is that it is just barely scratching the surface of scientific and psychological information - there is so much to learn in this vast deep-rooted subject area. My aim is that this piece will provide a pathway to further delve

into knowledge and taking that first baby step toward cultivating joy amidst these troubling times.

In author J.K. Rowling’s book “Harry Potter and The Prisoner of Azkaban,” Albus Dumbledore gave one of many poignant quotes regarding happiness: “Happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light.”

Whether it is reading about the science and psychological theories, learning of the power that music can play in lifting our moods, or the adorable ways that dogs warm our souls, my intention with this piece is that it can provide you a sense of a starting point or perhaps a new way of looking at cultivating happiness.

My special thanks goes out to Fredonia Psychology Department chair and professor Dr. Jack Croxton, Zandra Campese who is a trained mental health counselor at the Fredonia Counseling Center, assistant Psychology professor Dr. Catherine Creeley, Fredonia psychology professor Dr. Nancy R. Gee, Fredonia music therapy program head and associate professor Dr. Joni Milgram-Luterman.

My thanks also goes out to the help insight from students including sophomore journalism and public relations double major Angelina Dohre, sophomore journalism major Maci Cosmore, sophomore journalism and public relations double major Avril King, junior journalism major Leah Graziano, former journalism and audio/radio production double major and Fredonia alum Jason Paton, first-year communication disorders and sciences graduate student Kalene Shafer, and of course the amazing dog owners including those of Luke the corgi and Zuko the corgi.

I would also like to take the time to express my gratitude for the great songs suggested by Dianna Hawryluk, Riley Eren, Shane Meenaghan, Garrett Blackwell, Kyle Licht, and Marie D’Angelo.

Defining Happiness & the Neuroscience of Happiness

How can exactly can you define something so individualized as happiness? It starts with delving into the area of positive psychology.

Dr. Jack Croxton is a professor and the Psychology Department chair at Fredonia. Dr. Croxton has been teaching a positive psychology class for several years as it is still a rather new field of psychology.

"It basically is a kind of maybe antidote to looking at the negative side of human existence, that so much of psychology has looked at mental illness and, you know, what goes wrong with people in terms of their thinking and so on," Dr. Croxton said.

"So positive psychologists have said 'Let's turn the tables, and let's look at what makes people happy, let's look at the positive things that people bring to the table, and what can we do to create environments that will bring about happiness in people, how can we help people build on their own character strengths' rather than always focusing on, well, 'how can we help people combat depression and unhappiness, what can we do to you know make people happier.' That's kind of what positive psychology is all about, so how can we educate people, how can we enable people to take their strengths and make

themselves into better people."

Dr. Croxton made the key point that happiness isn't the same for every single person. "I think happiness is a very subjective thing ... I think that's an important thing to realize - there's not like this magic pill you know that people can take and suddenly they'll be happy," he said.

Dr. Croxton provided some methods to seek happiness that work differently for each person.

"For other people, happiness might be coming home to their pet at night, or for some people happiness is just curling up with a good book," Dr. Croxton said. "I think you have to find your own kind of pleasure spots and then go out and make those things happen for yourself, but I don't think that there's a universal definition for happiness ... I think we each have our conception of what brings happiness into our lives."

Zandra Campese is a mental health counselor at the Fredonia Counseling Center. Campese also touched on how she might define something as personal as happiness.

"There is this social construct of what happiness should be, but in reality everyone experiences happiness differently," Campese said. "Although one thing I have noticed through talking to students and those in my

own life is that there is this common link around finding meaning or doing something meaningful."

Campese said our use of language plays a role in how we perceive things as well as our happiness.

"So, for example, if we have to do something that we deem unpleasant, we may have thoughts like 'I don't want to do this,' or 'Why am I even going. I am not going to have fun' ... Statements like this set ourselves up to get those expected outcomes," Campese said.

Campese adds that our language choices can shape and play a tremendous role in our happiness as we examine the meaning of the things that may make us unhappy.

Campese also briefly touched on the role of the brain's biology. While she may not be extensively knowledgeable about the brain, Campese gave a basic explanation.

"The brain has a pleasure center which consist of the amygdala and nucleus accumben ... the amygdala regulates emotions and the nucleus accumben controls the release of dopamine," Campese said, "When we do something we enjoy, these two parts along with others work together to release dopamine and create a positive emotion - for someone to continue to experience these feelings they would need to create a positive emotion."

Campese emphasized how important a role these biological ties can play. Research has shown through the years the link between these brain chemicals in our brains and the predisposition of those with conditions such as depression. They tend to have chemical imbalances.

Dr. Catherine Creeley is an assistant professor in the Psychology Department at Fredonia. One of Dr. Creeley's research interests lies in the area of neuroscience.

"From a neuroscience point of view, in terms of understanding the

concept of happiness, cognitive neuroscience is likely the most relevant field of research," Dr. Creeley said, "Understanding happiness through neuroscience mainly reveals the relationship between brain structures and their function during different states of emotion ... Neuroscientists, for example, are now able to identify which areas of the brain are active and involved in pleasurable experiences, which, theoretically, make us happy."

Dr. Creeley said that seeking to quantify a certain number to the individualized human experience of happiness without considering other factors associated with human happiness can prove difficult.

"The human experience of happiness is complex, with multiple components at play, such as seeing a life of meaning and purpose, and having a certain level of social connectedness ... Of course all of these experiences and perceptions are created by neural activation and interaction among brain networks involved in reward and pleasure," Dr. Creeley said.

"What neuroscience may lead us to is a better understanding of wants vs. needs, and the difference between feeling simple reward vs. reaching a higher level of appreciation of the ability to achieve happiness by changing behaviors and perspective."

With regards to maintaining a state of happiness, Dr. Creeley referred on the Theory of Mind and Mindfulness, a rapidly-developing field relating to the study of human consciousness.

"It is a goal of researchers who study our ability to be mindful to better understand what makes life meaningful and worth living - and hopefully this better understanding will lead to our ability to teach ourselves and others how to achieve and maintain happiness and peace."

How Can We Find Happiness?

With happiness being so subjectively personal, what are some ways that people can create their own joy in life?

Dr. Jack Croxton, a professor and the Psychology Department chair at Fredonia, cited the power of humor as an avenue for creating happiness.

"I think a lot of it is finding humor. You need to have a sense of humor in the world, and if you don't have that ... if you take everything too seriously, I don't think you can ever be completely happy," Dr. Croxton said.

Dr. Croxton also teaches a positive psychology course at Fredonia where he brings in a person who teaches something called laughter yoga.

"People sit around in a circle and, I know it seems kind of silly, but one person will do something and they're told 'now laugh out loud,' and then the next person just looks at them and they can't help but chuckle when they see just this other person laughing and it becomes almost contagious."

Dr. Croxton notes the woman who teaches laughter yoga stresses that just the mere physiology of laughter can reduce certain brain chemicals, resulting in a positive sensation.

"So it's like most people think

'well, if something, if you feel good about something - you laugh,' she's arguing if you just laugh, it can sometimes make you feel better," Dr. Croxton said.

This is especially true for Fredonia sophomore journalism and public relations double major Angelina Dohre.

"Watching comedies always puts me in a great mood ... Laughter is really the best medicine," Dohre said.

Dr. Croxton also noted how important it can be to be grateful for the little things in life - especially considering today's political climate. "I think you have to appreciate the little things, maybe, rather than just wringing your hands and saying 'Oh, woe is me,' you know, 'woe to our country' ... I think you just have to take little steps to just find enjoyment," he said.

Zandra Campese, a mental health counselor at the Fredonia Counseling Center, mentioned the Wellness model theory, which touches on creating wellness from balancing all areas of our lives, including physical health.

"I personally believe that when we are physically taking care of ourselves that we are able to focus more of those things that make us happy ...

We are able to do the things that make us happy and we feel physically well while we do them," Campese said. "Doing physical activity produces dopamine in the brain, which is the 'feel good' neurotransmitter in our brains."

Maci Cosmore, who is a sophomore journalism major at Fredonia, was part of her high school's cheerleading team.

"I loved the team as much as I loved the sport ... I felt a place of belonging and something about competitive cheerleading is so fun," Cosmore said. "Being able to do something and say I was a part of that is such a great feeling."

Sophomore journalism and public relations double major at Fredonia Angelina Dohre finds working out to be great way of finding joy.

"I always feel accomplished after a good workout and motivated to work on other aspects of my life," Dohre said.

Avril King is a sophomore journalism and public relations double major who plays on the women's Fredonia tennis team.

"If I feel frustrated or stressed, getting my heart rate up through exercise helps take my mind off of what I am stressing about and also helps me put it in perspective, somehow," King said.

So what about other ways of discovering joy - aside from physical activity, appreciating the little things, and laughter?

For Leah Graziano, a junior journalism major at Fredonia, baking and cooking makes her happy (especially when her results are enjoyed by others).

King said she finds one of the best mood boosts is only a phone call away.

"If I start feeling stressed or sad, I talk to my friends or even my mom ... They always make me laugh and

help put things into perspective," King says.

For Fredonia alum Jason Paton, currently residing in the Boulder, Colorado, area, time spent in nature can provide a sense of joy.

Paton also points out the refreshing simplicity found uniquely found in nature.

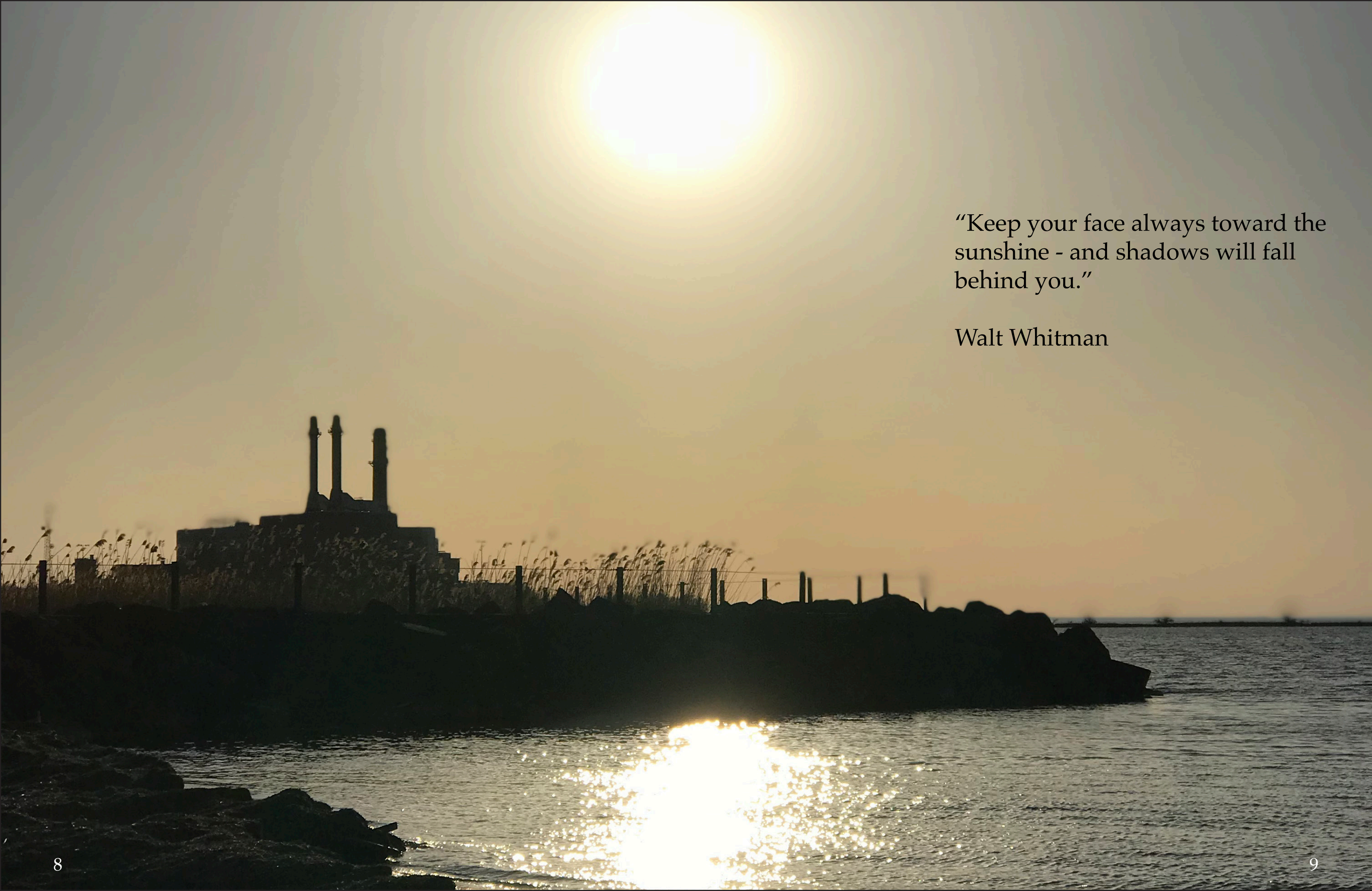
"I spend time in silence - hiking, biking and camping ... Any significant amount of time in nature requires a level of self-assuredness that I also find satisfying," Paton said, "You set straightforward goals ('today I'll hike with all my supplies on my back a few miles further into the canyon, set up camp and stare at a fire all night with some whiskey') and require nothing but your own willpower to accomplish them."

When he's not exploring nature, Paton finds joy in his routine, keeping himself busy and of course - with coffee.

"Coffee is God ... I keep my coffee on a certain shelf with the French-press clean and ready to go - anything to ease morning grogginess, often exaggerated by an inconsistent sleep schedule," Paton said.

Paton also surrounds himself with individuals who share the same interests and inspire him toward improving.

"I often create music with like-minded individuals," Paton said, "I set long-term exploration goals and daydream about adventures with the people I love."



“Keep your face always toward the
sunshine - and shadows will fall
behind you.”

Walt Whitman

For The Love of Dogs: Creating Happiness with Our Pets

Referred to as man's best friend, dogs are a common choice as a pet. More often than not, they act as more than our pets, though - they get us through some of the rough patches that crop up in life.

Admittedly throughout my life I have found it to be the case that the dogs I have had as family members have given me the gift of pure joy and support. Whether it was our troubled, ever-hungry German shepherd Max, who would eat anything and everything in sight; our rambunctious and sexually-frustrated pit bull Willy that my late step dad and I adopted together; or the three Labrador retrievers that fill our house with love and laughs with their adorable and hysterical antics - it's hard to deny the powerful bonds that dogs have in our hearts.

Kalene Shafer, a first-year Fredonia graduate student studying communication disorders and sciences, shared how her dog improves her mood.

"My dog makes me feel as if I have a purpose and he also helps create routine and meaning in my days," Shafer said. "If it weren't for him, I would be on my couch alone a lot more instead of being active and making us both happier!"

Angelina Dohre, a sophomore journalism and public relations double major at Fredonia, also shared her sentiments on how dogs are such an outlet for happiness.

"They always look forward to you coming home after a long day of work ... they listen to your problems without butting in," Dohre said.

Fredonia junior Leah Graziano, a journalism major and English minor, also owns a dog and shared how her dog provides her happiness.

"My dog makes me feel happier because he is so funny and of course super cute ... he also cuddles, which makes me happy," Graziano said.

Even those who may see dogs in passing or whose family might foster dogs such as Fredonia sophomore Maci Cosmore's mother does for a local organization near Elmira, N.Y., might feel a glimmer of happiness from encountering a furry friend. Cosmore, who is also a journalism major, says that it can be easy to grow attached to a dog such as the ones her mother fosters.

"It's sad to watch them leave, but it's so nice to get to see them happy... they're so innocent," Cosmore said.

Dr. Nancy R. Gee is a psychology professor at Fredonia who specializes in the research area of human-animal interaction, or HAI.

Gee brings up the example of interaction between a mother and a newborn and the release of a hormone called oxytocin, and how that shared enjoyment correlates with dogs.

"There's some research looking at an individual interacting with dogs, and it turns out that when you interact with a dog in such a way that you

are ... you are looking into their eyes and maybe, you know petting the dog, stroking the dog down their body, both the human and the dog release oxytocin indicating that they're enjoying that interaction," Gee said.

Dr. Gee also touched on the happiness provided by service and emotional support animals through interactions with their owners.

"The argument is that animals are non-judgemental and humans perceive them as loving the human," Gee said, "I think a lot of people would like to assume that our dogs love us, and often times what they love is that we give them treats, and we give them food, and we give them a warm place to live, and we pet them and we do wonderful things for them. They obviously like that and so you come home after work, your dog greets you at the door, they're extraordinarily happy to see you - we enjoy that interaction."

One junior nursing student who wished to remain anonymous shared her experience of having a service animal.

"I have a service dog and a cat, and my service dog will respond to any health episodes I may have, which relieves a lot of anxiety I may have about being in public," she said, "Both of my pets act like my children and it's such a great feeling when I come home after a long day and both of them are so happy to see me."

She added that their pets can pick up on cues when they get stressed or upset and know how to make them feel better.

"Having pets in college can be stressful, especially when they make messes but the pros definitely outweigh the cons," she said.

Dr. Gee said, "Because the animal tends to be non-judgemental, having that non-judgemental being around us from which we tend to garner happiness, that makes us feel more relaxed, and in a sense, it's almost as if we


feel as though we have someone we can count on when we're navigating an environment that can be very stressful and unfriendly.

"And if you have a support animal with you, for whatever reason - emotional support, an alert dog, you know there's a number of different service dogs - emotional support dogs, therapy dogs, there's all kinds of different classifications, but having that animal near you puts you into a bit more relaxed feeling and individuals feel better able to navigate those environments."

"We're absolutely looking at it from a scientific perspective, but when I step back from that, I have to admit as a pet owner myself, there is something very unique and special about pets, and about the fact that when you come home the dog greets you enthusiastically, that they want to be with you no matter if you're tired or angry or hurt," Gee said, "They love you whether you're fat, or skinny, or if you have a pimple on your face - none of that matters to the dog, and I think that kind of unconditional connection is unique and special ... we don't find that very frequently in human-to-human relationships."

Gee said the judgement often present within human to human interactions seems to be absent with human-animal interactions.

"As we navigate life, we do look at other people ... whether we like it or not, we do judge other people and we don't get that sense from animals. I think that's what they bring that is so unique to the situation is it really is a non-judgemental approach that we don't get as often from other humans."



“You know, a dog can snap you out of any kind of bad mood that you’re in faster than you can think of.”

Jill Abramson

Downtown Dogs: The Dogs of Fredonia



Kingston, a male
great Dane



Photo from
[@zukothe tricolored corgi](#)

Zuko, a male
corgi



Bridget, a female
golden retriever

Dakota, a male
Labrador retriever



Lucas "Luke", a
male Pembroke
Welsh corgi



Photo from Leah Graziano

Winston "Winnie", a
male English golden
retriever

Background Photo from Martina Fuchs

Hitting The Note: Music's Role in Happiness

Music can play a powerful role in people's lives. It has the power to heal and band people together - whether you are part of the production process and play a musical instrument or listen to and allow a piece of music to touch your soul.

Music has played an important role in my life growing up. I'm almost always listening to music as it admittedly has become somewhat of a routine for me, especially in the mornings alongside my cup of coffee.

There's some aspect about music that has given me hope in what were otherwise dark times - it has lifted me up and helped to make me stronger. Music has been a powerful force of providing a light and helping me to overcome my emotions.

My struggles with both anxiety and depression have at times been difficult, but through the power of music I have been able to soar and climb out from the shadows of stress and sadness.

I find that putting on some classical, jazz or reggae can make all the difference when I may feel either bogged down by anxiety and stress or warding off depression. There's a calmness about classical and jazz in-

strumentation that just slows my anxious train of thought while reggae is like musical equivalent of sunshine.

Maci Cosmore, a sophomore journalism major at Fredonia, finds that music helps her connect to an emotion.

"I like listening to music to get pumped up while I'm doing my makeup (which is therapeutic to me) or trying to calm down (my boyfriend will play Frank Sinatra when I have anxiety)," Cosmore said.

Fellow journalism major and junior Leah Graziano listens to music to pass time while commuting between Fredonia and her hometown. "I listen to a lot of throwback songs and they bring back good memories," Graziano said.

Angelina Dohre who is a sophomore journalism and public relations double major at Fredonia also touched on the role music plays in her own life. "Music is there to help elevate my good moods and diminish my bad moods," Dohre said.

For Avril King who is also a sophomore journalism and public relations double major, putting on her favorite song can help to boost her mood. "I'm not entirely sure why my favorite song makes me feel happy, it just immediately releases good memories and feel-

ings that help me relax," King said.

Dr. Joni Milgram-Luterman is an associate professor and the head of the music therapy program at Fredonia. Dr. Milgram-Luterman equates her work as a music therapist to that seen for any other kind of therapist while also noting how magical her line of work can be.

"Now we have all of this research especially in the last 10 years ... it's music neuropsych research where they're finding with the onset of using MRI, fMRIs for research-purposes ... it's not just as simple as music's in the right hemisphere and not in the left hemisphere," Dr. Milgram-Luterman said. "It's everywhere, and music is affecting all parts of the brain - the emotional, the cognitive, the memory, the physical, the motor ... so in that way we say neurons that fire rewire, so the music is firing the neurons."

Dr. Milgram-Luterman said music can provide a sense of happiness for people whether it is as listener or participating in making music.

"For some people, making music like being in an ensemble or singing in a choir makes them happy ... There's a lot of research on singing and singing in a group that leads to happiness," Dr. Milgram-Luterman said.

She makes the key distinction that it's not a causal relationship and music works differently for each individual.

"There are areas in the brain that have to do with happiness and if the music is just right for you, but it's not a prescription - it's not like 'if you play this piece of music or sing this particular song, you're going to be happy'... It's really dependent on the person and how they are," Dr. Milgram-Luterman said.

She said music may impact the emotions.

"Music touches all the emotions - the goal might sometimes be happiness. But sometimes it's feeling your feelings and it's OK to be sad and some-

times music will touch you that way. Or if you're feeling sad, what a music therapist will do is bring you music that reaches you right there where you're at and then try to move out to maybe understanding that feeling and maybe trying to be happier."

Dr. Milgram-Luterman also shared how a music therapist might approach perhaps modifying emotions toward the positive.

"So in music therapy, we're using the music to reach the person where they are, then move out from there. But if your goal in life, aside from going for therapy and doing all that stuff, is to be happy, it seems now more and more people are making their own playlists and finding the music that makes them happy," She said, "It's not the same for every person and it's based on your history as a person, your memories, with a particular genre of music, when ... where you grew up, what music you were listening to in your teen years, in your twenties, that has a big impact on you for the rest of your life in terms of music that you would choose."

What Songs Make You Happy?



“Mr. Brightside” by
The Killers
- Dianna H.

“Come and Get Your
Love” by Redbone
- Riley E.



“Ophelia” by The
Lumineers
- Shane M.



“The Bills Shout
Song”
- Garrett B.

“Send Me On My Way”
by Rusted Root
- Kyle L.

“Mr. Blue Sky” by
ELO
- Marie D.





Photo from Dawn Ellner