

# TO BE HONEST

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Frederika Roberts

# HOW HAPPINESS STEMS FROM POSITIVE OUTLOOK

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Happiness - we all want it, and eternally cheerful Doncaster businesswoman and mother of two Frederika Roberts reckons she knows how to help people get it. She speaks on the subject and has now written a book on finding the key to a happy state of mind. But Frederika, a social media marketing specialist who trained Rotherham town centre retailers under the Mary Portas programme, and 'tweeter' for a business networking organisation in Yorkshire, has had much to be unhappy about in her own life. Both of her daughters almost died of heart problems. Looking at life's positives is what got her family through.

**Q. Why do people need to be taught how to be happy?**

**A.** Some people find that happiness comes naturally to them; others need to learn how to be happy and work at it. In my experience, many people put off happiness. They think: "I'll be happy once I get that job" or "I'll be happy once I've lost weight". But fundamental happiness needs to come from within us.

**Q. Do you think we have become too materialistic these days, and that this affects how happy we are?**

**A.** Material possessions alone don't make us happy. I believe that if we pursue material possessions to the exclusion of all else and forget to LIVE in the process, this is likely to make us unhappy. If you get the balance right, however, I think it is possible to have both. There are happy and unhappy people at either end of the prosperity spectrum.

**Q. What is happiness?**

**A.** Buddhist Monk Matthieu Ricard defines happiness as



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'a deep sense of flourishing that arises from an exceptionally healthy mind'. I believe that being happy means that you can overcome even the most horrific of circumstances and events because you have the healthy mind that helps you deal with these and move on when the time is right.

I also believe happiness is about how we perceive events and circumstances. A happy person who has been in a car accident and escaped without physical injury is likely to think "Phew! That was lucky - it could have been so much worse", whereas an unhappy person may perceive the same event along the lines of "Why do these things always happen to me? I am so unlucky!"

**Q. Why is it that what makes one person happy probably doesn't make another?**

**A.** Research has shown that while 50 per cent of our hap-

piness is genetically pre-determined, only 10 per cent is down to circumstances and events. This means that a whopping 40 per cent of our happiness is down to us; the actions we take to make ourselves happier. So partly it's genetic, but also some people work at their happiness more than others.

**Q. Is it better to be a glass half-full person?**

**A.** Yes. If you view things in a positive light, you will be more successful because you will spot and pounce on more opportunities.

**Q. You've written a book about it - Recipe for Happiness. What makes you an expert on happiness?**

**A.** My book offers the happiness ingredients that have worked for me, along with anecdotes from my own life and the people I have interviewed. Both my daughters were born with severe heart

defects. We found out about Charlie's (now 15) at birth; Hannah's (now 14) came when I was 20 weeks pregnant. I was advised to consider a termination.

Hannah became ill with bronchiolitis when she was just 10 days old; she was in my arms when she stopped breathing. Her heart stopped just as my midwife knocked on the door to do a routine check-up. She resuscitated her. Hannah had open-heart surgery to be fitted with a new artery and valve at 10 months old. It was a huge success; she is a happy, and intelligent teenager with a lust for life who wants to become a paediatric cardiothoracic surgeon when she grows up.

Charlie had open heart surgery when she was five. We always thought we had less to worry about with Charlie than Hannah, but in February 2010, we faced every parent's worst nightmare

when we went to wake her up for school to find she had suffered a cardiac arrest. My husband administered CPR while I was on the phone to 999, with Hannah running between the two rooms, relaying instructions. After being kept unconscious in intensive care for eight days, she miraculously woke up with no long-term mental or physical damage. She now delights in telling people about 'the day she died' and continues to be witty, lively and delightful.

Life has definitely been a challenge, but despite this, we are a happy family.

**Q. Do you ever feel angry that your daughters were dealt with such an unfair hand?**

**A.** I feel angry, sad and, frankly, terrified at times. Those emotions are normal. My daughters' heart conditions, their cardiac arrests, their surgery scars; none of it is fair. But happiness comes down to perception and choice. We are so fortunate to have two amazing daughters; some people try to have children and can't.

We nearly lost our daughters more than once, but we didn't. I remember one day sitting in the car park of Birmingham Children's Hospital, where both our daughters have had their main cardiac care, watching a mother load her car with vital medical equipment for her child. I remember thinking "I'm so lucky. My daughters don't need equipment to keep them alive and mobile day-to-day."

**Q. You have also got through great difficulties in your career...**

**A.** I was a teacher, then moved into recruitment and eventually found a great company where my career progressed. Then the recession hit. Making people redundant was heart-breaking; I believed in the business, so I borrowed money and invested. The last four years have been tough; I've

worked without a salary for a long time, but the company is now profitable again. During this time, I also set up a small food business, but I was trying to do too much, so I closed it. I am currently on sabbatical leave from my recruitment business while I focus on my social media marketing, training and consultancy business, as well as my work as The Happiness Speaker and writing my book.

**Q. Do you feel your experiences make you better able to help other small businesses?**

**A.** I have learned a lot about running a business and about when to let go. You learn far more from overcoming obstacles than when everything goes well. Hopefully that makes me a good business mentor.

**Q. What are the nine ingredients you write about?**

**A.** Read the book to find out! It does have an added twist - it features nine of my favourite recipes. Cooking and sharing food is intrinsic to Italian family life - I was born in Italy - and it is a huge happiness ingredient in my life.

**Q. Have you always been a happy person?**

**A.** Yes. I have always received comments about how much I laugh and smile and love life. Of course, I wasn't immune to teenage angst in my youth, and I have suffered emotional pain in my life, but none of it has ever undermined my fundamentally happy nature.

**Q. Do you have smile lines?**

**A.** At 41, I'm amazed that I don't! I guess it's good genes and a generous amount of 'padding'. There are some advantages to loving food as much as I do!

■ Recipe for Happiness will be published by Yorkshire-based Solopreneur Publishing on December 1 - available from www.recipe-for-happiness.co.uk