Time to appreciate some of the great things in our lives. Let’s give thanks.

I haven’t done a happiness post in a while. Perhaps it’s high time that I dust off the old keyboard, slide all that nonsense and clutter off my desk, open up a window and let some fresh sunny air inside. With that being said, let’s spend a few minutes to talk about some good things; things that matter to me. And, by extension, maybe that matter to you as well. Eh?

These are just some thoughts that I have had. They are my thoughts, and I am sure that not everyone will agree with me. But you can skip the parts you don’t like or agree with. And nod to yourself silently in parts that you do like.

Deep Dark Cool Forests

One of the little pleasures that I have enjoyed are those special moments when I enter the deep dark woods.

As most of you might be aware, there are all kinds of forests. From light sparsely fielded birch groves, to dense pine growths, to scrub and spackle arrangements. Here we are talking about deep, thick and rich old-growth forests. Forests that are populated with century old hard-woods like cherry, maple, oak and mahogany. Forests with bark as thick as your hand and lush deep thick curtains of moss that cover everything.
You can breathe in the cool moistness with your nostrils and feel the fresh air in your lungs.

The cool deep dark forest.

When you walk into this environment it is like you are entering another world. It’s cooler. It’s dimmer, and the shade is complete. There might be a very few instances of light that might manage to pierce through the upper canopy, but not often. You might be able to hear a brook bubbling away, or a swish of some deer as they disappear in the distance.
On of my great pleasures is to walk and explore the dark recesses of a midnight dark forest.

It’s a treasured place, and a treasured time. As such, I would like to express my belief that if we do not take the time to go forth and visit these treasured places that we are missing out in one of the great joys of life.

Perhaps there is a national park nearby. If so, go there and take a trail that you have never walked before. You will not regret it.

Sunny mid-morning Spring days

As I write this, it is the start of May. Springtime. Just about the entire world is waking up, stretching their arms, and venturing outside.
One of the little pleasures (that I have) is the freshness and coolness of Spring air, most especially when it is associated with a very Sunny day. These are days where the windows are open in the house to let the fresh air in. Where the kids are out in the driveway hosing down and washing the car, and where people are talking about when the local pool will open up.

After I left the ADC once I was retired, everything was “good”. It was all good. And I vowed that I would appreciate life more, enjoy it more and treasure it more. Perhaps that is what many people need today. A lesson to appreciate what you have WHILE YOU HAVE IT.

This is also the time when Winter clothes are packed and stored away. The Winterizing for the house, the car, and just about everything else is set aside. It’s also when the first mowing of the lawn occurs, and if you have a pool, when the pool cover is removed, the leaves are gathered from the water, and you “shock the pool” into health.

Maybe you might even set some chairs out in the yard.
Nighttime on the beach

It’s quiet. All that you can hear is the surf beating up against the shore. The sky is black, and the sea is black, and the sand is dark grey. Yet, strangely once your eyes adjust, the whitecaps on the waves are this light blue color. It’s actually magical.

Nighttime on the beach.

It’s a time when you walk, and think. And if you are with a friend, you talk. The waves roll. The air is still with occasional light breezes, the palms sway. There is a pace of life. It is free of the electronic media that are all tethered to. And that is a good thing.
Then once you return home you can turn on your social media. You can read or hear people literally screaming at you with the latest “issues” of the day. Trump is a Russian spy! China is evil, nasty and eats bats! Your rights are being stolen from you! We need to raise taxes! And on and on and on.

Go outside. Shut that nonsense off.

Warm laundry on an icy cold day

It doesn’t seem like much, but to me it’s special. It’s a time when you pull the clothes out of a dryer on a frigid Winter day. The clothes are warm, toasty and delicious. Meanwhile the house is cold, brisk and icy.

A delicious home-cooked hamburger and an icy beer

You didn’t think that I would ignore this special moment, did you? Nope. All praises to the home-made hamburger and the icy cold beer. Now, when I mean icy-cold, I actually do mean icy cold. In fact, I (myself) prefer a tall glass of ice, and then pour the beer in. That means, boys and girls, that I drink the beer at 32F or 0C. Frosty.
One of the delicious pleasures that I have is the home-made hamburger with a nice frosty beer. It’s what I enjoy, and I believe that everyone should try this combination at least once in their life.

Now a frosty mug is nice. But it is the temperature of the beer that makes this special. Not to mention a nice home made hamburger with tomatoes, cheese (glorious cheese!), lettuce, and bun. Oh, and if you were inspired, some nice slabs of bacon would really enhance the overall burger flavor, don’t you know.

Well?

What’s stopping you from doing this right now?
Fixing a busted car and having it roar back to life

Have you ever dealt with a broken piece of machinery? You sit in the car, you fire it up and …clunk! Nothing.

Gagh!

From my vast experience in watching cartoons, that car is very tired.

That car is very tired.
So then, after some screaming and moaning, you finally figure out what is wrong. You pull out your tools, and start to get to the heart of the matter. But, of course, nothing is easy to get to. You need to tear half the car apart to get to anything. Then, after hours of work, frozen and stuck nuts, icy wind blowing on your knees and your shit wet with water, oil, gasoline and grease, you finally are able to put the replacement part back in.

Then, you climb in and fire that puppy back up...

...barooooom!

It’s “Miller Time!”

It’s a real joy to see an engine roar back to life once you fix a few problems. (Oh, and don't you just love the 454, eh?) The 1970 LS6 454 cu-
bic-inch V8 that was one of the best street muscle car motors ever produced. Broooom!

Making a pot of Chili

There is a certain joy in making a pot of chili. I really cannot enunciate why it is so special. Maybe it is because I would tend to cook chili on the weekends. Or maybe it’s the smell of the chili as it is cooking all afternoon.
A fine bowl of home-made chili.

Or maybe it’s sitting down afterwards watching a movie with the chili in one hand and an icy cold beer in the other. I really don’t know. What ever it is, it’s most certainly a wonderful and special noteworthy time.
I started to make chili when I lived outside “Poison Canyon” in Ridgecrest, California. One day the staff on the base had a “chili cook-off” on a non-base facility. All of us were asked to submit our creations. It was my first attempt at making chili and (yes) I made some mistakes. But then ever since, I kept at it and kept at it.

Now, when I make up a pot, it is my “comfort food”.

I like to eat it over rice. (Though some friends in Louisiana like to eat it over chips.) I know that sour cream is a nice addition, but I never seem to have any around. Instead I opt for lots and lots of yellow cheese (sharp cheddar) is my favorite and some hot peppers.

Oh, and don’t forget the icy cold beer.

Playing with your dog

There’s something about a little playful ritual that I have with my dog “Shao Pi”. You see, a couple of times a day I give him a “dog sausage”. It’s a kind of meat flavored rice filler in the shape of a sausage. It’s pretty darn cheap.
Chinese doggie sausages. You cut holes in the plastic skin and he sucks the liverwurst like meat out of the sausage.

What I do is cut the ends off and punch holes in it. Then I call him.

Now, my game is to pretend that I cannot see him or know where he is. I start looking for him all over the house and outside on the porch. He goes crazy trying to say “I'm here! I'm here!”.

I carry on like this for a few minutes. Eventually he “convinces” me that he’s there, and I hand the treat out to him.

Now, my wife tried this game.
The only thing is that she didn’t play the game. She just handed the sausage to him.

What he did was so funny. He sat on the floor. Looked at the sausage, and then up to her. As if to say “what? You don’t want to play with me? Did I do something wrong?” And then he slunk back to his sleeping bed and ignored the sausage.

LOL.

This time is a little pleasure I have. I guess that it sounds so silly to dog haters or cat lovers, but I swear it is a special time and something that adds meaning to my life.

An after-dinner cigar and a glass of whiskey

Ah. You can tell that I am a man growing old. But you know what? Yup this is a real pleasure of mine. There is something relaxing and soothing to have a fine meal, and then calm down afterwards with a fine cigar and a nice glass of whiskey.
An after dinner cigar and a glass of whiskey.

I must admit that I am not a connoisseur of cigars. Rather, I take what I can get. Though the Cuban cigars obtained locally are really nice. As far as whiskey goes, I know what bad and fake whiskey is, but my budget will not permit me to have any of those expensive brands that you see in magazines. So I make the best with what is within my budget.

It’s a pleasure of mine and something that you cannot do in any public restaurant in America today. But, it is something that I can do just about anywhere else in the world. It’s what’s called “freedom”.
Picking a ripe heirloom tomato off the vine

When I was growing up we had a little garden. I was the only one who really cared about it. I would tend to it, and weed it all Summer. I would also go ahead and plant tomatoes along with the other vegetables. My favorite plants were, of course, tomatoes. Though secondary favorites included green peppers and zucchini.

A fine tomato sandwich.

I tried to grow them up here in China. No such luck. Zhuhai is way, way too hot for the kinds of tomatoes that I know and love. I wrote a post about this HERE...
Anyways, back to my story.

Growing tomatoes is a real pleasure of mine. I especially like the tomato sandwich that I make from a freshly picked juicy “Big Boy” fresh off the vine. I just cut that sucker into many thin cuts. Layer the cuts one on top of the other. Add some salt and pepper, and slather some sweet mayonnaise (Miracle Whip) on top. Of course, I use plain white bread. It’s the perfect bread for this sandwich.

I just cannot imagine a Summer without a tomato sandwich.
And, of course, I always eat it over the sink while the sauce and the tomato dripping fall down. My hands get all messy, but I just rinse them off under the running water.

It’s a great Summer pleasure, I’ll tell you what.

You do not know what your true pleasures are until you cannot have them. The pleasure of a simple tomato sandwich was denied to me in the ADC.
Canoeing on a quiet lake alone

This is a pleasure that most people do not enjoy.

You buy or rent a canoe. You go to a remote area, and there, in the early morning, you paddle out into the lake while the morning mist is rising off the lake. If you get up really early, it’s still very dark out. Like maybe four in the morning.

It’s quiet. The mist is like a fog and all you can hear are the frogs, the critters, and the sound of the swishing of the water.

Then you just paddle up and down the lake. Maybe find a quiet spot and fish. You pop a top (open up a can of beer), and drink it down. You don’t have a cellphone, or at least no signals. No one can contact you with an

It’s magical.

Soup in a thermos and a home made sandwich

Most people don’t give this any thought. But you all should. There’s something comforting in having a lunch prepared by loved ones for you instead of a McDonald’s #3 meal supersized with a coke.

A home-made meal is healthier, better, cheaper, and often more delicious than one made in a fast-food restaurant. It won’t make you fat, it will be balanced, and it will remind you of your connections to your loved ones. It’s a win-win.
A homemade packed sandwich goes a long way to keep the stomach rumblings down and subdue the ravenous beast inside.

The thermos might contain coffee, but more often than not it would be homemade soup. My personal favorites are chicken-noodle, cream of broccoli, and vegetable beef. The sandwich would generally be some kind of “Dagwood” consisting of a few slabs of meat, some tomatoes, lettuce, onions and maybe a “thickener” like peanut butter or a fried egg. Topping it off would be a fruit. Maybe an apple or a banana. Sometimes an orange.

That’s what you get when you have a traditional family. One person works outside, the other person takes care of the domestic issues. They make sure that you eat well and healthy. They put care into that meal. They put love into that meal.
A thermos filled with home-made soup is a very special thing, and it reminds you that you are nothing without your family and their support.

They say the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach, and it is very, very true.

Enjoy an ice cream Sundae

Ice cream is everywhere. Or at least, what we call ice cream, is everywhere. In the West, America I’m talking to you, most “ice cream” is actually a percentage of cream with milk and other fillers. It’s not really “real” and “pure” ice cream at all.

Which is really rather sad.
This little pleasure describes eating real, honest to goodness, ice cream at a dairy that gives you the real thing. And what’s more, you eat a Sundae using it.

A well done ice cream sundae would have multiple scoops of real ice cream, with all sorts of toppings added.

Now, some history first.

Back in the day, when families still attended churches, and would spend the Sundays together, a “Sundae” was a special treat. It was a time to go traipse off to the local dairy farm and eat or have some fresh ice cream. That was a big event back in the day. It’s so difficult to imagine what the big deal was, because seemingly ice cream is everywhere.
Heck you can get a “ice cream” “Sundae” at McDonald’s, for goodness sakes. Which isn’t really a true “ice cream” nor a true “sundae”. It’s a tasty food-like product. Fine for kids, but really below standard for most adults.

Adults deserve real... REAL... ice cream.

In California, back in the 1980’s, ice cream parlors were making a comeback. Though, I have no idea what is going on today. When I was there, they were being displaced by the TCBY frozen yogurt franchises.

Oh, and by the way, any decent Sundae in the United States would be topped with an American flag, don’t ya know.
Here we are talking about paying the money and eating an enormous ice cream Sundae with your loved ones. We are not talking about some fake ‘soft serve” for a dollar at the local fast food joint. So, what more can I say? Go ahead, and go get a quality ice cream sundae. You won’t regret it.

Finally, here’s a shout out for Hersey’s Fudge. Get some on-line or in a grocery store and use this (instead of Hersey’s chocolate syrup) on your home concoctions.

Hersey’s Fudge

Playing with your cat

Now I talked about playing with my dog, but I also get an equal amount of satisfaction while playing with my cats. They are hunters and nothing gets them more excited that playing “hunt that critter”.
The best toys are the feathers or snake on a string.

Cats love to play with those feathers.

I would dangle those feathers in the air and they would spend hours running, chasing, leaping and clawing at them. They would be so caught up in it and it’s a true joy to behold. Ah... good times.

A cup of fresh brewed coffee on a cold winter’s day
Now most Americans appreciate a nice cup of brewed coffee. We go to Tim Hort-
ton’s, Starbucks, McDonald’s or Duncan Donuts to get our fix. Of course, we
also tend to brew it at home, whether it is in an old-fashioned percolator,
a Chemex, or even (gasp) instant coffee.

But here, I want to talk about a different kind of coffee experience.

An “old fashioned” American diner.

Imagine it’s snowing out, and as cold as a witches tit out. You had spent
maybe ten minutes trying to chop the ice off your windshield with the wind
howled around you, and icy cold dust flakes of snow burned your skin. Your
breath would exhale in white clouds that would frost up your eye glasses
and turn your beard white. And finally, after shoveling away the snow you
hop into the car, and turn the motor over (you had a oil-dipstick heater,
after your reinstalled the battery)...

Gah! You can tell that I used to live in Northern Indiana, eh?
You start driving down the road. It’s around 5:30 in the morning and the sky is just beginning to become a dreary light grey.

Up ahead is a brightly lit diner. It’s one of those old-fashioned stainless steel sausage affairs. It looks something like a mobile home, but is all silver color with warm inviting windows all along the sides.

You pull in, while a truck with a snowplow on it’s front is busy cleaning out the parking lot.

You park, turn off the engine and get out of the car. A few steps later, you pull open the heavy stainless steel and glass door and you are inside this warm, inviting diner filled with the aroma of bacon, eggs and freshly brewing coffee.

Inside of a fine American style diner.

You go up to the counter.
There’s a guy (or a gal) there who immediately places some silverware on a napkin next to you once they wipe down the table. You, of course, reach over to the free newspapers down the counter to see what the daily news is, and when the waitress comes on over you place your order.

If you are like me, you would order “Country fried steak and eggs” with grits (or hash browns), wheat toast (why I never ordered rye?) and a coffee.

She would say “Just a moment, hon.” Then in short order, she would fill up a fine slam-on-the table white mug filled with fresh coffee...

A vintage heavy ivory white ironstone china coffee mug. This is what coffee was intended to be drunk out of.
You see, it’s not so much about the coffee as it is about the context... the environment... the feelings and the emotions that you have at that exact moment in time.

I know, I know...

Starbucks fans will argue that that they are just fine with the paper cup that they get from Starbucks. They believe that it is just as good, or maybe better....

I do not.

Please enjoy a nice cup of coffee, and share it at a moment that remains special to you.
Thunderstorm at night

Who doesn’t enjoy a nice cozy stay inside during a thunderstorm? The light display, and the booming of the thunder is inspiring. Not to mention the crash of the rain as it beats upon the house, and the gusts of wind that howl and moan in the pitch black night.

It’s a great time to stay inside and cozy up with loved ones under a throw. Don’t you think?
Homemade Iced Tea

I grew up in Western Pennsylvania. There, we pretty much drank Hi-C, or Cool-Aide. My mother would go ahead and pour the granulated mix into pitcher and refrigerate it. Then, when I was in High School, the idea of making “fresh” lemonade or Iced Tea caught on. We would put this big tureen on the stove and cook up a batch of tasty refreshing beverage. Then allow it to cool down.

later, at the end of the day, we might sit on the large shady porch and drink it as the sun would set. Though in those days we called it “watching the street lights turn on”. It was nice, you know.

Of course, then in those days, we might also smoke a joint, a cigarette, or a bowl of something that was illegal at that time. We were pretty much told that it would give us brain damage, and one day we might get confused, and put a baby in the microwave, or try to jump out of the window in an attempt to fly.

It was in all the newspapers and magazines, don’t you know.

Back then, we would sit on a “glider” (which is a metal couch that sways back and forth) or in a “porch swing” which is a wooden bench seat that hung from the ceiling by chains.
Metal glider. This is a long forgotten masterpiece that is fun to sit in and wonderful for wide shady porches.

Of course, there would be a blanket or throw or some pillows on the glider. We never sat on the bare metal or wood slats. You know, looking back, many of my first dates were spent on the safety of the porch while the girls’ parents were in the kitchen or living room.

It is that moment that you treasure. The sun has set, the sky is turning into a dark blue color. The air is cooling down and a little breeze is kicking up. House lights are turning on, and the homes looked warm through their windows with yellow and orange colors on the bluish-white exteriors. The crickets come out, and the cicadas. You can even watch the bats fly about in the sky.

Later on in my life, I completely forgot about that.
Delicious Southern style Iced Tea.

I would go ahead and get this kind of iced tea in fast food restaurants. It would be filled with chemical preservatives, and unsweetened. No lemon. No orange. No mint. And I would be forced to drink this kind of camel piss on my way to and from work.

Then, when I moved to the South, I experienced what “real” iced tea is. It’s called “Southern Ice Tea”, and it’s awesome!

How to Make Perfect Southern Sweet Iced Tea

Iced tea is pretty much a year-round staple here in the south - probably mostly because it's so darned hot down here most all of the year. Besides, tea - unlike soft drinks - is loaded with benefits.

Just like seasoning recipes to taste, you definitely should adjust to your own sweetness level with sweetened iced tea. Some folks like it real sweet, some not quite so sweet and you can certainly exchange sugar
for an appropriate sugar substitute, even making the tea completely unsweetened, and adding it per glass.

This recipe makes 2 quarts of sweet tea and I used to use a cup of sugar, but then I switched to making my tea completely unsweetened and using a sugar substitute by the glass, but then I stopped using artificial sweeteners completely, then I went back to them, or I flip flop between a stevia/sugar blend, monk fruit or agave - I've pretty much tried most all of them. When I went back to using regular granulated sugar, I found a cup to be too sweet for me. Eventually I reduced that cup of sugar to 3/4 cup, then 2/3 cup and now I find about 1/2 cup of sugar for the whole pitcher works pretty good for me. In restaurants I always find sweet tea generally far too sweet for me, so I order it "half and half" - half sweet, mixed with half unsweetened, and during the summer I go through so much tea that I now make a full gallon of a diet sweet tea.

Sweetening aside, one thing is for certain. I believe that the perfect iced tea starts with Luzianne brand.  {affil link} Period.

Now... I don't say that because I'm trying to impress the folks at Luzianne (who have no idea who I am), or because I'm trying to make myself look more "Southern" by using Luzianne. I use it because, in my opinion, it is the tea for Southern iced tea - whether it's sugared up or made with sugar substitute. Not that other brands don't make a good pitcher of tea. Mama used Lipton and it's a perfectly fine tea. It's just that for what I consider to be the perfect Southern iced tea, I truly believe you need to use Luzianne.

Finding a restaurant, even in the Deep South, that served sweet tea was a challenge there for awhile. Restaurants jumped on the bandwagon of removing sugar from their tea and tried to pass off unsweetened tea to all of their patrons, offering sugar packets at the table. Well, everybody knows that just doesn't work. Warm tea is what you need to dissolve sugar and iced tea just needs to be cold. Not warm. Not at room temperature. But chilled cold and served over ice and for me, with lemon. So, thankfully, they have finally gotten back to offering sweet tea again, and unsweetened for those folks who prefer not to have the sugar. It's true, a lot of folks, myself included, sweeten with sugar substitutes these days, but still... every once in awhile, we all sure enjoy a glass of ice cold, sugared-up tea.

**Tea Tips:**

1. For perfect tea always start with fresh filtered cool water - never tap water!

2. Cloudiness is often caused by putting hot or still warm tea directly into a cold refrigerator. My method prevents this since you are pouring your steeped tea directly over ice cubes.

2. Bitterness in tea is caused by overcooking and burning the tea leaves - that is why it is important not to boil the teabags and not to steep them too long in boiling water. To counter, a pinch of baking soda - only about 1/8 of a teaspoon - can be added to the hot, steeped tea
after you remove the bags. It will not affect the taste of your tea, and provides insurance against bitterness.

3. Use wooden spoons to squeeze your tea bags, a glass container - like a large Pyrex measuring cup - to steep your tea, and store it in a glass pitcher if at all possible. I break this rule myself at times though, especially with my Milo's copycat diet iced tea. And I do love my Tervis cups.

4. If you prefer your sweetened tea more on the sweet side, increase the sugar. Some folks like as much as 1-1/2 cups of sugar, but start lower and increase for the next pitcher.

5. Of course, substitute artificial sweetener by the pitcher or per glass if you don't want to use sugar. I use the granulated Splenda in the large bag, about 3/4ths cup is enough for me.

6. If you like lemon in your tea, try making ice cubes out of lemonade to use in the individual glasses. As they melt, they will infuse the tea with lemon flavor! {a tip from Susan of our Facebook Family!}

**Ingredients:**
5 to 7 individual tea bags, [Luzianne brand preferred] [affil link]  
1 quart of cool filtered or bottled water  
Pinch of baking soda, optional  
1 (4-cup) glass Pyrex measuring cup for steeping  
2 quart glass pitcher filled with ice  
1/2 to 1 cup granulated sugar, or to taste  
Fresh lemon, sliced or wedges, and some mint sprigs, optional

**Instructions:**
Boil one quart of cool filtered or bottled water, bringing to a full, rolling boil then turn off heat. Steep tea bags in the hot water for 9 minutes. Gently squeeze bags of excess water and remove. Whisk in sugar (and baking soda if using) until dissolved and set aside. Fill pitcher with ice, and carefully pour the hot tea concentrate over the ice. Stir well and pour over ice filled glasses, garnishing with a sprig of mint leaves and a nice juicy slice of lemon. Savor. Makes 2 quarts.

**Cook's Notes:**
For a milder tea, use 5 bags; for a more robust tea, go with 7. Increase sugar as needed to your sweetness level. Never pour hot tea directly into a glass pitcher without ice in it! To conserve your ice and use the tea per glass, fill the 1/2 gallon pitcher with 1-1/2 quarts of water instead of ice, and top with the steeped tea.

-Deep South Dish

Personally, I always use (a generous amount of) cut up orange slices, along with the lemon. And sometimes even a slice or two of lime or grapefruit to
tarten up things a bit.

Sweet + tart = flavorful neutral.

I always use mint, but too much mint is not good and will act medicinally. Your heart will start to race. Yikes! So just use a sprig and no more.

Sweeteners can be sugar, brown sugar, cane sugar, and honey. Experiment. You can end up with some very delicious cool Summer drinks for your end of the day porch rest periods.
Iced tea is just perfect for the end of the day rest periods while the world quiets down. Some of the best Southern Iced Tea that I ever had came from Louisiana and Mississippi.

Nighttime walk in a snowstorm

You have not lived life until you have walked at night in a snowstorm. This is most especially true if it is in the countryside, on a wooded road, and you are alone with only the wind whistling through the trees and the cracking and gnawing of the branches as they sway in the wind.

Night time walk in the Winter snow storm.

When ever you have an opportunity, whether it is an old-fashioned sled
ride, or sleigh ride, a walk, or a ski-mobile trip to the neighboring woods... please do it. Get gout and enjoy “Mother Nature”.

Conclusion

Make what you do matter. Take time to savor every moment. Do not try to be like the actors in the movies. Just try to be you; the best YOU that you can be. Do things your way. Live life your way.

Start doing it now.

Make your life matter. Do the little things that enhance your life. Appreciate them, savor them and enjoy them.

I do hope that you enjoyed this post. I have similar posts in my Happiness Index...