

DAYS OF  
ACTION



UNIVERSITY  
OF ALBERTA

# HAPPINESS REFLECTED:

## A COMMUNITY POETRY PROJECT

Collected by the  
University of Alberta Days  
of Action International Day  
of Happiness Working Group

Published by the University of Alberta Days of Action International Day of Happiness Working Group

Copyright © 2023 Ebum Akomolafe, Amy Bacon, Belle D., LG, Rebecca Graff-McRae, Alexandra Horrigan, Siri Iris, Jerry Iwanus, Katherine Koller, Jon Lai, Iris Lau, Zyesa Lo, Lorelei Loveridge, Julie Claire Ma, Madeleine Natrass, Natasha Nunn, Michael Przystupa, Simran Panesar, Carmen Person, David Sulz, Rebekah van Bruggen, the University of Alberta Days of Action International Day of Happiness Working Group.

University of Alberta Days of Action International Day of Happiness Working Group: Madalina Ingram, Lucinda Johnston, Nandini Karunamuni, Rick Mast, Gavin Palmer, Heather Ritz, Devin Smith, Madeline Smith-Ackerl, David Sulz, Linnea Velikonja, Courtney Wagner.

This publication is licensed under a Creative Commons licence, Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0): see <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>. To obtain permission for uses beyond those outlined in the Creative Commons licence, please contact the Days of Action International Day of Happiness Working Group.

University of Alberta Days of Action International Day of Happiness Working Group gratefully acknowledges funding for this project from the Office of Advancement and Brian and Cecil Silzer for their donation in support of mental health initiatives, as well as our partners, the Digital Scholarship Centre, Sound Studies Institute, and University of Alberta Library, who have made this project possible.

The University of Alberta Days of Action International Day of Happiness Working Group respectfully acknowledges that we are situated on Treaty 6 territory, traditional lands of First Nations and Métis people.



# Preface and Acknowledgements

Many hearts, minds, and voices made this project possible, and we are grateful for each person's thoughtful contributions.

To our poets: thank you for seeing value in this project and trusting us with your creation.

To our readers, we hope that you find what you need in these pages, be it refreshment, inspiration, consolation or solidarity. We wanted to bring this project to our community as a way to remind ourselves how powerful happiness is, and to encourage each of us to seek it out—particularly as we learn to be present with ourselves and the ordinary moments in life.

This chapbook is part of a larger initiative for International Day of Happiness. To get more information and learn about other ways to engage with the poetry collection go to [uab.ca/happy](http://uab.ca/happy).

In your light I learn how to love.  
In your beauty, how to make poems.  
You dance inside my chest where no-one sees you,  
but sometimes I do, and that sight becomes this art.  
—Rumi

# Table of contents

It's the small things	7
Simpler	8
Why all the fuss?	9
Winter Solstice 1986	10
it is in the smallest of things	12
The Junkyard	14
Soul Season	15
To My Son	16
Breathe	17
A smile	18
On the axis of suffering	20
Eye Smile	21
The Morning of the Poem After James Schuyler	22
Puppy Love	23
on washing dishes together	24
Not Quite Blue	25
Memories of Northwest	26
Instead	28
Chillin'	30
At the end of a day	31
To Burn as a Star	32
Hope on the Line	34



# It's the small things

By Rebekah van Bruggen, she/her  
Staff, Department of Cell Biology

An unexpected, rambling, chatty letter from a long-distanced friend  
Hot from the oven, a chocolate chip cookie - with a glass of milk  
Woodpeckers knocking on old, gnarled tree branches  
Early misty morning rambles through the river valley  
Laughing children swinging on creaking swings  
Delightful encounters with random strangers  
Garrulous magpies chasing scolding squirrels  
Late night strolls on rain-dampened streets  
Fresh produce stocked on market stalls  
Conversations that wander and weave  
The smell of old, much-loved books  
Frost fractals fringing the window  
All the dishes done and put away  
Cool breezes on a hot day  
Framed old photographs  
A hot mug in cold hands  
Snow ladened branches  
Crossed off To Do lists  
Shared moments  
Sunbeam naps  
A warm bed  
New socks

# Simpler

By Amy Bacon

Undergraduate student, Department of Chemistry

I have never been  
Happier  
Than the times  
I am not cognizant  
Of time passing  
Slipping past me  
Carrying me along  
Its tide

Never been  
Happier  
Than the times  
I am merely another  
Creature  
And I simply  
Exist

Absorbed  
Wholly  
My mind consumed  
By the rumble of the car  
Underneath  
My seat  
The sound  
Of their voice  
The smell of  
Pasta  
Cooking on the stovetop  
The taste  
Of evergreen  
On my tongue  
The soft embrace  
Of larches  
In between my fingertips  
And the sight of  
Beauty  
In my eyes



# Why all the fuss?

By Rebekah van Bruggen, she/her  
Staff, Department of Cell Biology

Pursued and chased,  
A destination or the journey?

They say, "Happiness is a warm puppy"  
But what if I'm allergic?

I like sad songs,  
Can that bring me happiness?

They say, "Happiness is homemade"  
But what if you're home-less?

If happy is a choice,  
What were the options?

# Winter Solstice 1986

By Rebecca Graff-McRae, she/her  
Staff, Faculty of Arts (TRAS)

Midwinter. Northern Alberta – not quite North  
of 60 but nearly – far enough to feel like  
the whole world was south of us: nothing nowhere darker.  
I was three. My father joyfully  
offered a midnight ride at 6pm  
atop a skidoo that roared  
dragon-fierce and rumbling.  
The moon might have been  
full (or memory fills it) casting  
enough brightness to sparkle  
diamond tesseræ across the snow,  
a crust above the crust of the earth.

We race, the four of us  
astride, faster than any  
reindeer. I am up front, safely  
wedged between the throttle and  
my father's arms.  
We whoop – my sister and I – as dad  
sails us over windrows and snowdunes delighted  
squeals that amplify beneath our toques before  
stealing  
away  
on the wind...

Until

the sled launches and spins  
mid-air, a high-dive. My family  
a quartet of Icarus falling like  
snowflakes through the black night.  
I land and gravity  
presses me deep into the  
cold, apprehension heavier than the weight  
of the sled I am under.

Muffled voices echo: my sister crying  
out; mom and dad alright and laughing, already  
composing the jokes they would tell  
to friends when morning came.  
The crunch of boots shatters the crystal  
silence of the night. Poised, still  
winded, I wait, wondering. They call  
my name but still  
I lay a second, feeling  
the love of being  
lost, a little longer.

# it is in the smallest of things

By Lorelei Loveridge

Alumni, Department of Education

it is in the smallest of things:

each bristle on the brush  
that cleans the grooves  
between my aging teeth

this food that i eat while  
the price of dairy shoots up  
thirty percent here in the desert

arabian hospitality put into  
my hands in the form of a  
traditional bahraini dish

imported from pakistan  
the sounds of nusrat fateh ali khan  
in my head, how this all started

the lock on my suitcase  
lime green, bold as the  
declaration: i am going

aloo basheer, deep fried potato  
in a gold souq and the memory  
of my father talking to the

asian men he met everywhere  
in dubai - the taxi driver, the  
hotel porter, the lungi seller  
the flowers sent to my parents'  
hotel room as thanks, the merriment  
of my dad before he died a traveler, too

the way my stray cats purr  
when i place my hands on them  
they stretch their legs like arms

as if to say 'rub me' and we  
are not alone though the rain  
has driven us inside ourselves

gutters whisk the water away  
the heater has an automatic switch  
and the placement of the clock

on the upper right hand corner  
of my computer and the warmth  
of this tartan fleece on the sofa

remind me: it's time for bed, so rest  
and when the sun comes up  
the venetian blinds will help you

hibernate and recuperate  
from the agony of being  
6778 miles away  
from your canadian home

sold in the aftermath  
to family friends at least  
this much is a blessing

for happiness  
it is in the smallest of things

# The Junkyard

By Jerry Iwanus

Alumni, Department of History, Classics, and Religion

I want to go to a junkyard  
strewn with hollowed husks  
of Sunday drives to church  
first dates and shyness  
maybe second and third dates, too – less shyness  
and secrets kept from prying parents

I want to go to a junkyard again  
with the old shiplap garage  
that has a potbellied stove in the corner  
mismatched chairs all around, pin-up calendars  
and twin tanks for the acetylene torches  
that effortlessly slice through the stubborn angle iron

I want to go to the junkyard again  
next to my parents' house  
where George would pay for whatever scrap copper we collected  
at thirteen cents a pound  
so we could buy the newest Mad Magazine  
and the kind of ice cream that had a gumball at the bottom

I want to go to that junkyard again  
where George would give my mother half his yard every year  
to grow a garden where the earthy aroma of dill and tomato  
permeated the oppressively humid Winnipeg summer air  
and the spray from the oscillating sprinkler  
refracted the sunlight into ineffable rainbow hues

I want to go back to that junkyard just one more time  
but not for too long  
as the garden has reverted to lawn anyway  
and the burn barrels have all been taken to another junkyard some-  
where  
Scrap copper is well over five dollars a pound now –  
we may have been wise to hold on to some over the years

# Soul Season

By Julie Claire Ma, she/her

Alumni, Departments of English, Speech-Language Pathology

The days lengthen  
But the cold wind strengthens

This winter has been too long  
So we turn to song

To guide us into spring  
Hoping it will bring

Something new  
Like fresh morning dew

On a flower that hasn't bloomed  
Or your soul that you assumed

Would be happy

Once spring comes

# To My Son

By Natasha Nunn, she/her  
Librarian, University of Alberta Library

Today you rescued a small brown bird  
stuck in chicken wire. You brought it to me shivering  
in your gentle hands.

Your hands have grown so  
quickly. And your legs, and your feet.  
Your heart hasn't caught up, struggles to pump blood  
through your long-limbed body  
making you dizzy, prone to falling.

The fledgling keeps its wings tightly folded,  
peeks up at me through the space between your fingers.  
You ask, "what should I do, what should I do?"

It's been one week  
since I took an exacto knife  
out of your shaking hand and washed  
the cuts on your wrist.

I lead you outside,  
you open your hands slowly. The bird  
doesn't move, stares at us, its tiny chest pounding.  
Then suddenly it  
flits away into the daylight, we  
laugh with delight that it can still fly.



# Breathe

By Zyesa Lo, she/her  
Alumni

It's been a long day

Breathe.

So much noise in my mind

Breathe, 1,2,3.

I watch the leaves fall off the trees

Breathe.

I focus on the flutter, the colour and the breeze

Breathe, 4,5,6.

The small joys of life

Quiet the noise

And I smile

Breathe.

# A smile

By Carmen Person, she/her  
Counselling Therapist, Augustana Campus

A step forward  
looks from  
the outside  
as movement  
in a particular  
direction.

A step forward  
from  
the inside  
feels like  
movement  
yet maybe  
you feel it more  
fully  
than that.

You take that  
step from within  
and like the  
frost on the trees  
there is a visible  
union of the outer  
with the inner.

The movement  
in the step  
is like the  
joining of  
beauty from  
within  
and  
from outside.

You know the curling  
of the lips  
that seems like  
the movement of  
a smile.  
Like the frost  
it too can be  
placed there by  
the outside.  
Teased up  
in the motion  
of a smile.

What a delight  
to feel the  
movement  
of the curling lips  
upward  
as similar to  
a step forward.

Frost on trees,  
edges of lips,  
a step with the foot,  
you are aware  
of the joining  
that you feel  
as wonder  
full.

# On the axis of suffering

By Jon Lai, he/him

Graduate student, Department of Human Ecology

could there be more to the day  
subsumed by discontent  
than to reflect  
on the time spent

might we uncover  
the root of disassociation  
and live to experience the grief  
that has yet to manifest

your attention will pique in unexpected ways  
those feelings and thoughts  
that ought to be repressed  
will dissolve

the happiness that is sought  
may be in the rough  
of our kinship and relations  
which will not be forgot

# Eye Smile

By Ebum Akomolafe, she/her

Undergraduate student, Alberta School of Business

That our skin should stumble and fold and trip over itself  
in its excitement to express our joy  
is perhaps another reminder that beautiful things  
are most often not made perfect.

# The Morning of the Poem

*After James Schuyler*

By Madeleine Nattrass, she/her  
Faculty of Arts, Faculté Saint-Jean, Education

enough  
to sit here  
hand-me-down table's  
familiar slab of oak old-fashioned  
chairs huddled around its sturdy  
burl'd poster-bed legs rounded  
backs of chairs their carved  
pattern Brailled into my fingers  
from years of Saturday dusting  
hours of hidden played  
under its flat roof

enough  
to settle in sunlight  
in an all-to-myself house  
clutter of pens and pencils untidy  
magazines newspapers books  
fitting bits of reading  
into every sitting minute  
on this exceptionally warm  
October afternoon

enough  
that there is a bird at the feeder  
pecking with greedy satisfaction  
at the on-sale suet  
I put out yesterday  
a treat  
this finding nourishment  
in the open book  
of a fine poet  
I'm happy to get to know.

# Puppy Love

By Belle D., she/her

Undergraduate student, Environmental Science, Augustana Campus

My body was my cage  
Showing me my limits  
My rusty hinge joints squeaking loudly at me  
Making me mourn the things I can't do  
Until her.  
Her big brown eyes  
Her wiggly bum  
The way she bolts to just me every time I open the door  
She takes me on walks, happy to stop and sniff when I need a  
break  
I learned joy again, learned how to focus on the fun  
The way everything in her little puppy eyes shone with curiosity  
I became her protector from the vacuum cleaner  
And she became mine against my mind  
I now see a field of flowers as a thing of beauty  
Instead of seeing an unattainable space, I can not run in  
She runs it for me, She does the things I can't  
But the joy I feel is all mine

# on washing dishes together

By Alexandra Horrigan

Undergraduate student, Department of Earth and Atmospheric Science

another dish. *plunk*

"plonk"

"ohhhh! pish-posh!"

*splish, splosh.* happiness



# Not Quite Blue

By LG, she/her

Undergraduate student, Departments of Political Science,  
Women's and Gender Studies

Through my cloudy eyes  
It's light when you know you'll see him again.  
Briefly fading to gray when you realize  
that you don't know when.  
Its electric, bright as lightning  
June fireworks reflecting in her eyes.  
It's Atlantic depth when you kiss her.  
Velvet almost black the texture of memory, the night you gazed at  
stars.  
All crammed into the bed of a cobalt truck  
Glowing numbers on the dash  
music from the right side speaker.  
Warm hearts and hot tears of parting  
The vibrance of a Midsummers sky, and cotton candy at the fair.  
A reflection of youth in our favorite lake.  
Vast as the Pacific when you feel  
like seventeen might last forever,  
shallow as what we were told was sin.  
Tinted with nostalgia  
my treasured indigo moments.  
Cornflower dreaming such fleeting joy  
the bliss of my mediterranean memories.  
Blushing all through winters frosted reunion  
I had never forgotten the blending shades  
of their souls dancing together.

# Memories of Northwest

By Michael Przystupa, he/him

Graduate student, Department of Computing Science

Whether a drip or downpour,  
Coating the world in mist,  
In the cold or hot weather,  
It sends the earth its kiss.

It forms friendless puddle lakes,  
Swelling with lost interactions.  
While we weep into streams,  
Our sorrows flowing to the drains.

Stay indoors if you wish!  
Lock eyes with the cobwebs.  
The pitter patter sonata,  
Lulls you to sleep in bed.

But in my clothes, it seeps.  
No umbrella fella am I!  
Permeating into the skin,  
Soaking into the blood inside.

As a drenched dress shirt,  
Gives you a friend's damp touch,  
Their embrace cools hot skin,  
While warming my soul much.

As your wet grinning face,  
Has washed away tears with it.  
There's happiness in store,  
With smiling dripping droplets.

The tree's dew shines through,  
And green leaves absorb it in.  
The air full of fresh wooden smells  
From moist soils on mountains.

As the drizzle's fizzle ends,  
I love it when it rains.  
A tearful sky's reminder –  
Of being home again.

# Instead

By Iris Lau, she/her

Alumni, Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences

Not big bold beautiful  
Gilded gold and flashy bright  
Preplanned star event  
Months in the making

Years increase, it shifts  
Instead –

I.  
Four housemates, four corners of the world  
I hold those nights dear  
When once we spoke of dreams  
long past midnight, impromptu kitchen meetings  
Now,  
Though rare,  
We make it work  
Through time zones and life  
Our faces blurry pixelated quadrants  
But the banter still echoes the same

II.  
Unexpected, your name  
Flashes on the screen  
“I’m so sorry this is last minute,  
but would you have time...”  
For you?  
Always.  
It is me that fear to impose on you  
You, now mother to a child

Was it so long ago that we were children  
Laughing at our shared secret  
Now I in one city  
You on a surprise layover  
One long evening, we laugh and walk and eat three ice creams  
How often this occurrence, every handful of years perhaps?

III.  
Mundane commute  
Punctuated by jewel toned skies  
A rare spectacular sunset in the gloom of rainy winter  
Hummingbirds deign to visit my feeder  
Eleven floors above ground

Instead –  
Your smile  
That warmth  
Splashes of colour in the quiet of my life  
Fills my heart still  
My flavour of joy  
This and many

# Chillin'

By Siri Iris, she/her

Undergraduate student,

Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation

Talking is cool  
And I do it a lot  
But I also love when the talking stops

And you just sit in each other's company  
Working on your own tasks  
Body doubling

And out of the silence  
Something comes up  
And you laugh at a meme  
Or a discussion starts up

These are the times I feel seen  
And heard

And happiness  
Is more than just a word

# At the end of a day

By David Sulz

Librarian, University of Alberta Library

At the End of a Day as at the End of a Life;  
Look back on your Actions, your Efforts, your Strife;  
All Justified then but when Accounting is Made;  
Were the Results and Achievements worth all that was Paid?

The Inferno of Sunset, the Arc-light of Dawn;  
All taken on Faith and Childhood Memories long Gone;  
Head bowed in Haste, Brain ruled by Important;  
Eyes, Heart, and Soul cut off from the All-Potent.

Freedom sold to the Masters, so to Belong;  
and Buy back the Rights that were Ours all along;  
Find the Essential so at the End you won't Say;  
One Day never Done before the Next in its Way.

# To Burn as a Star

By Simran Panesar, she/her

Undergraduate student, Department of Physiology (Honours)

Some of us just grow up wild  
Beyond the imagination of those around us.  
What they thought was a songbird  
That could be caged to sing for the perpetrator  
Turns out to be an eagle  
Destined to soar over treetops.  
A ruler of the skies Flying to the tunes of no one.  
Years of my childhood  
Were spent under an umbrella,  
Told not to escape the border it outlined  
For the rain would drench my dress.  
Yet what can I say  
Standing on the side  
Admiring from a distance  
Had never been my way of happiness.  
Eventually, I started resigning  
From the role of the well-behaved daughter  
To stand at the edge of the shore  
To feel the cold sensation on my bare feet,  
Being told it was cold was never enough.  
Today I often think  
About the many cages that play a role in our lives,  
Their foundations placed  
From the moment we set foot on earth.  
We inherit the trauma of others  
Each with its unique borders,  
Like of nations at war with each other,  
Keeping us huddled within,  
Guided by fear.  
Happiness then becomes like a star  
Whose warmth is felt from afar  
But yet we never become one with it,  
Since the star resides outside the iron bars  
And above the glass ceiling.  
Souls that are like stars ablaze



Are unapologetic for their brightness.  
Stars are meant to shine  
They are meant to be seen in all their glory.  
As my fingers met keys  
100s of pages were written  
It was never explicitly mentioned  
Yet I had often been smitten  
With the quest for happiness.  
Stars can not be dimmed  
Just as oceans can not be shrunk.  
Souls are meant to shine like stars  
As they are  
Where they are  
Without permission.  
We must step bravely into the power  
We possess to heal  
When all the layers choking us  
Are peeled.  
We must break the shackles passed on to us  
Sometimes disguised as a facade of shining heirlooms.  
Happiness thrives in authenticity.  
We glow brightest when we shine for who we are.

# Hope on the Line

By Katherine Koller

Faculty, Department of English and Film Studies

Hardwired for it  
we know  
yellowed leaves fall  
dying eyes close  
books burn to ash  
fireworks explode  
but hope  
antennae another leaf  
anticipates one more day  
fingers the next page  
beholds the  
wings of a bird.



