

DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY

A Palm Beach author reveals his secrets to a joyful life



BY ROGER WILLIAMS
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A LOT HAS BEEN SAID ABOUT happiness; some are helpful, some are amusing, and some are philosophic, like Aristotle almost 2,400 years ago. “Happiness depends on ourselves,” the Greek philosopher said — which isn’t a bad observation but prompts the question: How?

Fortunately for us, Max Ans-

bacher, born and raised in New York City to parents who both held doctorates in psychology — a man educated at Exeter, the University of Vermont and Yale Law School — finally moved to Florida, settling in Palm Beach County. According to his publicity biography, his success as a decades-long Wall Street investment advisor includes authoring the best-selling 1987 book, “The New Options Market,” translated

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A Dazzling Lineup of Ballet

Ballet Palm Beach announces a season overflowing with splendor and delight.

Leap into the season with the passionate tale of “Carmen,” a darkly beautiful ballet full of passion and jealousy. Other works include the Spanish heat and cool contemporary artistry of “Fractured” and the ethereal beauty of a Ballet Palm Beach original work “Mozart Intermezzo.”

The beloved yule-time classic “The Nutcracker” takes center stage in early December. Experience an enchanted winter wonderland full of dancing snowflakes, tin soldier battles and a little bit of magic.

In February 2025, it’s a love story from the jazz era with the production of “The Great Gats-

by.” F. Scott Fitzgerald’s masterpiece joins Daisy, Gatsby and Nick Carraway on a trip through the roaring 20’s. The poignant story of love, loss and the price of success is captured in extravagant dances.

The season concludes with a happily-ever-after version of “Sleeping Beauty,” in which Princess Aurora is doomed to slumber for 100 years. The page-to-stage production retells the

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Ballet Palm Beach presents *The Nutcracker* at the Kravis Center December 6 – 8.





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ABOVE: Max Ansbacher, posing with a Model T Ford, is the author of the book "A Practical Guide to Happiness." He says happiness is a choice we all have to make.

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into Chinese and used in the Harvard Business School curriculum.

And a more recent, significantly more personal book, "A Practical Guide To Happiness: How To Bring Optimism, Confidence and Self-Esteem Into Your Life."

The book offers three seemingly simple answers. And they are simple, not magical, Ansbacher insists, in effect confirming Aristotle's conclusion: Happiness is a choice.

"Want what you have" is the primary principle in the trinity of choice.

"Be true to your own values" is second. And the third, perhaps unexpectedly, is "Nurture your friendships."

So, how do you accomplish these three things?

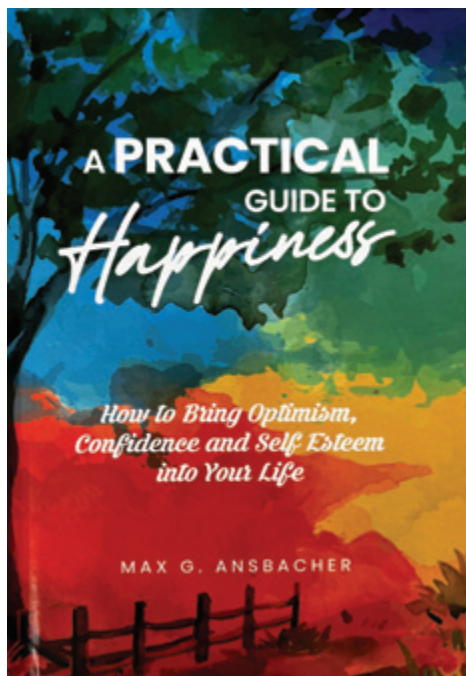
For Ansbacher, the answer came after spending significant portions of his adult life feeling like a failure, he said in a recent conversation.

Although he was always at the head of the class in his early years, he recalled that when he got to Yale, things changed.

"I graduated in the middle. I had friends at the top of the class, and only about 2% of the people who applied to Yale Law School got in, but I felt like a failure."

That feeling became more pronounced when he went to Wall Street, became a vice president and investment banker at Bear Stearns for 20 years, then opened his trading firm, Ansbacher Investment Management, Inc.

"I had been feeling more or less unhappy for most of my life, including while I was on Wall Street," he says. "After a while, I had about \$100 million under management, and on Wall Street, it was nothing. I said, 'What's the matter



with me? I'm not doing well. Maybe it's enough to make a nice living, but I'm not at the top."

He didn't like the feeling.

"Once I regained my composure, I figured out I was a stockbroker dealing with individuals, investing limited amounts of money, while others were managing hundreds of millions in corporate accounts."

But that initial sting, particularly on Wall Street where "everybody knows how much everybody else has," compelled him to begin thinking about his own happiness.

He began to realize, he says, that actually wanting what he had, not what somebody else had, was a powerful engine for a better life. He began to read everything he could find about happiness, including a long-term Harvard study of a group of people who were happier if they had more and closer friendships with other people over time.

"Believe it or not, we have a lot of control over our minds — more than most people realize," Ansbacher says. "If you're

haunted by things in the past, for example, you can focus on the present or future.

"Here's what I want to do. Or, 'I'd like to be this' or 'I'd like to be that.' Or maybe, 'I want to give up being an alcoholic.' Whatever it is, you can — you CAN change your focus."

Wanting what you have proves a rich choice, he suggests.

"We have so much. Everybody here in America is blessed. I'm not political, but I can see that we all have so many things. And we're not going to be (arrested) in the middle of the night for something we thought or said. We all have enough to eat, we're not starving — and we all have friends who are so important in our lives. You can cultivate those friendships.

"So concentrate on the good and on what you have. You will be happier."

Posed an old and oft-asked question by a reporter, Ansbacher's answer may reveal his pragmatic realism.

"Can money make you happier?" the reporter says.

"Well, you can't buy happiness; there's a lot of truth to that,"

he replied. "But there's some truth to the notion that people with more money and more education tend to be happier than people who don't have them, too."

Ansbacher, who never had children, says he adopted the community and culture around him, treating them almost

like his wards. He's a "happiness coach" for individuals, a public speaker, and a bit of a philanthropic whirlwind.

In New York City, he spent a decade on the board of The Carter Burden Center for the Aging, working with the elderly and infirm, and on the board of The Fortune Society, providing opportunities for recently released prisoners.

In Palm Beach, along with his wife Chris, his publicist says he supports The Palm Beach Island Hospice Foundation and The Cancer Alliance of Help and Hope, as well as a bouquet of cultural organizations, including The Palm Beach Opera, The Kravis Center, The Round Table speakers' series (Max is a board member), The Coudert Institute, The Palm Beach Symphony and The Chamber Music Society of Palm Beach.

It's a lot, which may suggest another truth about happiness, this one articulated by the 19th-century British writer and pundit Oscar Wilde: "Some cause happiness wherever they go; others whenever they go."

Max Ansbacher is a member of the former category, not the latter.

"A Practical Guide To Happiness: How To Bring Optimism, Confidence and Self-Esteem Into Your Life," by Max Ansbacher, is available in print and a Kindle version at Amazon.com. To learn more about Ansbacher and his book, visit www.practicalguidetohappiness.com. ■

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— Max G. Ansbacher