January 5, 2012

**“Volunteering Made Me So Happy That I Altered the Course of My Life.”**

[](http://happiness-project.com/happiness_project/2012/01/ive-never-seen-somebody-come-back-from-exercising-in-a-bad-mood/)

Happiness interview: [**Conor Grennan**](http://conorgrennan.com/).

I met Conor Grennan at a book event in Canada—he was there for his book, [Little Princes: One Man’s Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0061930059/ref=as_li_ss_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=thehappproj-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0061930059), and I was there for [The Happiness Project](http://www.happiness-project.com/happiness_project/the-happiness-project-book/).

Conor’s book—which came out in paperback this week—tells an amazing story. At age 30, when he was volunteering at an orphanage in Nepal, he realized that the children there weren’t orphans, they were trafficked. He put himself on a mission to reunite these lost children with their families, and he managed to get many of them back to their families, after years of separation, fear, and privation. He also founded [Next Generation Nepal](http://conorgrennan.com/next-generation-nepal/), an organization that continues to help trafficked children.

That day, we had a chance to talk only for a few minutes, but I could tell that Conor had many interesting things to say about happiness, so I was very pleased to get the chance to interview him.

**What’s a simple activity that consistently makes you happier?**   
Knowing that I have one small routine every day that makes me happy. No matter how busy I am, I always take lunch off (or at least 30 minutes, anyway) to mindlessly chill out. I love that.

**What’s something you know now about happiness that you didn’t know when you were 18 years old?**  
That there’s never a real “This is my last time to do this!” I thought college was my last time to have fun. I thought post-college was my last time to take that big European trip. I thought before my son was born was the last time to really travel. None of these things turned out to be true.

**Is there anything you find yourself doing repeatedly that gets in the way of your happiness?**   
Checking email too often.

**Is there a happiness mantra or motto that you’ve found very helpful? (e.g., I remind myself to “Be polite and be fair.”)**   
“Will I look back on this when I’m 50 and be proud I did this?” (I imagine that age will increase as I approach it.) It’s what made me move to Prague when I was 21, then Brussels when I was 28, then go around the world when I was 30, then move to Nepal when I was 31. I thought my 50-year-old self would think those things were pretty cool.

**If you’re feeling blue, how do you give yourself a happiness boost? Or, like a “comfort food,” do you have a comfort activity? (mine is reading children’s books).**  
I go see my kids—3 years old and 8 months old. Nothing cheers me up quicker.

**Is there anything that you see people around you doing or saying that adds a lot to their happiness, or detracts a lot from their happiness?**   
I’ve never seen somebody come back from exercising in a bad mood.

**Have you always felt about the same level of happiness, or have you been through a period when you felt exceptionally happy or unhappy, if so, why? If you were unhappy, how did you become happier?**  
Taking bold decisions, or setting a goal that seems too hard and reaching for it, those things make me much happier.

**Have you ever been surprised that something you expected would make you very happy, didn’t – or vice versa?**   
Yes! I thought volunteering would definitely not make me happy. In fact, it not only made me overwhelmingly happy, but it made me so happy that I altered the course of my life to put make helping kids in Nepal at the center of it.

I’ve never known anybody who has volunteered internationally to not say it was one of the best things they ever did. Getting involved with people and kids that you can actually help is one of the things that’s made me the happiest.

From The Happiness Project website

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