

## Happiness: A Multi-Voice Narrative

Ellene G. Mobbs

Jim has impressed upon me the value of including a short summary to explain my thesis project, saying, “I can just imagine Jay Devine sitting at his desk with this box in front of him, thinking *What the heck am I supposed to do with that?* Jay Devine (or anyone else for that matter), if you are indeed sitting there with my project in front of you and wondering what you are supposed to be doing with it, let me tell you: stop reading immediately! Set this summary down, and please interact with the box. *That* is the project, not this summary, and it is meant to stand entirely on its own, with no explanation and no apology. My intention is that once you have spent a good amount of time interacting with the project—maybe putting it aside and then coming back to it once, twice, or even three or four times—you will then read through this for the background information that is perhaps interesting but also (*I hope*) wholly unnecessary for you to comprehend the “meaning” of my project.

### The Concept

*What was I thinking?*

At its heart, this project is simply a story about happiness. It may not look like a regular story—where you know exactly where it begins and where it ends and in what order you must read it in order to understand it fully—but I found that tackling the enormous (and enormously diverse) topic of happiness required an approach to narrative-crafting that would use the topic’s multidimensionality as a tool to facilitate the telling of the story, rather than inhibit it. I wanted to create an experience for the user that allowed for multiple readings of the same material, where each reading highlighted a different relationship between the many voices in the story. It was also important to me that the user discovered these multiple readings on their own, even if it took several sessions with the material for them to do so. The idea is that happiness itself takes on many characteristics that can change over time.

### The Content

*What is actually going on here?*

The project is comprised of transcripts from three conversations I had with different people and then a series of journal entries I wrote to reflect on those conversations and the project as a whole. All of the conversations were held at a restaurant over a meal.

This was by design—I thought that a <sup>meal</sup> would help carve out a specific amount of time for the conversation (and thus avoid us rambling on forever) but in a natural way. I also really enjoy eating, and think better when I am not hungry. Also, I did not go into any of these conversations with a list of questions, because I felt very strongly that I wanted them to be as natural and organic as possible.

The journal entries take place before, during, and after the month or so that I was conducting these conversations. In these journals, I talk about the project, respond to things that stuck with me after each conversation, and reflect on the experience as a whole.

The conversations and the journal entries are dated or timestamped to give the reader a sense of how they all related to each other in time, although this chronological stamp becomes less important as the content is shifted around in the different readings.

### **The Form**

*Why does it look like this?*

The form of the narrative (i.e. the box and the many booklets contained therein) is designed to allow for multiple, unique readings of the content. I have tried to cue the reader through each reading with a series of visual elements. We should start with the box. The first thing the user encounters (and I love that word—as a friend of my mine put it, “It’s pretty hilarious, thinking about your advisors and department heads *encountering* this project”) is the box. A functional necessity, the box is there to keep the booklets together in storage, transportation, etc. It also serves as a definite starting point, from which the entire narrative unfolds. Looking at it that way, it was important to me to use the visual elements of box to clue the user into what they should do once they open it. For example, I specifically designed the box to close with a seam around it, over which I could print text—like the word “happiness.” The intent here is to put that idea of bringing two halves of one word together into the mind of the user from the very beginning, even before they encounter that same element on the booklets. Also, I wouldn’t necessarily expect the user to turn the box over, but the way I wrapped the text on the bottom cover may entice some users to look at that bottom cover before opening the box. They then might be more likely to turn the booklets over and “discover” that reading as well.

Once the box is open, the reader encounters the booklets. The front covers are printed such that the user’s eye will first go to the lines and the “title,” because that ink is darker and the text is oriented horizontally. This cues the user to the first reading, which is to take all of the booklets from a single conversation (or all of the journal entries) and read them in chronological order from beginning to end. For example, all of the booklets in the Anna set say “Anna, Lulu’s, Pittsburgh” on them, have lines that match up with each other, and have timestamps to suggest order. If all the user wants is to read a transcript from a single conversation, this is what they’ll do. The design for the journal entries functions in the same way.

What would happen, though, if the voices in each separate discourse started talking to each other? Although Anna and Charlie have never met, and neither have read my reflection on the conversation with my mother and Leigh, is it possible for them all to engage in a dialogue with each other? And what do we all have in common? The text

printed on the spine and outer edge of the booklets is meant to suggest a reading that lets these different voices “talk to” each other. The phrases serve two purposes: one, each one is a distinct visual element that has only one distinct counterpart, or “solution”; two, once the user has “solved” the puzzle, each phrase suggests the nature of the relationship between the two booklets that it brings together. For example, both Anna and Charlie discuss “knowing what you want” at some point. With this reading, that commonality is made clearer.

The third reading focuses on grouping rather than linear discourse. I pulled out three major themes, or lessons, from my conversations and journal entry and grouped the booklets according to which ones I felt treated each theme. These themes are, “focus,” “enthusiasm,” and “self-knowledge” and are printed on the backs of the booklets such that the user has to piece them together to discover the themes. In the process, they will physically be grouping together the booklets that treat those themes.

The last thing I want to talk about with regard to form has to do with the layout of the interior of the booklets. The layout does not suggest any particular order or grouping like the other visual elements do, but there are a few key things I want to point out. First, the pull-quotes. Usually, a pull-quote is pulled from the text on the page, serving to highlight something of interest. I actually pulled those quotes from completely different discourses within the project. The purpose there is to show how people either agreed or disagreed with each other on specific points. My hope is that the reader will see the pull-quote and wonder where it comes from, then suddenly recognize it when they later read it in the text of another booklet. The second fun little layout thing that I want to talk about is the form for the conversations. I intentionally laid them out like a play script, with tags and stage directions. I find that that when reading a script, the tendency is for the reader to read the words out loud, as if he or she is playing the characters. I wanted to invite the user to participate in the conversation, even imagine him- or herself as the characters, sitting at a table, talking about happiness. It’s a subtle thing, but I hope it is effective in its own little way.

It’s true that I started with the content—the conversations and the journal entries—and then let that content drive the form, but what I found was that the form ends up driving the content as well. As the visual cues guide the user from one reading to the next, pulling out thought threads, zooming in and out on thematic relationships, teasing the fabric of the text, the content changes and adapts and takes on different meanings. It was truly stunning, realizing so acutely the essential relationship between form and content—as stunning, I hope, as is the realization of the relationships between the different voices in this narrative.

### **The Process**

*How did it all come together?*

If I am to be honest, I have to say that getting started on this project was slow going. As I mentioned above, I knew that I wanted to treat the subject of happiness, that I wanted to talk with people to get their stories and ideas, and that I wanted the final form to be a book. Figuring out how to execute these ideas in a meaningful way took a lot of time, and the project itself went through several transformative iterations—from a spiral bound book with images, to a box with vignette-like cards about happiness inside, to the current form that you see in front of you. I didn’t settle on this final form

until early December, which put me on a tight schedule for gathering information, editing it, writing, editing that, sussing out the validity of my design concept, buying materials, proofing materials, construction, etc.

I encountered several obstacles in the planning and construction of the box and booklets. It's a little laughable, actually, how often I hit a brick wall—I'd love to use that paper, but I can't find enough of it in time; the interior of the booklets should be in color but it will cost me over \$100 to print; these covers are supposed to be 13" by 7" but kinkos can't print straight on both sides so now I need to cut them smaller; the box should close easily but I forgot to account for two paper thicknesses when measuring the spine and so I need to carefully peel back the binding cloth without compromising the surface integrity of the board underneath... sigh. This is so much more difficult than I imagined, and there are so many different factors that only seem to come to my attention immediately after they were relevant to this process.

I have come to embrace the constant snafu, though, as an essential part of the project rather than as a hindrance to the project. Any exploration of happiness must, by necessity I think, also involve frustration, sadness, and confusion, and since the design of this project is ultimately intended to blur the line between form and content I realized that it was also fitting to blur the line between objective and process; between the project itself and the nature of my involvement in it. There is an important lesson about happiness in there, somewhere.



January 11, 2011

where it matters

I think we  
really only  
have the tip  
of the  
iceberg

I can't stop thinking about what Leigh said, that some people just luck into happiness. The last thing I want, after embarking on this journey, is to be told, "Well, some people are just lucky. And some people aren't." Is that really it? **Will I turn out to be one of the lucky ones, and how will I possibly know while I'm right in the middle of it?** Surely my life is no more fucked up than anyone else's — even with my insecurities, my questions,

why it matters



# It's unreasonable to think that to stick with one thing, or way about one

every goddamn hangup that seems to worm its way out of my mouth and into another argument with the people I love. Even with all of that, surely it's possible that I might be lucky enough to find happiness anyway.

I know that I am privileged. I often get the things I want. I often get things without even asking for them. College, for me,

you have  
feel a certain  
thing forever

has largely been a realization of this fact — this whole experience is a luxury, being able to sit here and “reflect” on my life. I have been given four years of education, of health, of security, of time to figure my shit out. Every class I go to, every lecture I attend, every essay I write is this incredible gift to me that I couldn't possibly pay back except to take full advantage of it all. **There's a degree of guilt that comes with this, though. What if I skip class? What if I don't study enough? What a waste of the resources that have been dropped in my lap.**

Like Lucy, I have been given infinite opportunities to fulfill my dreams. But in a way, these gifts are not free at all because they force me to work hard — or want to work hard and avoid

where it is in the...

the guilt of squandering them. How, then, can I to resign myself to the idea that happiness is a matter of luck and not a matter of my own doing? It cannot be that happiness is chance. I have to believe that something about the search for happiness matters beyond what happenstance throws my way. **Otherwise — what's the point?**

what's the  
use of even  
being here?

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January 10, 2011

it's hard  
for you, in the  
beginning,  
to be happy  
for other  
people

I should have known that any conversation with my mother about happiness would eventually circle around to my older brother, the one person I know who has had everything and yet can never seem to be happy. My mother has always spoken very frankly with me about Alan. In an early version of these transcripts I changed their **names** and deleted every instance of my referring to her as "Mom" because I wanted to protect him from her frankness. We are supposed to protect the ones we love from embarrassment.

**My relationship with my brother is a long and complicated history of trying not to give a shit.** On the one hand, I have memories of us laughing together, hugging in the kitchen saying, "Mom, look how well we get along!" and of banding together against our eldest brother, who towered over us. On the other hand, I also have much clearer and much deeper memories of him lunging at me, hands outstretched, leaving bruises

announcing sadness



on my neck; of running through the house crying, trying to get to my room before he caught up with me; of him sitting across from me at the kitchen table on my birthday, the disturbing calmness with which he said, "I have more ammo" before he bloodied my face with a book. Eventually, it's just easier not to remember at all.

I know exactly what my mom means when she says "it's like a bubble bath." The way joy feels delicate, like you could just blow it off your fingertips and let it float there in front of you. I know that feeling; I've felt it before. When we say that happiness can bubble up inside of you, it's because that is what it feels like. But sadness can feel that way, too; anger can feel that way; darkness, too. I wonder now if the question isn't, how do we find happiness? It's, how do we fight the darkness inside of us?

Scott told me a story about a man who lives somewhere in the world at the top of a cliff, the only inhabitant for miles. Every morning he sits on his porch drinking coffee and reading a book. Every now and then someone will drive up, get out of their car and walk to the edge. This is where the man puts down his coffee, closes his book, and steps off the porch to go talk to them. He asks them their names, what they do. He invites them to come sit with him and drink some coffee. Sometimes he saves them, sometimes they jump right before his eyes.

Part of me cannot imagine standing at the edge of nothing and making the decision to jump. But part of me, deep inside, responds to this in a way that frightens me. I understand the feeling of looking out into that nothingness, fighting the urge to topple over. Many years ago, in the midst of my parents' terrifyingly cruel divorce, I woke some mornings and thought, how much

"I don't hate him."

I remember her grabbing me arm, making me face her. "Your brother is curled up in his bed, crying. He can't understand why his own sister wants him to fail. How *dare* you say such a thing to him! He is your brother. You better make this right."

But who knows how to make something like that right? I tried to talk to Alan, mumbling an apology, but he hid his face under his covers. I went into my mom's room, looking for a solace that she refused to give me. She wouldn't even look at me. I crawled into her bed and started shaking. I shook so hard I couldn't speak at first, and when I did it was in wet, swollen words.

"Mama?" It hurt so much. "Mama, I know no one ever said it would be easy. But — God! **No one ever told me it would be so dark, and so ugly.**"

because  
or some sort  
of suffering,  
or some sort  
of misfortune  
happens to  
everyone

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Mom & Leigh  
Rare Bar & Grill, New York  
9:37am

Sumner

fichting darknos

because  
there's  
so many  
different  
types  
of happiness

LEENIE Okay, so. *[to Leigh]* Before you came down, Mom was complaining about having to talk about happiness because "it's so elusive."

MOM Not e-LU-sive. E-lusive.

LEENIE That's what I said.

MOM Oh, okay.

LEENIE Mom, why do you think happiness is elusive?

MOM **Well, because I think it comes in many different forms, and...**

*[waitress brings Leigh her coffee]*

LEIGH Oh. Thank you very much.

fighting darkness

[Pause]

LEIGH I don't feel that. I feel happiness is — I — it's very easy for me to know when I'm happy. And it's very easy for me to know when I'm not happy. For me happiness always is when I feel... when I feel content and when I feel that my loved ones are okay. When anything's off-kilter with that, it wrecks my happiness — particularly with my loved ones. That's very simple for me.

LEENIE But are there different — like, does happiness take different forms, like Mom said, or is *that* just happiness? That's what it is?

LEIGH Well for me, happiness is a sense of contentment and peace. Feeling good about waking up and enjoying my day —

MOM Yeah, but you can feel that spirit — you can be in a state of happiness over a period of time, which is what I think Leenie is

talking about. But there's also a... sporadic feeling of happiness — oh! like when you're best friend brings you a little present! There — I — there was a little feeling of happiness there. And especially because I liked it! *[laughs]* So —

LEIGH *[to Leenie]* But I think what you're talking about is —

MOM Sort of an enduring happiness.

LEENIE *[Pause]* Well not necessarily. I mean, I'm trying to define happiness, so... is the happiness that you feel when all is right in your life the same happiness that you feel when you get a gift? Is there any relationship between those two "types" of happiness?

MOM Yeah, because it's not the gift, it's... just the friendship that is there. And that gives you contentment. To know someone is thinking of you, or someone has put some effort into something

for *you*. I mean — it's a lovely thing. *[Pause]* Well... it may endure this whole day! This whole day — she may have made my day for me.

LEIGH *[laughs]*

MOM Or not! *[laughing]* We'll have to see what happens!

LEENIE Well, I was talking with Scott and I asked him what made him happy and he said he said he didn't know. And I said, "How can you not know what makes you happy?" And he said, "Well, I know *when* I am happy, but I don't necessarily know *what's* going to make me happy." And, well, what you said just now about always knowing when you're happy, it reminded me of that. Because I want to know — **have you always known what's going to make you happy, or is that something that you learned over time?**

LEIGH *[Pause]* I assume it's... I assume that it's something I've learned, but I always know that I'm happy when — when I feel loved, when I — when the people that I love are okay. And it's always — from a little girl on it was — I was happy if I thought my parents were happy, *[laughing]* you know, and when I felt safe. And when I worried... I have a personality that worries a lot, and I always have. So, I wasn't as — I could get into a state of unhappiness, from as long as I can remember, from feeling the security bubble break, or from something going wrong.

LEENIE Mmhmm.



LEIGH    And that's — I think... I mean, that's probably for everybody, but as we age I think — [*to Mom*] security is a big one, don't you think?

MOM      I think it is, but I — it may be gender specific. But I think safety is... and feeling safe is very much of a — it's definitely a female thing. And I'm not sure about a male. I think it could be different.

LEENIE    But I think there's a big difference between *actually* being safe — like, somebody making you safe — and you *feeling* safe, like, in yourself. It sounds like for you, happiness is largely dependant

on your environment, but... is there something inside of you that makes you happy? Do you have control over your happiness even when your environment isn't necessarily ideal?

LEIGH I work at that. I don't have — I realize that...

MOM But you know there are some people that are just... happy.

LEIGH Yeah, and there are —

MOM And there are some people who are just really unhappy, and —

LEIGH Right, no matter what —

MOM — no matter what you do. *[Laughs]*

LEIGH Like my son. No matter what.

MOM Like *my* son.

LEENIE What's the difference between those people? The people who are happy, what are they doing right?

MOM Well, I think the people who are *not* happy, and who just live a life that way — I think they really go out of their way. They make

sure that everything they perceive is perceived in a negative way. I mean — it's like they *can't* see it in a positive way. And —

LEENIE Why do they do that?

LEIGH I think — I mean, I don't know. Both of us being parents of a child who has that, I mean it's... is the saddest thing to see, and also infuriating. You know I could find — I'm happy because I'm in New York. I'm happy because I'm in a restaurant having a nice — seeing my friends and having breakfast. My son... I mean I have, in my life I've taken him to Paris, I — I've tried to expose him to everything I could think of. He is — I have never, ever witnessed him happy unless he was playing a computer game by himself in a room with nobody bothering him. And that's the truth.

MOM Well I've seen Alan happy.

LEIGH Yeah I've seen Alan happy, too —

MOM But it — it's sort of — he doesn't acknowledge it, and he doesn't build on it. And I think that's something about happiness. I think when you get caught in the wave of happiness... I think it does build, you know? I mean, I think you can even take it further. And I think that one has the — the — the drive and the

need to do that. You know, it's just sort of like a — a bubble — a  
bubble bath, it just sort of bubbles —

*[Mom's phone rings]*

MOM What is this?

LEENIE It's Tom. **You can silence it, if you want.**

MOM How do I do that?

*[Leenie silences phone]*

W W W

January 3, 2011

Hearing Charlie's thoughts on carrying things with you left me with conflicting thoughts. On the one hand, I find it comforting to know that I can end my participation in something without really abandoning it. I am afraid of being someone who *used* to do things. I used to write songs, I used to paint pictures, I used to do things that make me smile instead of things that make my shoulders hurt. For Charlie, nothing is ever finished, and nothing is ever lost. He simply brings an incomplete project with him, until he feels his focus shift back onto it. **But how can I just take everything with me, like that?**

Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses" comes to mind: "Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough gleams that untraveled world." Nothing, my mother says, is forever; but then, as per Charlie's philosophy, nothing is lost because we carry it with us into the next project, the next experience. Still, though, there are some things which I do not want to carry with me. A few weeks

ago I was in choir getting a little back massage (a normal activity to start off rehearsal), and the boy behind me leaned in and said, "Yeah, you have a lot knots in your back. Yup, right there. Feel that? You carry a lot of tension and stress in your shoulders." This is not news to me. I am often sitting at my desk typing or reading and suddenly become aware that my shoulders are much tighter than they need to be, that my upper back is aching. Next to nipping at the inside of my lips, tensing my shoulders might be number one sign of anxiety for me.

I had a conversation with a friend yesterday about guilt-based self-concepts versus shame-based self-concepts. She said that a child raised to have a guilt-based self-concept is able to differentiate between her actions and her self-worth. For example, if she accidentally breaks her mother favorite vase, she knows that what she did is not so good, but she is able to tell her mother and apologize because she knows that the accident does not make her a bad person. A child raised to have a shame-based concept will not be able to tell her mother because she feels that this accident is a sign of her worthlessness as a person. She will hide the broken pieces and never bring it up.



There are things about me, things I value, that would never lead me to behave like the child who hides the broken vase — honesty, dependability, taking responsibility for my actions. I have come to believe that the only way to be a free individual is take ownership of yourself, and this means owning up when you break the vase. But on the other hand, I come down so hard on myself sometimes. It's a deep-seated issue that I am only recently beginning to understand about myself. When I make a mistake, it is not just something I can shrug off. I'm not talking about answering a question incorrectly or messing up a solo or doing something embarrassing. I mean things like realizing that I may have been rude to someone, or let someone down, or seeing my intentions misconstrued and wondering what I did to misrepresent myself. Sometimes I become ashamed of myself, and it is hard to say, "Well, I tried my best to do the right thing" or "I didn't mean it, surely so-and-so can recognize that." These things make me feel like a terrible person, and I want to be a good person.

**I guess what I am starting to think is that there is something flawed about the way I think about myself,** something that makes me judge myself too severely when I "let myself down." These are the things I don't want to carry with me. Why do I often lack the confidence to face a difficult situation and know that I have acted with integrity? To know that sometimes other people's reactions have very little to do with me and more to do with something that is going on in their lives? I doubt myself so often, and yet I think I am treating myself very unfairly. I know I want to be good, and that should be enough to satisfy me, to give myself a break, to start evaluating my life in a way that is not an affront to the person I want to be.

On the other hand, I have learned that ritual comes first and belief will follow. Habits and routines are what give rise to our belief system, and we can alter those beliefs just by changing

what we do. Why, then, should I dismiss altering my habits in favor of altering my perceptions? Surely there is a habit I can drop or pick up that will end up being the key to changing these ideas I have about myself — the key to being happy. I read a book over the summer, *Born To Run* by Christopher McDougall, that was sort of a philosophical, historical, socio-anthropological exploration of running. There's a coach in the book — for some college track team somewhere — who said that he somehow couldn't shake the idea that running made his kids better people. That using the body for what it was meant to do brings a profound peace to the spirit. **God, I need that — I need to find what I was meant for, and just be grateful for that.**



Anna  
Lulu's, Pittsburgh  
12:44pm

LEENIE But — alright. The more that we learn about how we work — our minds and stuff — we learn that love is a series of chemicals that are released to facilitate biological imperatives. That happiness is, is — happiness can be achieved by understanding psychological trends. **So, is there something more to happiness than us doing something that makes our brain do something which makes us feel a certain way because of x chemical.** Or is it something more than that?

ANNA I think if that's really how it works — I'm not a biologist, so I have no idea how things work! — but if that's really how it works, if it's just a chemical reaction or whatever — if that's just how it works then that's all there is to it. But for us, you're not thinking to yourself, "Okay, Chemical, go get —" or "Okay, Brain, please turn on this chemical so I can feel this way," or "I'm looking at a person I really like, can you please turn on

my sex chemicals right now? Like, can you turn them on? That would be great." You don't say that to yourself. We're not aware of what's going on for us chemically. And if that's what's going on underneath, that's okay...

LEENIE But, I don't want to hear, "If that's what's happening then it's fine." I want to know what you think. Do you think that there is something more to happiness — and everything that we do in our lives — ?

ANNA Well that's what I mean by "if that's what's happening then it's fine." Because for me, the reason I feel like it's more than just that is... we can't see what's going on chemically, so we have nothing to rely except for what we're feeling. So, I feel like that's completely legitimate.

LEENIE Why is there so much struggle and sadness and *weight* in the things we're feeling —

*[waitress asks Anna a question]*

ANNA Yes it's okay, thank you!

*[waitress leaves]*

LEENIE —why do we have such problems with all of these things, and why are the stakes so *high*, when they can just be traced to biological imperatives? Why — do you understand what I'm saying? —

why are things so important to us in life when really it's all just our brains are doing something, and... then we die?

ANNA I mean, that's such a waste if we just walk around and use our chemicals and reproduce and then die and not really do anything else, you know?

LEENIE Why is it a waste?

ANNA Well, you feel really good when you're happy. So you're wasting time that you could potentially be feeling that way, and instead you'd just be having meaningless sex to make babies and walking around and being all "neutrally chemical." I don't know... I feel... we don't really know about — well, for me, I don't really understand that much about chemicals. I don't really understand. I mean, I — I'm a Christian so I guess I know what happens after you die. But... I know that's not true for all people. That's why I say "I guess," because I know what other people believe in and I don't feel like everyone has to believe in the same thing. So for me, all that I have is this life right now. And if you're going to think that this is just a chemical reaction, what's the use of even being here? What's the use of our life?

LEENIE But what *is* the use of our life? What do you think?

ANNA I don't know. *[laughs]* You can't — I have no idea, actually. I don't even know where I am going, because I have no idea. I've never really thought about it. People really can't see things that are very

much bigger than us. We don't know what role we're really playing in the galaxy. We can take guesses and say, "Oh, our planet does this and this, and this is why we're here." We don't really know that much about anything, really. So... I don't know. *This* is all we really know about. And I think you have to use what you know first, before *[muffled]*.

LEENIE Use what you know before what?

ANNA Before thinking about the big picture. About happiness and chemical reactions. I mean, we understand what's going on that makes you happy. There's serotonin in the brain, and those levels affect your happiness. But we don't understand — the brain has so many mysteries, we really — I think we really only have the tip of the iceberg. To say that it's all just a chemical reaction? I don't think we know that.

LEENIE Well, how important do you think it is to strive for happiness in this life? I mean you say this is all we've got, so it's such a waste to be like, "Chemicals! And then we die." So what — what is the importance of looking to be happy?



ANNA **I don't know, I think it's another thing — like, making the best out of a situation.** Like I said, I'm a Christian, so I think that after we're done with this we're going to go and be *really* happy later on, like in Heaven. We're going to be happy if we've lived a good life and lived true to ourselves and lived true to what God wants, which... I don't know, for me what God wants is all things that are common decency. Like not killing people, and respecting other people. I think they're all pretty simple things to follow. But if you don't strive for happiness, this part of your life is so bland. It's a like a party that you have to go to, but maybe you don't want to go that badly. Or at all, even. You can decide to go and have fun. I think that life is the same kind of thing. If you go and don't decide to have fun — that was meaningless, you just wasted an hour of your life because you sat in a corner

and were mopey. But if you didn't waste it, and you met awesome people and had a blast, you would be so much happier for the experience that you had. That's definitely not a waste of time.

LEENIE

I had this teacher once. She was the chaplain at our school, and she was idiotic. Not because she was chaplain, but because she, as a person, was idiotic. Long before she ever decided to become a chaplain. And she said this one thing during morning assembly that I'll never forget because it was just... it seemed so profoundly wrong to me. She thought Heaven was a place where there was no fear. And I'm thinking, "Alright, that — I'm liking this so far, that makes sense — a world without fear, or a place without fear." And then she's like, "And if there's no fear, it means I can do anything I want and not have to worry about it! I plan on going skydiving when I get to heaven!" It's like — what?? You are gonna wait until you *die* to do something thrilling and exciting and fun on the off-chance that what *you* believe to be "heaven" is actually what "heaven" is? I mean, far be it for me to belittle anybody's idea of the afterlife, but... but that seems insane to me! It seems insane that she's living a cautious life now so that in death she can go skydiving. I mean, I'm not saying that we need to do reckless things in order to live a full life, but... surely we need to live a *full life!* And part of that is being afraid and being unhappy sometimes, right? I don't know. It was weird.

ANNA I think that's definitely weird. I think that goes back to our — like, you have to be sad before you can be happy. You know how we were talking about that before? **I think also in order to really accomplish anything, you have to know that what you accomplish could be a little scary for you.** If you did something and it wasn't hard for you, what's the point? If people are handing things to you all your life, you're never going to know the value of what you're handed. For her — if she were able to go and skydive, she would be able to say, "I was really afraid of this my entire life." And that would be huge. I don't know... I think that when people overcome their fears, especially if she feels like she can only do it in Heaven or whatever, that's a really big thing.

LEENIE So is happiness a state, or is happiness a transition from one state to a better state? I mean... is it Buddhists...? I think it's Buddhists that believe in Nirvana.

ANNA Yeah.

LEENIE So there's... after various reincarnations where possibly you're bettering and bettering yourself from one life to the next, you achieve a final state of pure bliss. Do you think that — and you know, the original Bodhisattva is said to achieved that state while on earth — is that what happiness can be? You know, a state that you reach. Or is happiness the process?

ANNA *[Pause]* I think that happiness is really just an emotion. But I guess happiness can be a product of things that you were already experiencing.

LEENIE Yeah?

ANNA I don't know if you can say that happiness is a state. Because you can feel it both when you're transitioning and when you have just achieved something that you didn't have before. So I think it's both transitional and being in a state, which makes me think that it's related to both feelings that make you happy in those two parts. Happiness is just an emotion. It's wh —

LEENIE That sounds like a song. *[sings]* Happiness is just an emo — is that, like, is it a song? It really sounds like a song I heard once.

ANNA You can write it.

LEENIE Okay.

ANNA You should make it. *[laughs]*

LEENIE I know.

ANNA You should sing it right now, for the recorder. Sing it. Happiness song —

LEENIE *[singing]* Happiness is just an emotion... ! Like that. Did you like it?

ANNA Mmhmm.

*[silence]*

LEENIE Sorry, I interrupted you.

ANNA *[nods]*

LEENIE You're nod — *[to recorder]* She's nodding, to say, Yes, I did interrupt her.

ANNA I liked the song.

LEENIE *[laughing]* Thanks. Well... Scott always gets mad at me — well, he doesn't always get made at me. What I'm trying to say is...

ANNA *[laughs]*

LEENIE I get... really, really excited about things that haven't happened yet, and that makes him feel anxious because he's afraid that it's not going to — that me being really excited about it is a sign that I'm just building it up in my head and that it's not going to

be as good as I think. And then I'll crash afterwards and not be as happy. And sometimes that *does* happen. **Sometimes I'm just super excited and really happy about things. And then sometimes I'm down in the dumps.** And Scott is much more even-keeled than I am. His happy moments are not as happy as mine and his sad moments are not as sad as mine. And I'm wondering if, through all of this up-and-down-and-up-and-down [*makes big up-and-down hand gesture*] is my happiness level going to average out to higher than his, which is like this [*makes little up-and-down hand gesture*]:

ANNA I don't know, because... I mean did you ever think that he does feel things intensely but that his intensity doesn't show as much as yours does?

LEENIE Maybe. That's a possibility. I tend to be very open with my... feelings. [*laughs*]. After I heard about this thing, you know, that I just told you about [*referring to a prior discussion, before recording*]...

ANNA Yeah.

LEENIE I, uh... I asked Scott if it was illegal to threaten somebody's life. And he was like, "... Yup. That is illegal." [*laughs*] It's too bad, right?

ANNA [*laughing*] Oh...Leenie... What did — did you interview Scott about happiness?

LEENIE I didn't. I don't think I will, probably. But I have talked with him about it. About this project. [*Pause*] I've eaten way more pan-fried noodles than you.

ANNA I'm okay with that. They were delicious.

LEENIE I really like those bean-sprouts.

ANNA I really like the noodles.

LEENIE The noodles are really good. *[Pause]* Well do you have any final thoughts?

ANNA I guess since I'm a really indecisive person, and sine a lot of what I say might have been conflicting, I might just say that I don't — I know that I don't understand happiness.

LEENIE Yeah.

ANNA So... and I... It goes back to the skydiving thing. If you're gonna spend a lot of time thinking about it instead of experiencing it, that's not good either. She's thinking a lot about her fear. Meanwhile she could be out trying to conquer her fear.

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LEENIE And does that apply to happiness, too? Instead of spending all this time on this project —

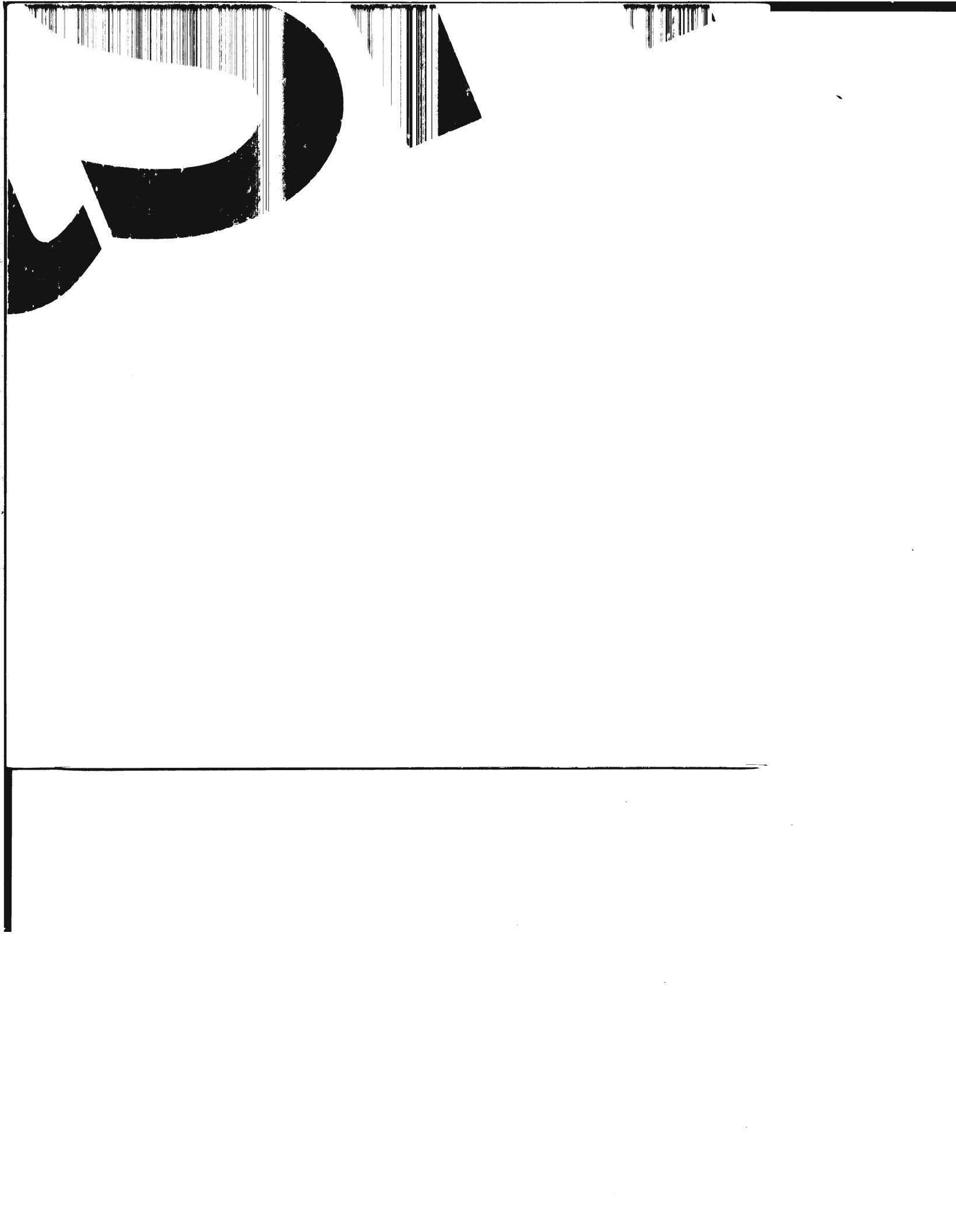
ANNA *[laughs]*

LEENIE — trying to figure out happiness, **should I just go out and do it? Just go out and be happy?**

ANNA Well... after you do this project, because you'll be so excited to have reached a new state of college honors! Or university honors.

LEENIE *[laughs]* Yeah. *[Pause]* So do I push stop — ?





Charlie  
Holy Frijoles, Baltimore  
3:22pm

LEENIE    Alright, so. We're here to talk about happiness...I guess my goal in having these conversations with people is to find out... what is happiness? How to you find happiness? Is happiness important? You know... those kinds of things. So, do you have anything to say?

CHARLIE   About... what happiness is or how to find it?

LEENIE    Yeah, anything like that.

CHARLIE   Um... I don't know. I feel like happiness might be sort of a... **I don't want to say a state of mind, but maybe a condition of the heart.** Because I feel like when people say that happiness is a state of mind, it's sort of a "think positive" philosophy, or that sort of thing. Like, I don't necessarily think that is gonna make you happy in the long run. I mean sure, it's a good practice. You know, bad things happen... think on the "bright side" or whatev-

er. But that's not gonna change the way you actually feel inside. But on the same note I feel like if you sort of condition yourself to be joyful, or at least content with things, then after a while it doesn't necessarily become a conscious function, but just sort of something that just is. So I think that's how happy people function, you know, they —

LEENIE — because they condition themselves to be happy? How do they do that, what does that mean?

CHARLIE Well, hearts and minds are part of the body just like anything else. I mean, sure, the heart that I'm talking about isn't necessarily a physical thing. But, like any part of the body, if you want something to be strong and to be resilient and to be able to last through things, then you have to condition a certain way. If you want your arms to be strong then you have to work out, or whatever. So, you know, if you want your brain to be strong or your mind to be strong, you have to subject it to things that make it think critically or deal with things that are... things that have to do with reason or logic. Or if you're doing creative stuff, things that force it to be creative. So, you know, people who are musicians —

*[waiter brings taco salad, burrito, and limeade to the table]*

CHARLIE Thank you.

LEENIE Thank you!

CHARLIE People who are musicians train their voice, so... you know, singing high notes come a little bit easier for them. So at the same time, people who don't condition their hearts, like say... somebody who hasn't dated a lot of people. If they date one person and it's a really long relationship or whatever, and then they break up with that person, since they haven't experience breakups a lot, or heartbreak a lot, then they're gonna take it a lot worse than somebody who dates people all the time. So, in the same way, their hearts would have to be conditioned. By the same token, people who deal with a whole lotta hurt can condition themselves to deal with a whole lot of suffering and get over it faster. It helps them to generally feel better about themselves. About life.

LEENIE So do you mean that... We're talking in metaphors now, right? Is that what's happening? Or do you mean... or is it more literal than that?

CHARLIE I think — I think it's sort of more literal than that. It's training yourself to not dwell in the doldrums of sadness, you know? To continually pick yourself up, until that becomes natural to you.

LEENIE So, when you are working out your muscles — like when you're building muscle to become stronger —

CHARLIE Mhmm.

LEENIE — from what I understand (I'm not a nutritionist, and I don't really work out that much) but... when you lift weights you're damaging your muscles, and then when they rebuild, they rebuild more and stronger. And that's what you're doing. So are you saying that in order to be happy, in order to have "stronger" happiness and a "stronger" heart — in the certain spiritual heart sense —

CHARLIE Right.

LEENIE — that you need to go through a lot of not being happy?

CHARLIE Not necessarily. It just means you have to... I guess, just challenge yourself to be stronger. I mean, dealing with your workout metaphor, you tear muscles, but as soon as you tear the muscles — if you're really trying to build muscles — you take some sort of supplement or, you know, eat a lot. And you want to do it relatively quickly after your workout. Like, if you're gonna have a protein shake or whatever, then you're gonna want some high quality protein within two hours of your workout. So that's, you know... every — all the little tears in your muscles will be filled up with something. It'll be filled up with whatever protein you eat, with a little bit of water. And then, over time, it'll change and turn into actual muscle. It'll metabolize and grow into a piece of muscle. So it's not like your actually damaging your muscle. You're just stressing it out a little. Working it out.

LEENIE Mhmm.

CHARLIE It's not necessarily that you're, you know, walking through hospitals in the units where all the people are dying, like "Ohhh

this is so sad — I — uh — this is so awful, I need to overcome all of this to be a happy person — ”

LEENIE *[laughs]*

CHARLIE It's not like that, you know? It's just sort of like... I mean, every — well, I'll put it this way: whereas some people will go through life and everything that happens to them will just be like tiny little daggers stabbing them, and they'll just let that bog them down. I feel like happy people say, "Well, this is just another five pound weight that I gotta lift up. So I'm gonna lift *that* up, gonna pass that barrier — oh, here's another five pound weight, gonna lift *that* up, gonna pass that." And at the end of the day, you know, they might be exhausted and trying to catch their breath. But the next day, when they encounter the same obstacles, they are a little bit easier.

LEENIE So it's not really... it seems like it's not really that you have to practice going through things. It's that you have to practice having the right attitude. Is that what you're saying? Because you said that every time something sad happens to you, **it's like you're working out your heart, or you're working out your capacity for happiness.** But some people will come out of that not being

happy; they'll come out of that being pulled under. And other people will come out that will a better attitude and feeling better about themselves. So what is the difference between those two people? Because they could have gone through the exact same experience.

CHARLIE You're saying, what's the difference between the people who are bogged down and the people who aren't?

LEENIE Yeah. The people who are able to achieve happiness, what is it that they've done differently?

CHARLIE Well I guess in that sense, it does go back to the whole "looking on the bright side of things." But I don't necessarily like to think of it like that, because that's a conscious decision, and I feel like when you have a more upbeat attitude it's deeper than just "deciding" to be happy.

LEENIE Can you explain that a little more?

CHARLIE I can try to. I mean, it's just like... it'll be like... we'll go back to working out, because for whatever reason I feel like that —

LEENIE Well, wait —

CHARLIE No — but, hear me out, here.

LEENIE Okay, okay.



CHARLIE Okay. So. There's cake in the fridge.

LEENIE Yes. *[laughs]* Always.

CHARLIE *[laughs]* There's *always* cake in the fridge. And it's some sort of red velvet with the cream cheese icing, just — delicious. Delicious. Completely bad for you. There might be a layer of chocolate in there somewhere. Just, all over your cake. The people who say, "Well, I'm going to consciously look on the bright side" they look at the cake and say, "No, I'm not gonna eat that cake because I'm on a diet" or something. And then they'll leave. And then they'll come back and say, "No, no. I'm not gonna eat the cake." And every time they open the fridge they have to consciously tell themselves, "No, I'm not gonna eat the cake. And then I will be healthy." So those are people who are like, "Hey, look on the bright side, I'm gonna consciously choose to be happy in this situation." And, after a while, those same people are gonna be the ones who eventually succumb to the temptation for the cake. So, the people who are constantly bogged down by the sadness — because sadness, you know, or some sort of suffering, or some sort of misfortune happens to everyone — they're gonna be the people who don't have the willpower to continually say "no" to it. But the people who have changed their heart in order to live a happy life — or just a content life, really, 'cause I feel like contentedness... well, I'll deal with that later. So, just a content life. Those people open the refrigerator and see the cake and say, "That's not anything close to what I'm trying to work towards."

Maybe I can have that a little at some point, but for right now that cake is not my reward.

LEENIE **So, what you're talking about really is a complete shift in your perception of what's around you.**

CHARLIE Mhmm.

LEENIE The person who says "No" is inherently interacting with their world in a negative way, and the person who simply says "That's not relevant to what I want" is interacting with their world in a positive way.

CHARLIE Right.

LEENIE You can get happiness by, instead of denying things, only bringing in things that are aligned with your goals.

CHARLIE Yeah, exactly.



Anna  
Lulu's, Pittsburgh  
12:14pm

LEENIE Okay, so... I don't really know what to say, or what to ask. Do you have anything to say right off the bat?

ANNA Not really, because there's so many different types of happiness, you know? I feel like you can be happy in a lot of different situations. Things can make you happy, people can make you happy...

LEENIE Do you think that there are infinite types of happiness or do you think you could put them into a finite group of categories?

ANNA I think maybe each person could put them in categories, but I feel like there are an infinite amount of categories for everyone. Because I don't think... **The things that make me happy are certainly different from the things that make you happy**, so I don't

think that I would have things to put in every category that you would have things to put in.

LEENIE Well, what are your categories? What do you think?

ANNA Puppies. Small children.

LEENIE *[laughs]*

ANNA Hearts. Um, Christmas music — oh! I love Christmas music! That made me so happy when we sang in that concert.

LEENIE All those all different categories, though? They seem to all be things in one category... the category of "superficial happiness."

ANNA Okay, so superficial happiness: puppies, kittens, babies, and Christmas music. And then there's more... I get of happiness out of talking to people.

LEENIE Yeah?

ANNA So I'd put "people" in another category. I really like learning about them. So I think that's really exciting, having conversations.

LEENIE Why does that make you happy?

ANNA It makes me feel really that they felt comfortable sharing with me. I don't know. I like when people feel like they can share.

LEENIE Having people's trust.

ANNA Yeah, exactly.

LEENIE Do you think that's important, in life? Why?

ANNA I guess... I think more than just trust makes you happy. I think not trusting someone makes you not happy. Because, when you think of all the problems that come from not trusting someone — you get suspicious when they're not there, you get really nervous when they don't always pay attention to you. But if you trust them, you know that they're doing what's right even though you may not know exactly where they are or what they're doing at that exact moment.

LEENIE So, does that have to do with you, or with them? Because I wonder if, when you... can "trust" be a sort of an arbitrary decision that you're making?

ANNA I don't think so. I don't think that's an arbitrary decision because it's based on past experiences with that person. And past experiences with myself, too. I don't know. It's a mix, I think. A "me" problem and a "them" problem.

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LEENIE What do you do if you don't have that point of reference with somebody? How do you make your decisions then?

ANNA Ah. I have no idea.

LEENIE I guess what I'm getting at is... **I'm wondering more and more if "happiness" itself is kind of... is an arbitrary decision, in some ways. You know?**

ANNA Yeah, well, I watched this really interesting TedTalk video. The speaker did this whole talk on why happiness is based on being



forced into a situation, and that a lot of times people are happier when they can't make a decision or when their decision has already been made. There was a study, I think it was at Harvard — It was in a photography class, and people were allowed to take pictures of anything they wanted — ten pictures, go ahead, you can pick anything you want. The researcher took all of the ten pictures, developed them, and then he was like, "Alright, now you can choose two to hand in for your project. But I'm only going to keep one of them, so if you want to keep the other one you are welcome to keep it." So, each participant really liked those two particular pictures, but they chose one and handed it in to him. And to half the group he said, "I'll be around for three more days, so if you change your mind you can just come in, change

your picture, and that'd be fine." And then to the second group he said, "You know, I'm gonna leave tomorrow, so I need the pictures today, you can't change your mind. But, you liked both pictures, so it's gonna be great!" So, the group of participants who were able to change — first off, they were more likely to be unhappy with their picture choice in the beginning, and also more unlikely to be happy after the three days were over.

LEENIE More unlikely to be?

ANNA They were more likely to be unhappy.

LEENIE Oh, okay.

ANNA And the people who had to stick with their picture choice were extremely likely to be happy as soon as they made their decision, and even more happy after... in the long run. They really liked having that picture. And then, when polled, people said they would have liked to have the opportunity to change their picture — this is people who were in the class. They would have liked to have had the opportunity to change their picture, because they thought that would make them happier. But it's not true. Isn't that interesting?

LEENIE Yeah. So, is happiness the absence of decisions? Not having to make any decisions?

ANNA I think... well, they talked a lot about how it was a chemical process in the brain, something going back to cavemen. I don't know. But it was something about how chemically, when you make a decision and you have to stick with it, your brain just decides to make you feel better about the decision you can't change.

LEENIE Yeah, like — wait I learned about this is psychology class...  
cognitive dissonance!

ANNA Yeah, yeah. There's this other study that I really like. This  
person gave —

*[waitress brings dumplings to the table]*

LEENIE Thank you!

ANNA Thanks.

*[waitress leaves]*

LEENIE Oh my gosh. These are —

ANNA These look really good. I think dumplings are happiness.

LEENIE Dumplings — ! *[laughs]* These dumplings are happiness, because  
they are so tasty.

ANNA But what I was going to say was they did this study — a differ-  
ent study, but it was the same guy conducting it — where the  
researcher had six paintings, and he asked people to rank them  
one through six. This was with people in a psych ward who had  
lost their memory, so they didn't have the ability to remember  
anything thirty minutes after they had done something. Any  
decision they make doesn't matter to them a half hour later. They  
forget people... they forget everything. So the researcher made  
them rank paintings one through six and then he said, "Alright,  
we have prints of both three and four. We don't have one or two  
or five or six, but we have three and four. If you want one of those

you can have it." And so the participants, they were like, "Yeah, I'll take number three, I mean, it's a really pretty picture." So, they got number three, and then —

LEENIE Wait, when you say they didn't have two, five, or six, do you mean — according to what the participant ranked? Like they would say, "I don't have your first choice"?

ANNA Yeah, so then those people would choose number three — oh, thank you!

*[waitress sets down chopsticks and leaves]*

LEENIE Thank you!

ANNA And then they...sorry hold on one second. Oh, sorry! *[laughs]*

LEENIE *[laughing]* You — you took my dumpling!

ANNA Yeah, so they picked number three, and then the researcher left the room and waited a half hour until they wouldn't remember him, and then he'd present them with the same paintings and ask them to rank them again. But they didn't remember anything. But this

time, when they ranked the paintings, they'd rank their number three, the one they'd picked, as number two — they'd still have the same first choice — but they'd move number three up to number two, number two down to number three, and then number four down to number five and number five up to four. So it solidified their decision they had already made. And they didn't remember that they owned any of the prints, so it wasn't like they remembered, "Oh, I picked number three, so it has to be better than number two. Isn't that weird?"

LEENIE Oh, yeah. That's really interesting.

ANNA I don't know. **So I think happiness, especially for me because I'm really bad at decisions, is when I'm stuck with something.**

LEENIE When you... don't have to decide?

ANNA *[sbrugs]*

LEENIE But... I feel like there's so much importance placed on being an individual and being responsible for decisions. Making your own decisions can define who you are as a person. So, I mean, surely there's some kind of secret to happiness in the decisions that you make, right?

*[waitress brings pan-fried noodles and sets down in the middle of table]*

ANNA Thank you.

*[waitress leaves]*

ANNA Oh this looks so good.

LEENIE Do you think there is a way to ensure happiness by always making the right decision?

ANNA I think if you really understood what you wanted, then yes. But I feel like... not that people do change a lot, but people do change their minds, their goals, they change their opinions. And if you don't account for that in your decisions — that can make you unhappy. I don't know.

LEENIE Account for the fact that your wants have changed?

ANNA Yeah.

LEENIE How are you supposed to know what you want at any given time, though?

ANNA I have no idea. I don't know what I want a lot of the time, and I feel like that might be why I'm bad at making decisions, so... I don't know.

LEENIE Well, do you think if you don't know what you want, you can still make the wrong decision?

ANNA ... Yeah.

LEENIE But if you don't know what you want... I mean — weren't we just talking about how once the decision is made, people are happy with that decision because they no longer have a choice?

ANNA Yeah.

LEENIE So if you don't know what you want, you just sort of go through life making arbitrary decisions about things. And once those decisions are made you have no choices anymore, so where does the unhappiness come from?

ANNA I mean, not knowing what you want and having something you want are two different things. I think you can want something but not really know how to verbalize it or make decisions that'll get you there —

LEENIE Mmhmm.

ANNA — so if you made a decision that goes against what you truly want in life, that can make you really upset. You — you could not

even know you want it, but... I don't know. **You see people all the time who never know what they want but still they make decisions** that make them upset, you know. I feel like people make bad decisions when they're really upset.

LEENIE How are you supposed to find out what you want? That's... the "problem."

*[silence]*

ANNA I guess... a lot of times it's trial and error with what you decide. And then if you don't like the thing that you decided, you know that wasn't what you wanted originally. I don't know. I think it's a lot of trial and error.



F O C

Anna  
Lulu's, Pittsburgh  
12:29pm

LEENIE **So do you have to experience a lot of things in order to know what makes you happy?**

ANNA I don't know. I've always been kind of confused about that. People always say you need to be sad to know what happiness is, that you need to feel pain to know what — that you always need to feel the opposite to know what... the other one is. What the good part is.

LEENIE Yeah.

ANNA But I don't know. Because — yes it would make it more meaningful when you got there, but I don't think that you wouldn't know that

you were happy if you never were sad about something. I don't know... maybe you wouldn't appreciate it as much.

LEENIE Maybe. But, it seems like the idea of not being able to have happiness without sadness, or not being able to have joy without pain, is a really old concept that shows up in a lot of cultures.

ANNA Yeah.

LEENIE Do you think that gives it more credence?

*[silence]*

ANNA I don't know. I mean, some things have made me really sad. And it's not that they don't affect my current happiness, but I don't think having experienced them necessarily makes me happier when I experience happiness...

LEENIE What sad things are you talking about?

ANNA Like... when I lost Lilly last year. She was one of my best friends — like, she was probably my best friend in Art. She was the only one who was really... I don't know, she was really down to earth, and she was just really sweet. And when she passed away last year it was really hard. And I know you're supposed to be happy when people make speeches at funerals, when everything's done. When you find little things that remind you

of her... but I don't know. I still feel sad about it when I think about her. I don't know. And that's a *really* sad thing. Death is really sad for the people who are left behind. I think it's happy for some people — like, it must have been happy for her, because she was in a lot of pain, but... it was really sad. And I still feel sad about it, sometimes.

LEENIE Why did you think that you had to feel happy?

ANNA I don't think I have to feel — like, because her whole thing was — one of the quotes that people say about her a lot — and she wrote this in a note to us, when she wanted us to know that she was okay, when she went into hospice care — her biggest thing was that you can always choose to be happy. And you can see that all throughout her life. Even when she — like, she was a full time student while she was in chemotherapy, and that's something a lot of people could never do. She had lymphoma and she was still taking all of the classes that I was taking. And that — I don't know, she just always chose to make herself... instead of saying, "Oh, poor me. I have to go back to the hospital and get chemo and stay in the hospital when I really want to be out with my friends"... She never did that. She always just was like, "No, I *am* going to be at school. No, I'm going to go do what I want." You know? And I think she was always a happy person. She was always upbeat when I saw her. And... I don't know, I guess I felt like since that was something she really wanted for herself, that she — she definitely wants that for her friends. I

know she'd never want anyone to feel sad about her, and I guess that's why I feel like I have to be happy when I think of her. But then, I think... I think she would understand it's really natural. To be sad.

LEENIE Because it's just a normal feeling that you're supposed to have.

ANNA Yeah.

LEENIE So why is it that sadness is a normal feeling you're supposed to have, where happiness is a choice that you have to make? I mean, shouldn't happiness be the normal state of things?

ANNA I think it's a little bit of both because there's ways you can choose to be happy and ways you can choose to be sad. It's the glass is half full, glass is half empty thing. So there's some times when sadness just stumbles upon you and you have to be sad for a little while, and **sometimes happiness kind of does the same thing. You know? You can find it without having to do anything.** And other times... sometimes you make yourself sad and sometimes you have to make yourself happy. But I don't think it's only that

you have to choose to be happy, because I know people that are like — people that are choosing to be sad.

LEENIE Why do you think they do that?

*[silence]*

ANNA Sometimes I think maybe it was the way they were brought up. Maybe their mom never told them to do — to make a bad thing good, or... I don't really know.

LEENIE Is that what your mom told you? Tell me about your mom!

ANNA I love my mom! She was always really happy. I think the reason I always think about decisions in relation to happiness is because she was always about — like, if you stay really true to yourself you'll always make the right choice. As long as you make something that's right for you. She's very into listening to your heart and choosing what's good for you. She was always very okay with... if you needed to be sad — and I think this is why I cry more than most people — if you need to be sad then it's what you need to do. And there's a time for that. So if you needed to cry something out, you should just cry. You shouldn't feel like you have to hold it inside. So whenever I get sad I cry really easily, and that's probably one of the reasons why. But she always let me just

express what I needed to express. And being able to express when I felt sad made me also able to express when I'm happy.

LEENIE **So what is — what does it mean to “be true to yourself”?** I think people say that a lot — not to criticize your mom, because it seems like good advice — but it's lost its meaning in a lot of ways, and I don't... it's just one of those “feel good” things at this point. But what — how are you “true” to yourself? What does that even mean?

ANNA Mmm... I think in a way it is one of those “feel good” things, and that's not necessarily a bad thing at all. If it makes you feel good to think that you are making decisions that are good for you, I think that's not bad. But... I think it's making choices that — when you think about them, you don't feel upset. But, I feel a lot in my body when I choose things or — maybe it's because I'm an anxious person a lot of the time, I'm really aware of what my body does in relation to what I choose or what I say or what I do. And... when it feels really good, that's when I know I've made something that's good for myself.

LEENIE What is it — can you talk more about that? What does your body do when you make decisions?



ANNA Well when I feel like I have to choose something bad, or when I feel like I've made the wrong choice, I feel like I have a really — I know this is going to sound cliché — but it feels like I have a heavy heart. And I feel really heavy. And it just — I feel a lot in my stomach, too, like my stomach will get — not *upset*, but it'll just, kind of, turny and upset at me...

LEENIE Yeah.

ANNA And then... I don't know. It just makes me feel... I'll cry, probably, because I cry all the time — not *all* the time. But I do cry.

LEENIE [*laughs*]

ANNA But I *feel* like I cry all the time! Because no one cries anymore, and I don't know — like a lot of people were taught not to cry. I don't know. I don't like that. I think it's important to feel like you can let it out.

LEENIE Yeah. [*Pause*] These pan-fried noodles are so tasty. What is it about good food that just, like... makes me feel amazing? Everything. Cooking and eating — alright, I'm eating more of this right now. I'm just taking a little bit, because I don't want to eat it all while you're not even done with that. You have to hurry up. You have to pick up the pace.

ANNA [*mouth full*] Hmm!

LEENIE I just don't want to eat it all before you finish. [*Pause*] Something you said, a couple minutes ago, I thought was really interesting

and I want you to talk more about it. About being able to express your happiness easily.

ANNA Um—

LEENIE Serve yourself some more pan-fried noodles and then tell me more.

ANNA Okay.

LEENIE Because they're tasty.

ANNA Was that when I said I could cry more easily than most people?

LEENIE You were saying that being able to express your sadness easily also made it made it easy for you to express your happiness. And I was just wondering... how do you express happiness?

ANNA I think it depends on the situation. It depends on what made you happy. If it's something that you achieved, then I feel like you could feel a lot of pride. And I feel... I guess that goes back

to what my body does when I make good decisions. It feels lighter. It just — I smile a lot when I'm really happy.

LEENIE Because you know how — ? Okay, so, since you've taken this psychology class you've probably heard about this — we know that rituals come before beliefs, and your rituals shape your beliefs. If we're buying into the idea that happiness is a decision, then how can you decide to *feel* a certain way? Don't you have to decide to *do* something? And deciding to *express* happiness — does that make you, then, *feel* happy? We tell kids, "If you keep making those faces your face will stay that way." But isn't that sort of saying, "If you keep looking unhappy, then you will become unhappy"?

ANNA I don't know. Maybe this is more of a conversation about when you were a little kid and you lost a baseball game and your mom said, "You have to smile and shake hands, and tell the other kids they did a good job." You know — put on a happy face. And I think when you were told to do that, at first you were crying and, like, [*makes unhappy, crying face*] "Ahh...good job! I thought you were a really good team...!" But then the more you did it

I don't know. My two biggest things are honesty and trust, I think. **I'm really into honesty and when people are really reliable because I strive for that, too.** And I think, if that's something they're doing over a long period of time, then they're not being truthful with themselves either. It's not just them putting on a face, it's them not being true to what they're feeling. And that's an even deeper problem. They're actually having some sort of struggle. And they need to be aware of that, if that's the problem. They need to look at what's making them put on that face. If it's something like — if every time you hang out with a certain friend you feel like you have to smile, even though you're really thinking, "I wish I was sleeping instead of hanging out with these people," then you have to look at why you constantly feel unhappy with them and yet still feel like you should be with them. You know?

lec

Mom & Leigh  
Rare Bar & Grill, New York  
10:02am

LEENIE Is there something... I mean, **for people who don't have to learn what makes them happy, or don't have to struggle to find happiness... is that — is that really happiness?** It seems to me like *that* happiness would take on a very different quality than the people have struggled and then achieved happiness.

LEIGH I don't know. I mean, that would be an interesting thing. I feel — I mean, from my perspective I think... I think there's a tremendous — like, you see people interviewed that were great people who say, "I feel so happy for my life," or "honored for my life," and I think that there's — if you have a high awareness level and you are lucky, I think you really can see it and appreciate it. And those are the people that when they make successful they know in turn to be generous and... philan... phil — philanthropic or whatever.

MOM Philanthropic.

LEENIE *[laughs]*

LEIGH But I also think there are people that are so oblivious to...  
*[pause]* This is all inner stuff about your soul, or who you are,  
how evolved you are. I really think there are various degrees of  
evolution in the spirit. **You know, some people are so shallow.**  
**And they will never get it.** *[Laughs]*

MOM And yet those people would — could say that they are happy.  
And then they...

LEIGH They — maybe. I mean, I would love to hear what Sam would  
say if he was interviewed. Because I sometimes say — I guess  
because *I* have been somebody that didn't have things go well



for me, and yet I always try to find a way that I can feel my little happiness, because I *want* to feel that. I'm *trying*. My son doesn't *try*! He *doesn't try*. He doesn't care.

LEENIE So, is it... Happiness is important.

LEIGH That's what we all want.

LEENIE But why? Why do we want that? I mean, we look at people who don't try to be happy and ask, "Why aren't they trying to be happy?" but I'm kind of wondering, those of us who *are* trying to find happiness, why do we do that? Why do we fee like that is important? What is motivating us?

LEIGH It makes you feel good!

LEENIE So is it just about feeling good? Or is there something... deeper there?

MOM No, I mean — feeling good, that's part of it, but I think there's a completeness that...

LEIGH Yeah, that's it. I mean, you ever read Deepak Chopra?

LEENIE No.

LEIGH Well, he's one of these New Age "doctors." And he has several philosophical books out, and it's pretty interesting. His whole thing is that he thinks the root of all human drive is for happi-

ness. I mean that's what everyone is striving for. And, you know, whatever route you try to take to find it — I have that book, so I'll let you read it. But it's, it's — I do believe that — I mean for Sam, maybe happiness is sitting in a room, playing computer games, with nobody bothering him and him not having to do anything.

LEENIE And yet, we know that most of what we do, we've evolved to do because it ensures our survival. And that — I mean, all kinds of things could fall under that category: falling in love, having friendship... that these are things that allow us to live long enough to pass on our genes, right. So where does happiness fall there? What is it about happiness that —

MOM It's the underpinning of everything.

LEENIE In what way is it the underpinning of everything?

MOM I don't think you can move outside of yourself if you are not happy. Because happiness incorporates feeling safe, and you have to feel comfort, safety, or... or happiness in order to be able to move outside yourself.

LEIGH And it — sorry to interrupt you —

MOM No, it's okay.

LEIGH I think that that — the idea of moving outside of yourself could be taken en masse, like a — a force of goodness that... that keeps the human spirit going —

MOM And it *is* a force. And you know — I've always had this sort of... I remember having a conversation with Alan about... why live? Why do it? And I said, "Well... it's because we are the conduit of the energy of the universe."

LEIGH Right. I like to believe that.

MOM Oh, I *do* believe it! Now, you can sit there and you can do nothing. You can put yourself in a box [*laughs*] just sit there. Your whole life. Or you can get out and you can move. Or you can run. Or you can fly! I mean, the more you do, whether it's in thought or physical action, the more of the universe's energy passes through you. And it's — that's happiness. That's why you keep doing it.

LEENIE The word "enthusiasm" translates into "the God within" or something like that. Which I think speaks to what you're talking about. That happiness is fulfilling your role as a conduit for this... energy.

MOM That's right! That's what — you know, that's the mystery. I think that's what the mystery is. I think that's why we're here. It's creative.

LEENIE Do you guys have anything else you want to say to wrap this up, or should we just leave it there? **With leaving your cardboard box. And taking a shower.**

MOM *[laughing]* We are so profound!

LEENIE Is that good? Is there anything you want to add?

MOM No.

LEIGH I'm happy. And I don't need to go on.

car

Charlie  
Holy Frijoles, Baltimore  
3:31 pm

LEENIE So does that mean that happiness is related to having goals and knowing what they are?

CHARLIE I think so, definitely.

LEENIE How did you come to that decision or that idea?

CHARLIE Uh... I don't really know? I know that personally, when I encounter certain unhappiness — or, I'll call it discontentment, because I feel like happiness could be contentment. Discontentment comes from some form of suffering — like fear, or wanting. Or pain. So, at some point in time, everybody wants stuff. But after time and time again of trying to get what you want, only sometimes will you get it. Other times you won't get it. **So you'll say, "Well, I'm not very content." Then you have to redefine, "Well, what exactly is it that I want?"** So when you redefine what it is that

you want and whatever goal you have, then all that other stuff that used to be hurtful to you or didn't meet up to your standard of contentment — then that becomes irrelevant, you know? It becomes erroneous because it's not even aligned with your goals anymore.

LEENIE I never thought about it in that way before. So when you ask yourself what you want, is the goal to be happy? Or does happiness come by sticking with the goals?

CHARLIE I think happiness just comes by sticking with the goals. I suppose in determining what you want, you're really determining what you *need*. What's healthy for you, and what's good for you.

LEENIE Uh huh.

CHARLIE And sure, there might be an ultimate goal of where you wanna go or where you wanna be or what you wanna do in order to



be completely content and satisfied. But at the same time you sort of have to realize — you know, “Side note: once I get there, there are still gonna be problems.” So, you have a main goal, and you have all these little sub-goals, too. And all that stuff just keeps you busy until you can get to the main goal. And once you get to the main goal, well... well, I don't necessarily know what happens then. Maybe you have come up with another big, main goal. So, it's not necessarily like wanting, but more of... *[Pause]* just achieving. Like looking for those projects that will keep you busy, keep your mind off of all this other stuff that doesn't mean anything. Find what you like, and just stick with that. I'm not really making too much sense right now, am I? I'll put it this way: My mom is... a busy bee. She constantly needs to have about seventeen different projects going on. And I have streak of her in me, too, because I always have a ton of different projects going on, as you can tell by my thousands of blogs that I start and then only periodically update. I think my mom does it so that she doesn't get bored because when she gets bored

then she starts thinking about all this other stuff that might get her down. So she scrapbooks and she's a principle at the school, and... And even though she's the principle of the school she still has her hands in everything that goes on in the school. Even though she should have thousands of little minions to do her dirty work for her.

LEENIE *[laughs]*

CHARLIE So that's what makes her happy. Because she has things to do, things to keep her occupied. Because nobody wants to be doing nothing. And for me, that's what keeps me content. Having things to do, having things to work towards.

LEENIE So what are your goals?

CHARLIE Well... right now I have a whole bunch of goals in my professional life. I have certain places I'd like to go in the police department. My immediate goal is to get into the Gang Unit by January. I've already gotten the ball rolling on that, and I've talked to the sergeant in charge of the gang unit. And, so... hopefully I'll be going there. And then in March there's the SWAT test, so... you know. I've been working out for the SWAT test since last February, so... that's a big goal. And outside of the

police department I have a whole bunch of other projects going on. Some writing stuff, a little bit of music stuff that I'm gonna start next year. And some design stuff, too.

LEENIE Cool!

CHARLIE Yeah, I wanna — I wanna start a t-shirt company. But at the same time my friend is starting a design company and he has everything lined up, so he's gonna be trying me out. That's, a big, *big* goal for me, since it's sort of my ticket out of the police department... and into a life of... *[laughs]* luxury and wearing awesome t-shirts and shoes for the rest of my life. And going to parties until I'm thirty, when it — it just becomes weird.

LEENIE *[laughs]*

CHARLIE So, those are the things that keep me busy. And of course I have other personal goals like getting married and starting a family. Which kind of stresses me out sometimes. By the way, my brother got engaged two days ago.

LEENIE Yay! I love engagements.

CHARLIE Woo!

LEENIE    Okay, so. You said — well, I said and you confirmed — that the goal is not to *be happy*, that it's *sticking* to your goals that makes you happy. But —

CHARLIE    It's discipline.

LEENIE    — you could set arbitrary goals and stick to them. Are you saying that you could set any arbitrary goal and that just sticking to it would make you happy? Or is there something about working on that specific goal?

CHARLIE I feel like it has to be something that's important to you. It can't just be like... it can't be like Lent. Like, "I'm gonna give up chocolate for the next month and after the next month if I give up chocolate I'll be happy." No, I'm pretty sure that would make me miserable.

LEENIE Just like the person who keeps saying "no" to the cake.

CHARLIE Right. **I feel like it has to be something that means something to you and something that you can see progress with as you work through it.**

LEENIE But even those things... well, maybe this is a cliché example, but it's the only one I can think of right now. What about people who spend their entire lives working on one thing, like a career, to the exclusion of everything else. And after thirty-five years of working on their career they realize that it didn't make them happy and it wasn't what they wanted to do. It's something that's important because it's a career, and it's something that they were disciplined enough to stick with. But they're not *happy*. So why is that?

CHARLIE I think it's because they didn't have any sub-goals. Their career became their main goal. And so, you know, they're putting all of their eggs in one basket. You can't count on one thing to make you happy all the time...

LEENIE So the secret to happiness is to diversify?

CHARLIE I think so.

LEENIE How do you know what's important to you? I mean, it seems like a stupid question, but it's something that... it's something that *I* definitely struggle with. I don't think it's as simple an answer as it seems.

CHARLIE [*Pause*] I don't know. I mean... well, tell me — how is it that you struggle with it? Tell me that. Just to give me something to go off of.

LEENIE There might be things in my life that I think are important to me, like a hobby, or maybe a project that I'm working on. And then... in the end I don't follow through with it because I just can't... I end up not feeling excited about it like I was before.

Or... I don't know what path to take, because I don't know which path is going to end up being the *one* for me. And so it's hard to know what I want sometimes. It's just not always obvious.

CHARLIE For me, when it comes to starting things and then later coming to find out that I'm interested in something else — I feel like all that is just sort of circular to me. It's not necessarily linear. So... for instance, with a poem: I'll write a poem, I'll come up with some really great lines for a poem — like, the start of a poem — and then for whatever reason I keep screwing up the ending. And then eventually I'll say, "You know what? I'll just leave that alone." And then it might be months, it might be a year or two, but eventually something will happen and the end of the poem will come to me. So I'll dig up that poem and I'll finish it. And it will be the best poem I've written in the last 25 minutes. You know? So, the same thing happens to me with things that are important to me.

LEENIE Uh huh?

CHARLIE Anything that you start was important at one point in time. If you don't finish it, or if you lose interest in it, that doesn't necessarily mean that it never was important or even that it stopped being important. It just means that your interests were redirected elsewhere. And who knows, you might come back to later. It's not like — it's not like that career path that you described earlier, where you start with police department and then you work 20 years straight, or 25 years, or however many years they're gonna make you stay there. And then you just finish at some point. To me it's more that you start here, hang a little bit over there, hang out over a little over there, come back here. It's sort of like multi-tasking, I guess. You get a lot of things done at the same time. And I mean, each thing takes its own priority, and when one thing is in priority then you deal with that. Eventually you'll lose interest in it — and that's to be expected. People change. People change *every day*. It's unreasonable to think that you have to stick with one thing, or or feel a certain way about one thing forever. I mean, that might be kind of a weird argument against marriage, but at the same time — everybody is changing, and everything is changing. People need to recognize that a little more often so they can adapt to the change and just deal with it. I think people would be healthier if they were able to just understand the fact that things change, so we should be ready and willing to adapt and change as well.



LEENIE So, you mentioned before that you have a goal, and then maybe there comes a point where you realize that's not what was important to you and you go to something else. So, are you saying that... is living a process of constantly reassessing your goals? And each time, you take a step forward and then you reassess and then take another step forward, or — I mean, what you just described sounds more like, "This is important *now*, and it will always be important in that moment," and then you sort of circle around for a while. It's not so much a moving forward, it's more of a bouncing around.

[Pause]

CHARLIE I feel like it's all moving forward. Well, it's a little bit of both. But it's not necessarily that you're working, reassessing, and then moving on to something else. It's more that you just put it on pause. And you'll still bring it with you to whatever else you go to, but it will be on the back burner. So sure, you're bouncing around, but you're not leaving anything behind.

LEENIE And this is what makes you happy. To go back and forth and do these things, making small accomplishments here and there.

CHARLIE Yeah. I mean — because they're all things that I'm interested in. So, they're meaningful to me. And eventually I want to see them come to fruition. Fff... fruition? Fruition. Hah. *Transcribe that* — !

LEENIE *[laughing]* I will try. It's surprising difficult. I can get five seconds in and then have to pause it and go back. **Five seconds of conversation is a long time.** It really is. I mean, just this little spiel I've been on probably less than five seconds of talking.

CHARLIE Wow.

LEENIE Yeah. But it seems much shorter when you read it. *[Pause]* Now I have to time it to see if it really was.

CHARLIE *[laughs]*

LEENIE And make a note.

CHARLIE That's great.

100

Charlie  
Holy Frijoles, Baltimore  
3:48pm

LEENIE So, how do you approach the idea that... happiness is in serenity and in peace. Because the happiness that you're describing is a very busy happiness. Like, "I do these things to distract me from the things that will make me unhappy." **So how do you deal with the idea of happiness as quiet — quietude in your soul?**

CHARLIE There's a time and a place for that, too. Sometimes you're just too busy. I do enjoy days on end of sitting on the sofa. Just sitting. I think the last time I took a vacation, that's exactly what I did. I think I walked from the sofa to the refrigerator to the bathroom, and that's it.

LEENIE *[laughs]*

CHARLIE For three, four days straight. I don't know if I necessarily believe in the whole Eastern religion Zen stuff, just — like, meditation

constantly. That's more like disciplining yourself. I don't think that's necessarily happiness. I think that's just them training themselves to sit still.

LEENIE And yet, you're idea of happiness is training yourself and conditioning yourself.

CHARLIE Well yeah...

LEENIE And you have said that having the discipline to do things is happiness. So is discipline happiness or is it not happiness?

*[Pause]*

LEENIE I mean, I'm not trying to negate what you said, but I'm wondering if maybe it's not the discipline of doing those things that brings you happiness. If it's something else about this thing that you have going on.

CHARLIE Hmm. Well... I don't know. I don't think of it necessarily as discipline. Discipline is forcing myself to wake up every day and go to work. And... I feel like discipline keeps me doing

something when I don't always want to do it. And that's what I see in sitting on a rock for days on an end. Whereas keeping busy and then occasionally taking breaks... that's doing what's good for you.

LEENIE What *is* good for you?

CHARLIE I don't think there's a universal answer to that.

LEENIE Well how do you know what's good for you? I'm feeling like what it all comes down to is — how do you know what's good for you? How do you know what makes you happy? Because it's to be expected that it's different for everybody — or maybe that's not to be expected, maybe that's an assumption I shouldn't make — but, at the very least you have to know what makes *you* happy. How do you do that?

CHARLIE Well... I feel like it might go back to the whole doing what you're interested in and doing what's pleasing to you at the time. Sure, it might be different for every person, but it's also not necessarily going to stay the same for every person. It's not a constant. It's like dating. You might like somebody now, and

then, who knows — tomorrow you might not. Whatever. So, something that makes you feel good right now might not later.

LEENIE So self-awareness is pretty important in this process.

CHARLIE I would say so. But I've always found, time and time again... I **don't like sitting in a dark room while other people — you know — "breathe in, breathe out" — and I'm just thinking, "This is stupid, this... is stupid."** If I need to — if I need to discover some stuff about myself, then I have my own time and my own places to do that.

LEENIE And how do you do that? Because we're agreed, then, that self-awareness is important in the pursuit of happiness.

CHARLIE Right

LEENIE So how do you take the time to practice and achieve self-awareness?

CHARLIE I mean — it's — for me, it might be similar in that it is *alone* time. I need time by myself. It might not necessarily be breathing



exercises and things like that, but I've always been the type that is fine keeping his own company. So, my most recent practice — or, my most established practice — is on Sunday mornings I'll go to Church. And the 8 o'clock service is usually — there are very few people there. And I'll usually go to Dunkin' Donuts and buy two donuts and a coffee and then I'll sit at a table by myself and just eat the donuts and drink the coffee. And usually I'll have worked the night before, so I'm all strung out from work. So, I'll just go and I'll sit there, and I'll need for people to just leave me alone. Because that's how I make my transition from Work Charlie to Sociable, Alright-I'll-Talk-To-All-These-Happy-Christian-People-Without-Strangling-Them-Or-Cursing-At-Them Charlie. So sometimes I need some alone time to just be quiet, or sometimes on my off days I'll spend time in my apartment just to clean and get everything in my personal life in order. Or sometimes I need some alone time — like, just to design T-shirts, or just play music loudly. You know?

LEENIE So, would you say that these are rituals, things that you constantly come back to? Or at least on a semi-regular basis?

CHARLIE Pretty much. Especially the donuts. I mean, I love donuts. Cops love donuts.

LEENIE Mmm. Me too. What kind of donuts do you get?

CHARLIE Um... French Crullers, or — well, it depends on my mood. Sometimes I'll get a Boston Creme, but the French Crullers are really good for dipping in Dunkaccinos. Delicious.

LEENIE I really like just simple glazed donuts. I think those are my favorite.

CHARLIE They're pretty good. But yeah... I have to have *my* time. Because it's sort of like defragmenting my mind. All day long people inject all of their energy and all of their emotions into your life and into your mind and spirit and body, and they just want to take from you and give — give all of themselves to you. Sometimes I just feel like — alright, I need for all of this to go

away for while so I can collect *myself* again and put myself back together. And then I'll be good.

LEENIE    Something I've noticed about myself is that I have a very hard time ignoring things that are bothering me. Only as a very last resort, when I am so frustrated and so desperate that I *can't* deal with something, will I say, "I don't want to think about this or talk about this right now." But most of the time, if there is a problem I will want to address it *right now*. I don't want to wait — I want to talk about it and I want to resolve it (whatever *that* means) —

CHARLIE    [*laughs*]

LEENIE    You know, I don't like being distracted from things that I perceive to be problems. So... for you, being happy is doing things that will distract you from things that make you unhappy. And for me, I feel that gets me frustrated because I don't want to ignore the unhappiness. I want to deal with it head on. Like, I want to punch it in the face. I was in a class last semester where

we did a short meditation, and he was having us breathe and stuff, and the first thing that came to me was, "Man my arms and my legs really hurt." And at first I thought, well, it's because I have to sit here and do nothing and it's uncomfortable. But then I thought... not that's not it. I am finally quiet enough to notice that I didn't sleep well last night and that's why my shoulder hurts — or, I'm not sitting up straight right now haven't been for all of class, and that's why my back hurts. These things that I never bothered to notice about my body. And as soon as I became aware of them, then I could, you know, sit up straight, or... I mean — do you know what I'm saying?

CHARLIE Yeah.

LEENIE And it's funny because in my conscious life, *that's* what I do. I see something and I want to uncover it, I want to fix it, and then it's gone. But I carry these things with me that I don't even notice, like aches in my shoulders, and what if there are other things that I don't know — other pains that I carry with me that aren't necessarily physical. And for you the answer would be that it's irrelevant if you don't notice it and if you're distracted from it.

CHARLIE Well it's not necessarily irrelevant. It just goes back to my circle theory. Which is like — someone comes and gives you a heart problem. I don't necessarily have an answer to that problem right now, but I'm going to store it somewhere and let my subconscious work it out, and then my subconscious will burp later and then I'll have an answer for it.

LEENIE [*laughs*]

CHARLIE So that's how I deal with *all* things. I have a problem that I don't have the answer to, so I'll get it stabilized, and then I'll

move on to something else. Just to keep my mind off of it for a minute, like a painkiller. And I'll just let my body work, or let the mind work how it will work. It will heal itself. I'm not gonna tinker with it or pick at it like a scab. I'm just gonna let it heal. And eventually it'll be fixed. That usually works well for me — it might not work for everybody, but it's worked well for me. Once you get things stabilized, you don't need to keep nursing them back to health. The body — whether you want to admit it or not — the body and the mind and the spirit and the soul, they have their own mechanisms of coping that are far beyond our power and understanding.

LEENIE I remember when I first realized that — like, a doctor doesn't always fix you. A doctor just makes sure that you don't move so that your body can fix itself.

CHARLIE Right.

LEENIE I was like six or something and I had this revelation, and I was like, "That's amazing! It just fixes itself! The cast is just there so you don't mess it up!"

CHARLIE *[laughs]* Exactly! It's incredible.

LEENIE Because, you know that we like to mess things up, right. We like to get in the way of the natural processes of things.

CHARLIE Yeah, that's really all it is. You have to stabilize it, put a cast on it, and let the magic happen.

LEENIE So... I've noticed you using the word "content" instead of "happy." You've alluded once or twice to the fact that they're not the same thing —

CHARLIE Yeah, I just — I don't necessarily like the word "happy."

LEENIE Why?

CHARLIE Well, I feel like it has too many connotations — like somebody says, "Oh, they're a happy person," and you imagine somebody walking around smiling like, "Oh heyyy how you doing!" all the time and all that other crap. And I don't think that's what happiness is. For some people, I feel like that might be their own personal hell, having to smile at everyone. Contentment is more accurate because it's like you're in a state... a state of not suffering. Like, "I'm good where I'm at," not necessarily that you're brimming with excitement and joy. It's "Well, I'm fine." And I feel that's what people *should* be. I mean, you don't want to be all crazy and hyped up all the time. Because you're going to crash — it's caffeine or drugs, or something. **You should be content, stable, right along a line. And you just got to make sure you don't dip below the line.**

LEENIE Like a straight line across.

CHARLIE Yeah. But not if we're talking about a heart monitor. That would be bad. That's a little too stable.

LEENIE *[laughs]*

CHARLIE So I don't like the word "happy." It means too much to people. And because it holds that much weight, people have *crazy* expectations about what should make them — what should actually make them content. And people find contentment and then they're not actually content with it because they're so used to — because they want to "happy."

LEENIE They find contentment but they think it's not what they want.

CHARLIE Right. Because they're not walking around smiling and hugging everybody. But really... and maybe it's sort of a downer, but really we just live so that... we can live. So we can keep content.

LEENIE Everything we do is just about —

CHARLIE Survival. Even in this "modern age." I mean it's not... I mean not necessarily everything. I'm sure we have our interests and our desires. **But on a basic level it's all about needs.**

*[Pause]*

LEENIE Well do you have anything you want to say to wrap this up or should be end it there?

CHARLIE *[laughing]* It's sort of a really sad place to end it... But I guess we can wrap it up there! I don't really have anything else to say.  
*[laughs]*

LEENIE Okay.

CHARLIE Yeah. Thank you.

LEENIE Yeah, no problem! Thank *you*.



**no**

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Mom & Leigh  
Rare Bar & Grill, New York  
9:48am

MOM And... it's really a marvel to me — **there things that are just marvels to me. And they're really small.** Like just... looking out of the window, and some of those sunsets — and I can't — I don't know what it is. But I just feel this incredible warmth — and whatever's happened during that day, it all just sort of floats away. And... I guess it's beauty, or... but it's more than that. It's like a mystery. Sunsets to me are mysteries. And it's the mystery of it that I'll never understand. But it's just so...

LEIGH But I think you'll — I think everybody has to find for themselves what makes them feel that inner peace. Because it's — to me, it's that feeling inside that... that lets you... the words are so corny, but lets you pass through life in a happy way, or in a "feel-good" way. And everybody does it differently. Like, I could look out at that sunset and say, "Oh Gawd, another sunset" —

MOM *[laughing]* No you couldn't!

LEIGH Yeah, I could! I mean, if I'm not in the mood for that, that won't help me.

MOM Oh no, it always, just... it —

LEIGH But what would help me is a Pilates class. You know. I could go to a Pilates class and feel like I could lose myself in the concentration of the movement or whatever, and —

LEENIE Is it because you have to be so focused?

LEIGH Yes, I think. And it's hard for me to focus. So, in other words, there's only certain things that I can really lose myself within and feel this... relaxation. And —

MOM I had that with with Tai Chi.

LEIGH — and I... well, I think that's why I loved acting. Because when I was young and able to do that, I lost myself within the character or my concentration or whatever I was doing. And it was almost like an out of body experience. It was very — you know, it just took me over. And it was this fantastic... freeing thing. And I've never been able to have that since then. However, I *do* find it within these classes, or any kind of... dance, you know, stupid exercise class. But I can focus in and find this kind of release. Where I don't think about myself, where I don't think about my problems. I'm somewhere else.

MOM Yeah, I do it in cycling.

LEIGH Yes.

MOM That's what the bicycling is.

LEIGH And I think —

MOM It's the rhythm, and the... because I like cycling as opposed to — I mean, I like Pilates, but it doesn't... Tai Chi did it for me. There was something about the rhythm. But what I love about

cycling — and what brings me real happiness — just the moments that I get out there and do it. And the thing is I can do it alone, but I can also do it with my brother. It's joy no matter what the personal involvement is. And, of course, Greg and I talk the whole time. It isn't as if I', insular — like, I'm riding he just happens to be there. We actually interact — in fact, I mean, it's very interesting. My brother interacts more completely when he's cycling.

LEENIE What do you mean?

MOM We've had wonderful conversations — I mean, he just —

LEIGH He's not on guard, probably.

MOM He's not on guard. He just relaxes. And he tells me about things that are worrying him, or the things that are worrying him in my life and he wants to know if he can help. And he would never do that if we were just sitting there in his living room, or, you know... *[Laughs]*

LEIGH Well, I find that —

MOM Just something about the, you know — the beauty of that trail, just... Beauty brings me happiness, you know. Seeing it brings me happiness. That's why I love being with Lucy. Because Lucy is a person who creates beauty around her — and my mother. She was a person who created beauty around her, and I love it. And my grandmother. That's what they were. They were people who created beauty. And there's a wonderful warmth, and... and safety and completeness.

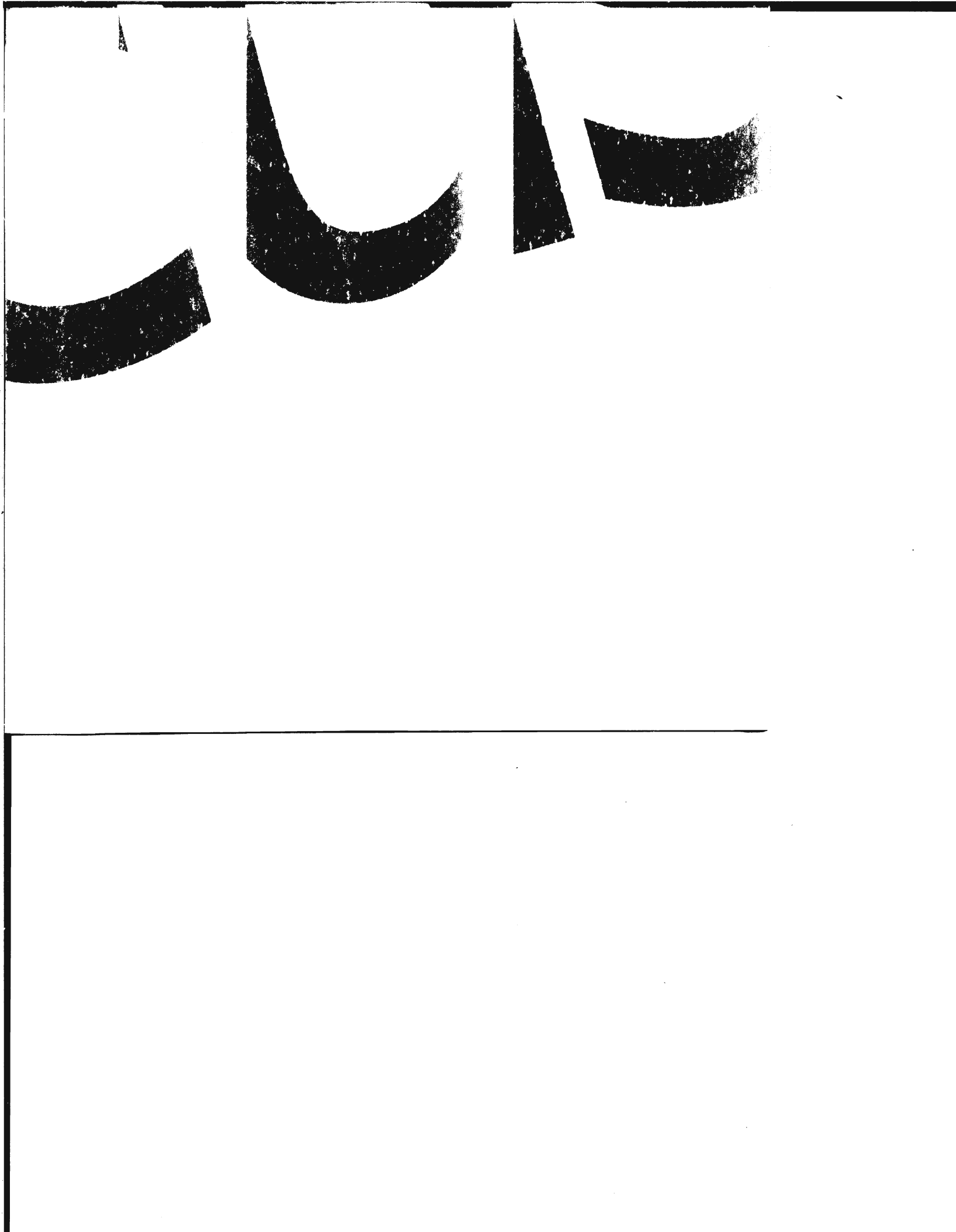
LEENIE And I will say this about... my observation about Lucy, as somebody from my viewpoint. She was somebody who was very lucky.

Very young she was able to fulfill a lot of dreams. And it just happened for her. And so she had the freedom, from my perspective, to... to have all the beautiful things around her and create them. I felt — now, I'm talking about myself here — but I felt that my whole youth like I was just... trying so hard to survive and... kind of catch a dream that I just couldn't catch. And I mean — the idea of trying to find beauty — you know, like, I would have loved to have pretty things. *[Laughs]* And I could never do it! And I think a lot of people, that's kind of — she was lucky in her life. Just kind of —

MOM Oh, yeah. And it was luck.

LEIGH She had choices. And I think it's always luck. And there are — **people with luck can talk a whole different way about happiness because it was always there.** In other words, some people just — it's there. Their life takes form and it just goes. The rest of us, where it doesn't work like that, you have to find tricks *[laughs]* to find your inner peace. You know. *I think.*

MOM I think you're right.



February 1, 2011



Looking back on all of the material I've collected — interviews, journal entries, notes — I have a hard time identifying exactly what I've learned. Broad themes jump out to me, like “self-knowledge,” “gratefulness,” “setting goals”... **but it's a mess. It's all a mess.** On the one hand, the people I interviewed drew thoughts out of my head and into the light where I could finally examine them in a way that eludes those who never journey beyond monologue.

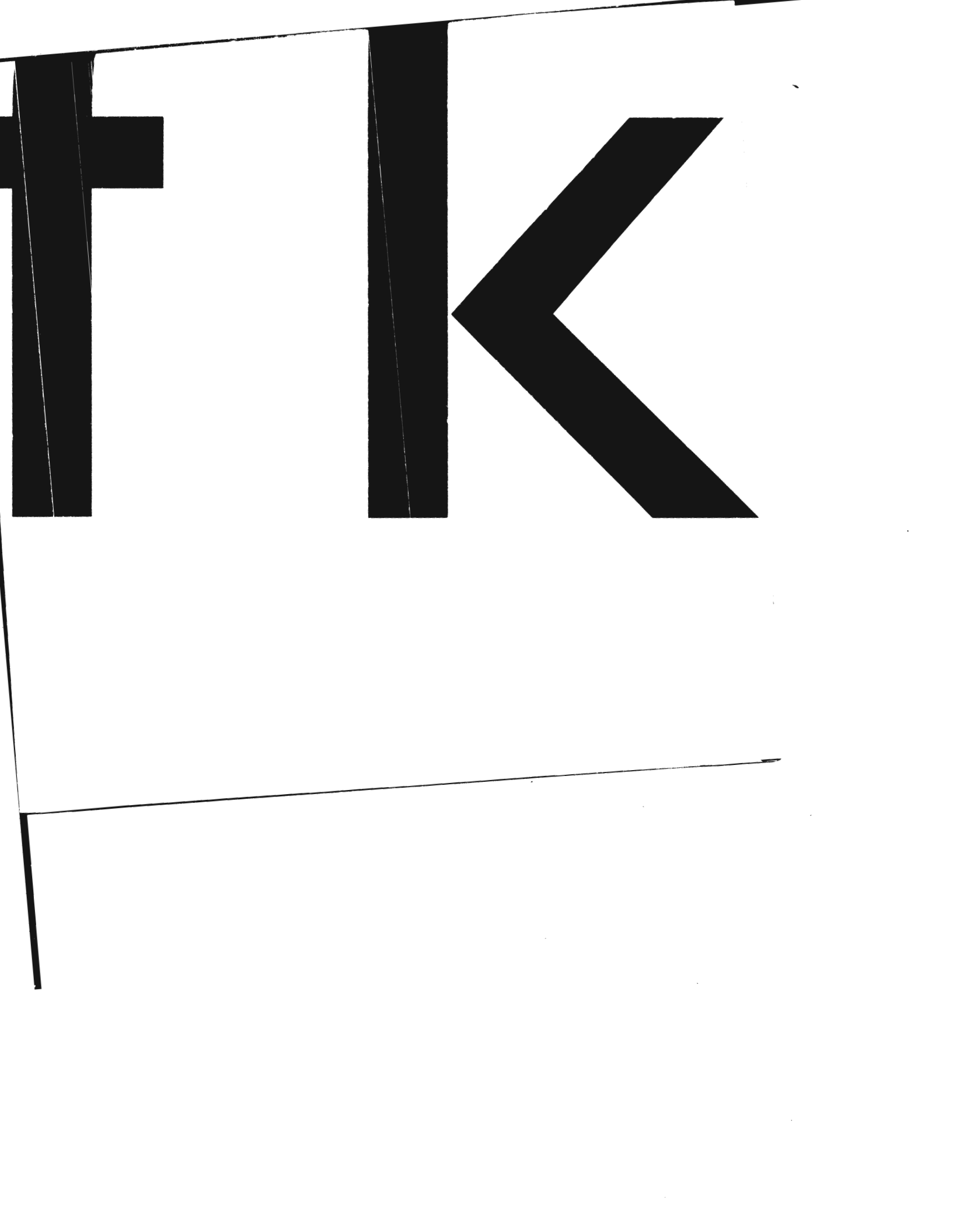
But on the other hand, I can't shake this sneaking feeling that each revelation and moment of insight was something that I

had known inside of me from the beginning. Of course I have to know myself before I can be happy! Of course being grateful gives you a more positive outlook on life. Of course having goals brings clarity to your mind. I knew these things. But where have they been? What else is hidden inside of me that I just can't access yet? I didn't tell Charlie the whole story about that meditation session. I did become increasingly aware of pains in my body, but it was more than that. As I settled deeper into the

exercise, I began to feel not sad or upset, but that I was on the verge of tears — the burning, tight feeling you get before you cry (I described the feeling to Scott and he said, "Ah, you were verklempt, Girlie!"). I felt like something tense and vital inside of me was cracking apart, waiting to be released.

It both saddens and thrills me to think that there are parts my heart and my mind I haven't pulled out into the light yet. It's so much work, and I just want to live a clean, happy life! Who can

say how significant this one project will be as I make my foray into the world of college graduates — that's where the real shit begins, isn't it? But I think I can be a much happier person than I have been in the past few years. Once I know what I want, at least I am very determined. **I don't want to let her down, that little girl in the white, fold-out chair, waiting to graduate.**



November 30, 2010

I had a dream last that I saw my daughter at her 4th grade graduation in the courtyard of her elementary school. She was young, and perfect in my mind's eye; long hair mussed in the wind, swinging her feet back and forth in front of the white, fold-out chair, intently watching and listening to the graduation proceedings, laughing just to laugh. Beautiful in her happiness. In my dream I felt strange, watching her. I felt deeply proud, nostalgic, and sad because she was so much like my memories of myself that I wondered if maybe this was no phantom of a future daughter, but a phantom of a former self. **Had I once been that easy and warm, messy but happy?** Now, it seems, I am like a tightly strung grand piano. Pluck me and I sound like I am in tune, but it takes over twenty tons of tension to make me that way.

And so, I've been obsessed with happiness lately. What is it, really? How do we get it? Why do we try? The easy happiness I saw in that little girl's face — where did it go? "Real life" —

the kind that takes place outside of dorms and classrooms — is gathering on the horizon and I can see the storm wall rushing towards me. It's exhilarating, sure, but it's also a fucking terror. I recently had lunch with a friend of my mother's, Leigh, and I asked her — I said, "Leigh, how do you know what makes you happy?"

"Why? What do you mean?"

I said, "I don't know. Just with graduation coming up... I have a lot of decisions to make. I wonder about it sometimes."

Leigh frowned. "Well, I don't think you have anything to be concerned about."

She paid, and I followed her out of the restaurant, disappointed in her reply. On the sidewalk, she turned and touched my arm and said, "What is this all about? Are you not happy? I'm worried about you."

I've been worried about myself, too. I came to college with a very clear idea of what kind of person I was and what kinds of pursuits I wanted to fill these college years. I was filled with certainty, because I was "that girl" — the one who's good at everything, the one the teachers love, the one who wins the awards, the one who speaks up, the one who thrives on the vague satisfaction that comes with yet another accolade. What a sham. Because the past



three years have not been marked with certainty — in fact, they have been filled with confusion, second-guessing, and constant reevaluation of my goals.

Many of my goals — get good grades, go to college, make Dean's List, get a job — I have regarded simply as inevitabilities, but I've come to question these and so many other decisions I thought I had made with confidence. Why must I do these "inevitable" things? Is anyone actually watching me? Will they make me happy?

And there it is — the most constant and frightening question that I am only now beginning to answer is this: What will make me happy in my life?

Several months ago, during one of many anxious phone conversations I've had with her over the past few years, my mom asked this of me. **It terrifies me that I have no clear answer.** I do have a shortlist. What makes me happy? Sunlight, flowers, art that is easy and childlike. Good food, sleep. Beautiful design. Honesty. Honesty is very important.

But what am I supposed to do with these things? Not long after my mom and I spoke I was sitting in class and I thought wryly, "You know, someone should just tell me how to be happy."

Then, I thought, "Why not — ? *Why not?*"

I am resolved to seek answers in other people, to find out if maybe someone does have it figured out. But speaking both critically and creatively about happiness (that is, avoiding that simpering, neo-intellectual bullshit that often accompanies self-discovery) is a challenge in itself, even without the added pressure of getting others to do the same. There is a tendency to abandon our real intuitions about things amongst the platitudes of philosophical discourse. We speak with authority because the terms of these conversations call upon us to do so — but

will I have truly found the authority on happiness in any of these discussions?

I just smiled at Leigh and told her no, I wasn't unhappy. I told her that I feel like I am at a crossroads — which is true — that I was looking for guidance — which is true — that I am interested in other people's stories — which is true — and that I'll be fine — which I hope is true. **Any question we ask is ultimately a means of orienting ourselves against everything we don't understand.** And there is so much, I find, that I don't understand.

MS12

December 15, 2010

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My conversation with Anna, the first of several, I hope, went better than expected. Well, I'm not sure what I expected, but I **was certainly surprised at how easy it was to keep the discussion moving forward, the facility with which we navigated our mutual confusion.** Turns out, even when we don't fully understand happiness we have a hell of a lot to say on the subject.

As I look over the transcript of our conversation, I keep coming back to those last few moments when we discussed living fully

in the moments we are given. It makes me think of that “Wear Sunscreen” essay by Mary Schmich — published as a column in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1997 — when she tells her readers to enjoy the power and beauty of their youth. That someday they will look at old pictures and remember all of the possibility that lay before their young selves. At age 9, sitting in my little chair in the courtyard of my elementary school, waiting to be ushered into my new life as a 5<sup>th</sup> grader, I did not know of all the things that would lead me here to this point, reflecting on what it means to be happy — my parents’ divorce, failing math class, traveling to Japan, crying, changing, chronic illness, falling in love, discovering who I am. **I did not know the many ways in which I would be called upon to be resilient, to be grateful, to fall apart, and to be joyful.** How much more possibility is out there, ahead of me, that I couldn’t possibly fathom?

Quite a bit, I see. But Anna said it best — it's no good to spend all of my time thinking about things instead of experiencing them. There is something powerful about the reckless enthusiasm of my youth — of this moment, right here. I trekked around the city for six hours today. I could probably do it again tomorrow. My mama would have told me to wear more comfortable shoes,

but I didn't and now my knee hurts and I am dead tired but it doesn't really matter because **I'm going to go eat some lobster mac'n'cheese and then out to drink at a bar and then to sleep and when I wake up I'll still be alive.**



WU

Mom & Leigh  
Rare Bar & Grill, New York  
9:43am

LEIGH Being thankful. **I think a lot of happiness is being thankful for your own life, that you have your health.** And, now, in my case, with Sam... he is never — he is never content. He is never appreciative of — of being alive, or anything! I mean ever! And — and I, as a parent, have tried to say, “Can’t you just be happy that we’re here,” or try — you know, give him some kind of... and, he gets mad. Infuriated at me that I would even try to talk about that, like, you know.

MOM I think you have to be born — I think you have to be born with a capacity —

LEIGH Right.

MOM — to be happy, as one is — I think you have to be born with the capacity to *love*. There are some people who just aren’t.

MOM And your happiness.

LEIGH Yeah.

MOM But that doesn't mean that happiness doesn't exist for Leigh. I mean, there are — she's found avenues that have brought her happiness.

LEIGH Right, I've looked for it —

MOM I mean that's what one does.

LEIGH — I mean, my relationship — I need... in my life I need a relationship with a guy to give me some sort of contentment. It helps — and I realize that. I mean I realize that I — that started for me when I was... in high school, or something. I need somebody. And, the fact that I have Frank in my life helps me tremendously, for my state of contentment and happiness. But it's not — he can't solve everything. He can't make me totally happy because... of... other pressures. And you work — you know, everybody I think needs to work on themselves, whether it's... meditation or exercise or — inner peace. And I think inner peace —

MOM Inner peace is —

LEIGH — is happiness. And it's something —

MOM Yeah, I think inner peace is happiness.

LEENIE I think people want to believe that happiness can be self-sufficient. But... can it be? Can it —

MOM It really has to be.

LEENIE Does it have to be?

MOM Yeah.

LEIGH Well I think that because in the end we're always gonna be alone at some point. So you do have to find inner... whatever it is to get you what you need. But I totally admit that I am... you know, like, I am *much* happier in a relationship. A relationship that's working. That's happy. *[laughs]* I mean, if I were — you know, a relationship that's not happy is traumatic, too. Just like... you know, my marriage was always stressed, too. Even though there was love, you know. But I worry about the people I love, and if I feel they're in trouble it affects me.

LEENIE What about... I see two conflicting life philosophies here. Because on one hand I have heard people say they feel very strongly that you should be able to be alone and happy. That you're all you have in the end and so you have to square with yourself and be self-sufficient in your happiness. And other people say that a life alone is an empty life. That people in your life bring joy to you and that it's important to have relationships...

*[Mom shushes]*

LEIGH I don't think they —

LEENIE They can't hear me.

LEIGH They're not looking.

LEENIE You guys aren't talking loud enough. The mic's not going to pick you up and then I'm gonna have to do this all over again.

LEIGH *[reaching for a strawberry]* Can I do this?

LEENIE Oh, yeah. Yeah. Anyway, so... what is it? Which is true?

MOM **I think you have to find contentment in yourself. Ultimately.**

LEENIE Then what's the purpose of other people?

MOM Well, I don't think you know yourself without reflecting off of other people.

LEENIE Can you explain that?

MOM Well... it's like looking in a mirror. I mean how do you know what your face looks like unless you look in the mirror? Unless you have it reflected back to you? And people are constantly — people you have relationships with —

*[waitress inquires if we need anything else]*

LEENIE No, I'm okay.

MOM — in any form —

LEIGH Do you want anything else?

MOM — No, I'm fine. Thank you—are constantly reflecting back to you. They react to you the way — you know, how they behave towards you gives you a feeling of who *you* are. It helps identify yourself and your needs and your — and what makes you happy. And what *doesn't* make you happy.

LEIGH *I know... exactly* what makes me happy.

LEENIE But —

LEIGH I mean it's what I said. I feel contentment doing things I like to do. Feeling relaxed. Secure. *I know* I will be happy.

LEENIE But you guys are also a lot older than most of the people I've interviewed. I mean... you're young...

MOM We are. *[Laughs]*

LEENIE But they are younger.

LEIGH Well I do think that...

MOM What.

LEIGH ... It's partly age, right? I think you learn as you age. Instead of — like, when I was young, in my mind I thought I couldn't be happy unless I achieved certain goals. And the more — the older you get and the more you realize you didn't make that goal or you didn't do this... and you let it go, the more you realize — you can get down to, *[laughs]* "I'm happy. I'm sitting here healthy." I — you know, you can find — I think it's part of just hanging in. You're happy that...

LEENIE That you've made it?

LEIGH You know, for me. And I've witnessed this in my mother, who's eighty-nine and physically everything is wrong with her — just, *everything*. And I checked in with her just today and she has this ongoing horrible wrist problem that they say there's no — there's nothing they can do about it. And she said, "Well, Leigh, at least I have a hand." And I think as you age, if you can have that attitude, it helps you *[laughing]*... And I believe my mother *is* happy that she has a hand. Happy that she can — like, I look at her and say, "If that was me..." If I could hardly get out of the bed and have someone have to dress me... would I want to be alive? That's me *now* saying this. But that'd be like you. Young.



LEENIE Yeah.

LEIGH I don't know, maybe I'll be the same way at her age, if I make it. That I'm still here, you know, so...

MOM **I think a lot of one's younger life one is fighting against the tide.** And there comes a time in life... what is it, the... Oh — ! "Middle Age." It's really past middle age, where you slowly start to let it go, and just enjoy it.

LEIGH Just enjoying your moments. And that's important to learn to do that, I think.



a multi-voice narrative







a multi-voice narrative



happiness  
happiness



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happiness





*happiness*

happiness

happiness







Anna  
Lulu's, Pittsburgh  
12:14pm











Anna  
Lulu's, Pittsburgh  
12/14pm

happiness



Anna  
Lulu's, Pittsburgh  
12:14pm

January 3, 2011



Anna  
Lulu's, Pittsburgh  
12:14pm

November 30, 2010

Charlie  
Holy Frijoles, Baltimore  
3:22pm

Mom & Leigh  
Rare Bar & Grill, New York  
9:37am



Charlie  
Holy Frijoles, Baltimore  
3:22pm





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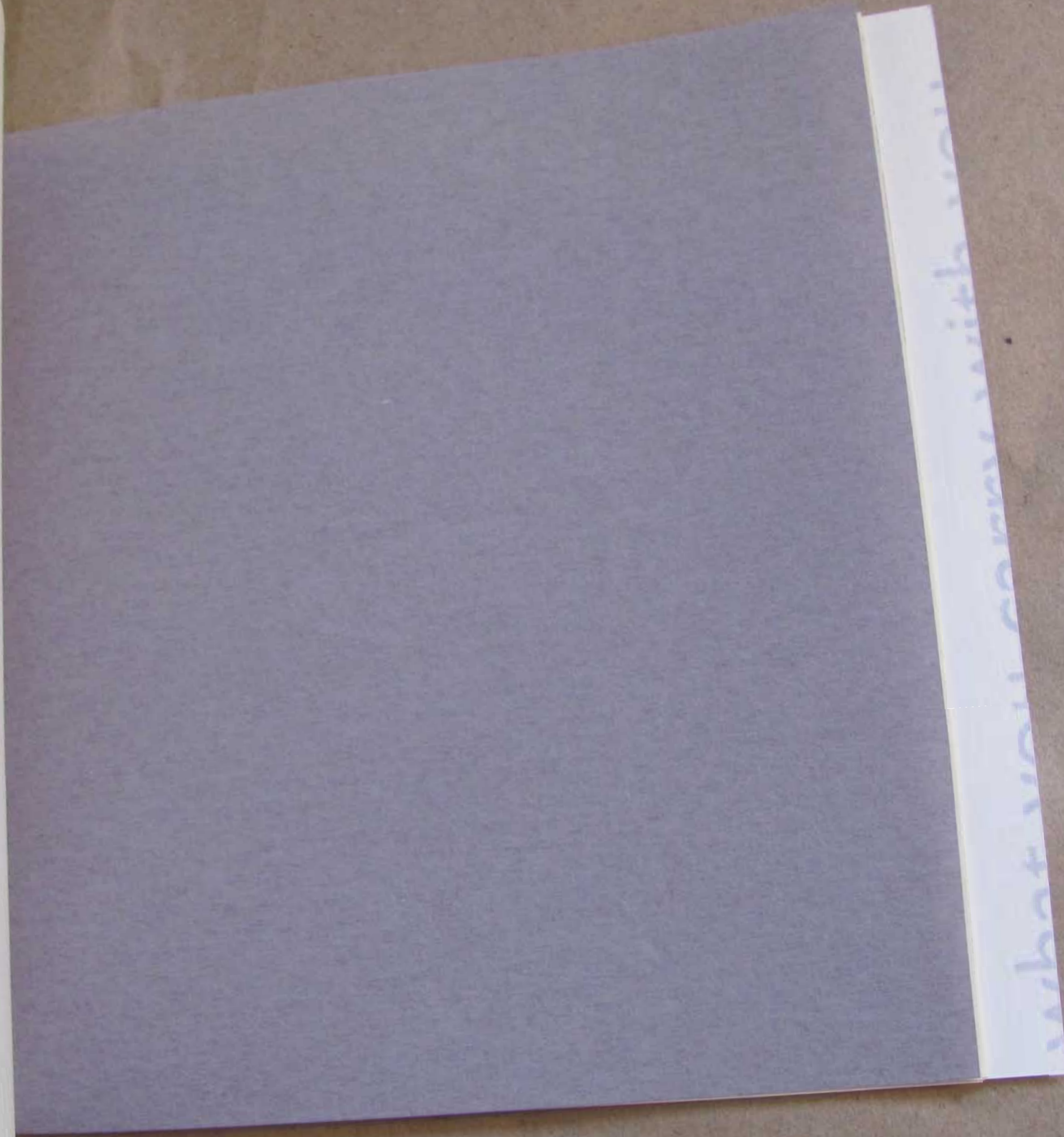
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**fooculus**





what you convey with you



but people  
do change  
their minds,  
their goals,  
they change  
their opinions

LEENIE So does that mean that happiness is related to having goals and knowing what they are?

CHARLIE I think so, definitely.

LEENIE How did you come to that decision or that idea?

CHARLIE Uh... I don't really know? I know that personally, when I encounter certain unhappiness — or, I'll call it discontentment, because I feel like happiness could be contentment. Discontentment comes from some form of suffering — like fear, or wanting. Or pain. So, at some point in time, everybody wants stuff. But after time and time again of trying to get what you want, only sometimes will you get it. Other times you won't get it. **So you'll say, "Well, I'm not very content." Then you have to redefine, "Well, what exactly is it that I want?"** So when you redefine what it is that



know she'd never want anyone to feel sad about her, and I guess that's why I feel like I have to be happy when I think of her. But then, I think... I think she would understand it's really natural. To be sad.

LEENIE Because it's just a normal feeling that you're supposed to have.

ANNA Yeah.

LEENIE So why is it that sadness is a normal feeling you're supposed to have, where happiness is a choice that you have to make? I mean, shouldn't happiness be the normal state of things?

ANNA I think it's a little bit of both because there's ways you can choose to be happy and ways you can choose to be sad. It's the glass is half full, glass is half empty thing. So there's some times when sadness just stumbles upon you and you have to be sad for a little while, and **sometimes happiness kind of does the same thing. You know? You can find it without having to do anything.** And other times... sometimes you make yourself sad and sometimes you have to make yourself happy. But I don't think it's only that

It does build, you know?

you have to choose to be happy, because I know people that are like — people that are choosing to be sad.

LEENIE Why do you think they do that?

[silence]

ANNA Sometimes I think maybe it was the way they were brought up. Maybe their mom never told them to do — to make a bad thing good, or... I don't really know.

LEENIE Is that what your mom told you? Tell me about your mom!

ANNA I love my mom! She was always really happy. I think the reason I always think about decisions in relation to happiness is because she was always about — like, if you stay really true to yourself you'll always make the right choice. As long as you make something that's right for you. She's very into listening to your heart and choosing what's good for you. She was always very okay with... if you needed to be sad — and I think this is why I cry more than most people — if you need to be sad then it's what you need to do. And there's a time for that. So if you needed to cry something out, you should just cry. You shouldn't feel like you have to hold it inside. So whenever I get sad I cry really easily, and that's probably one of the reasons why. But she always let me just

I mean, I think you can even take it further.  
And I think that one has the drive  
and the need to do that.



my sex chemicals right now? Like, can you turn them on? That would be great." You don't say that to yourself. We're not aware of what's going on for us chemically. And if that's what's going on underneath, that's okay...

LEENIE But, I don't want to hear, "If that's what's happening then it's fine." I want to know what you think. Do you think that there is something more to happiness — and everything that we do in our lives — ?

ANNA Well that's what I mean by "if that's what's happening then it's fine." Because for me, the reason I feel like it's more than just that is... we can't see what's going on chemically, so we have nothing to rely except for what we're feeling. So, I feel like that's completely legitimate.

LEENIE Why is there so much struggle and sadness and *weight* in the things we're feeling —

*[waitress asks Anna a question]*

ANNA Yes it's okay, thank you!

*[waitress leaves]*

LEENIE —why do we have such problems with all of these things, and why are the stakes so *high*, when they can just be traced to biological imperatives? Why — do you understand what I'm saying? —

why are things so important to us in life when really it's all just our brains are doing something, and... then we die?

ANNA I mean, that's such a waste if we just walk around and use our chemicals and reproduce and then die and not really do anything else, you know?

LEENIE Why is it a waste?

ANNA Well, you feel really good when you're happy. So you're wasting time that you could potentially be feeling that way, and instead you'd just be having meaningless sex to make babies and walking around and being all "neutrally chemical." I don't know... I feel... we don't really know about — well, for me, I don't really understand that much about chemicals. I don't really understand. I mean, I — I'm a Christian so I guess I know what happens after you die. But... I know that's not true for all people. That's why I say "I guess," because I know what other people believe in and I don't feel like everyone has to believe in the same thing. So for me, all that I have is this life right now. And if you're going to think that this is just a chemical reaction, what's the use of even being here? What's the use of our life?

LEENIE But what *is* the use of our life? What do you think?

ANNA I don't know. *[laughs]* You can't — I have no idea, actually. I don't even know where I am going, because I have no idea. I've never really thought about it. People really can't see things that are very



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*[waitress leaves]*

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when I'm not happy

the kind that takes place outside of dorms and classrooms — is gathering on the horizon and I can see the storm wall rushing towards me. It's exhilarating, sure, but it's also a fucking terror. I recently had lunch with a friend of my mother's, Leigh, and I asked her — I said, "Leigh, how do you know what makes you happy?"

"Why? What do you mean?"

I said, "I don't know. Just with graduation coming up... I have a lot of decisions to make. I wonder about it sometimes."

Leigh frowned. "Well, I don't think you have anything to be concerned about."

She paid, and I followed her out of the restaurant, disappointed in her reply. On the sidewalk, she turned and touched my arm and said, "What is this all about? Are you not happy? I'm worried about you."

I've been worried about myself, too. I came to college with a very clear idea of what kind of person I was and what kinds of pursuits I wanted to fill these college years. I was filled with certainty, because I was "that girl" — the one who's good at everything, the one the teachers love, the one who wins the awards, the one who speaks up, the one who thrives on the vague satisfaction that comes with yet another accolade. What a sham. Because the past

three years have not been marked with certainty — in fact, they have been filled with confusion, second-guessing, and constant reevaluation of my goals.

Many of my goals — get good grades, go to college, make Dean's List, get a job — I have regarded simply as inevitabilities, but I've come to question these and so many other decisions I thought I had made with confidence. Why must I do these "inevitable" things? Is anyone actually watching me? Will they make me happy?

And there it is — the most constant and frightening question that I am only now beginning to answer is this: What will make me happy in my life?

Several months ago, during one of many anxious phone conversations I've had with her over the past few years, my mom asked this of me. **It terrifies me that I have no clear answer.** I do have a shortlist. What makes me happy? Sunlight, flowers, art that is easy and childlike. Good food, sleep. Beautiful design. Honesty. Honesty is very important.

But what am I supposed to do with these things? Not long after my mom and I spoke I was sitting in class and I thought wryly, "You know, someone should just tell me how to be happy."

Then, I thought, "Why not — ? *Why not?*"

I am resolved to seek answers in other people, to find out if maybe someone does have it figured out. But speaking both critically and creatively about happiness (that is, avoiding that simpering, neo-intellectual bullshit that often accompanies self-discovery) is a challenge in itself, even without the added pressure of getting others to do the same. There is a tendency to abandon our real intuitions about things amongst the platitudes of philosophical discourse. We speak with authority because the terms of these conversations call upon us to do so — but



— it's very easy for me to know when I'm  
happy. And it's very easy for me to know  
when I'm not happy

the kind that takes place outside of dorms and classrooms — is gathering on the horizon and I can see the storm wall rushing towards me. It's exhilarating, sure, but it's also a fucking terror. I recently had lunch with a friend of my mother's, Leigh, and I asked her — I said, "Leigh, how do you know what makes you happy?"

"Why? What do you mean?"

I said, "I don't know. Just with graduation coming up... I have a lot of decisions to make. I wonder about it sometimes."

Leigh frowned. "Well, I don't think you have anything to be concerned about."

She paid, and I followed her out of the restaurant, disappointed in her reply. On the sidewalk, she turned and touched my arm,



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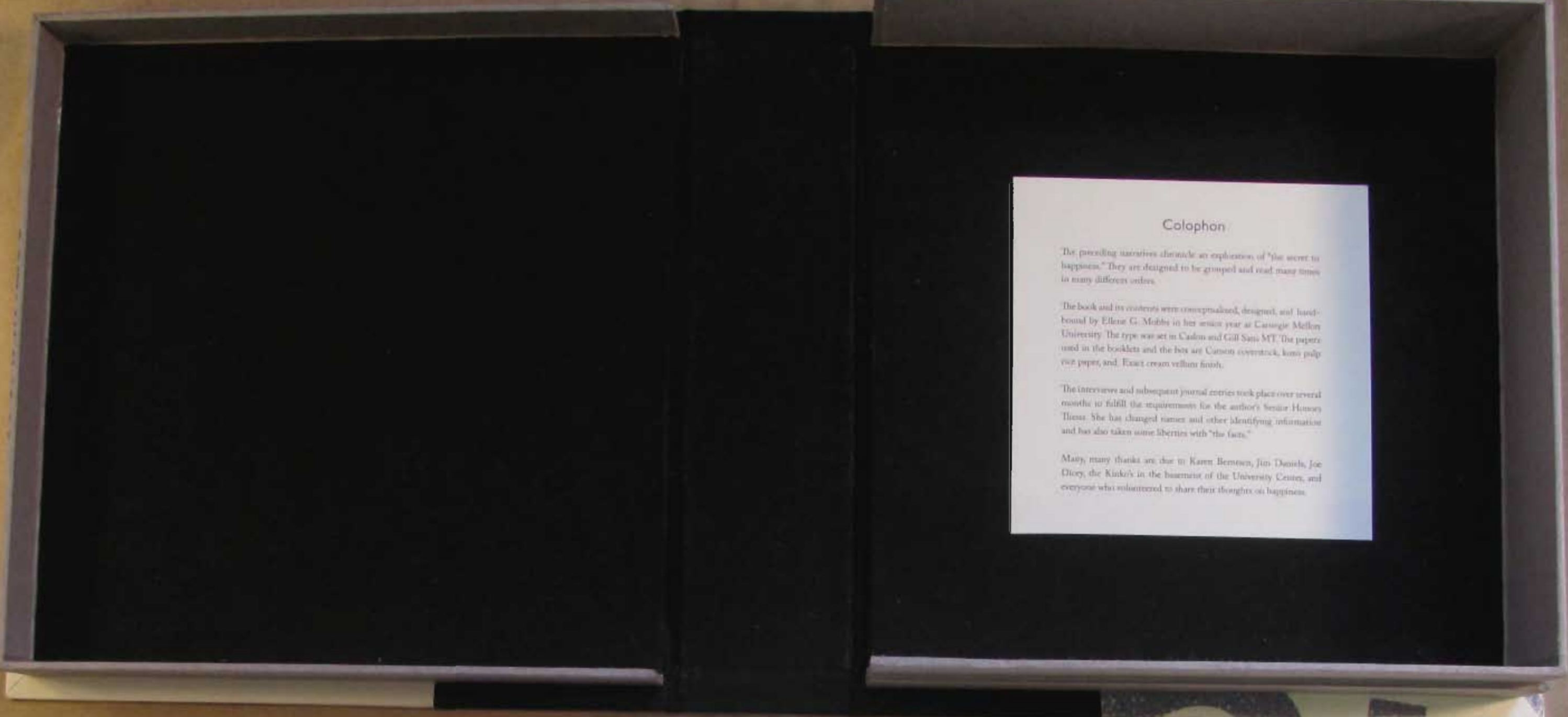
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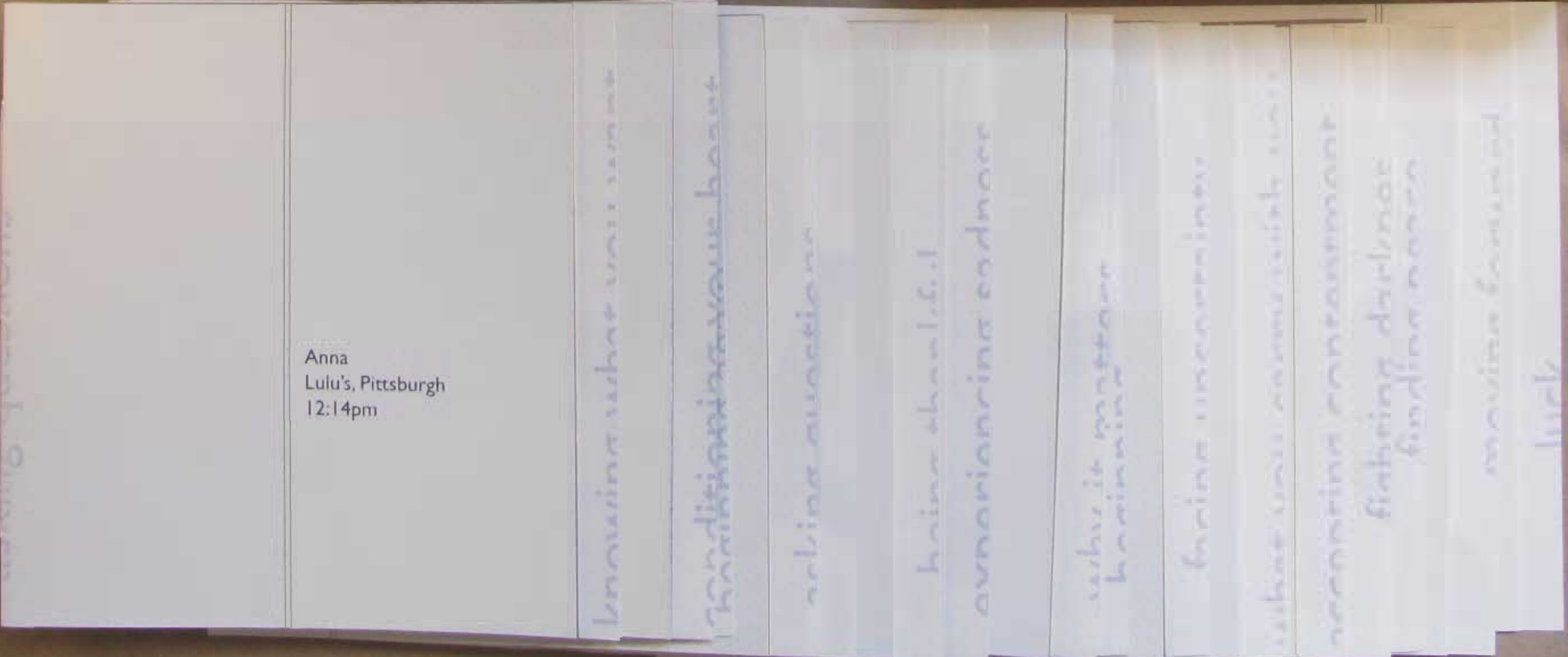
Colophon

The preceding narratives chronicle an exploration of "the secret to happiness." They are designed to be grouped and read many times in many different orders.

The book and its contents were conceptualized, designed, and hand-bound by Elise G. Mubbs in her senior year at Carnegie Mellon University. The type was set in Caslon and Gill Sans MT. The papers used in the booklets and the box are: Canon Everstock, kani pulp rice paper, and Exact cream vellum finish.

The interviews and subsequent journal entries took place over several months to fulfill the requirements for the author's Senior Honors Thesis. She has changed names and other identifying information and has also taken some liberties with "the facts."

Many, many thanks are due to Karen Bensten, Jim Daniels, Joe Drey, the Kink's in the basement of the University Center, and everyone who volunteered to share their thoughts on happiness.



Anna  
Lulu's, Pittsburgh  
12:14pm

knowing what was wrong

conditioning your heart

asking questions

hairs that fall

amazing and more

why it matters  
happiness

being uncertain

what you can't see

meaning and contentment

finding darkness  
finding hope

moving forward

luck



## Colophon

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January 10, 2011

Rare Bar & Grill, New York  
9:37pm

Anna  
Lulu's, Pittsburgh  
12:29pm

Charlie  
3:48pm

Diane  
3:17pm



Charlie  
Holy Frioles, Baltimore  
3:48pm

LERNIE They can't hear me.

LEIGH They're not looking.

LERNIE You guys aren't talking loud enough. The mic's not going to pick you up and then I'm gonna have to do this all over again.

LEIGH *[teaching for a strawberry]* Can I do this?

LERNIE Oh, yeah. Yeah. Anyway, so... what is it? Which is true?

LEIGH I think you have to find comment in yourself. Ultimately.

MOM Then what's the purpose of other people?

MOM Well, I don't think you know yourself without reflecting off of other people.

I'll just go and I'll sit there, and  
leave me alone  
I'll need for people to just

So I'll





Mom & Leigh  
Rare Bar & Grill, New York  
9:37am

Charlie  
almore  
3:22pm

Anna  
Lulu's, Pittsburgh  
12:29pm













Anna  
Lulu's, Pittsburgh  
12:29pm

January (10, 2011)

W

W

X





e  
o

no  
K

y  
x

Anna  
Lulu, Pittsburgh  
12:44pm





mom

love

Anna  
Lulu's, Pittsburgh  
12/4/11





Self-Knowledge  
Empower





think we  
really only  
see the tip  
of the  
iceberg

Knowledge

is



I think we  
really only  
have the tip  
of the  
iceberg

*I can't stop thinking about what Leigh said, that some people  
are back with happiness. The last thing I want, after remembering  
how wrong people are, is to see them. To see people who are happy  
one of the lucky ones, and how well I possibly know what I'm  
right in the middle of all this. My life is not mine. I'm  
just someone else's — even with my own thoughts, my emotions.*

Wedge







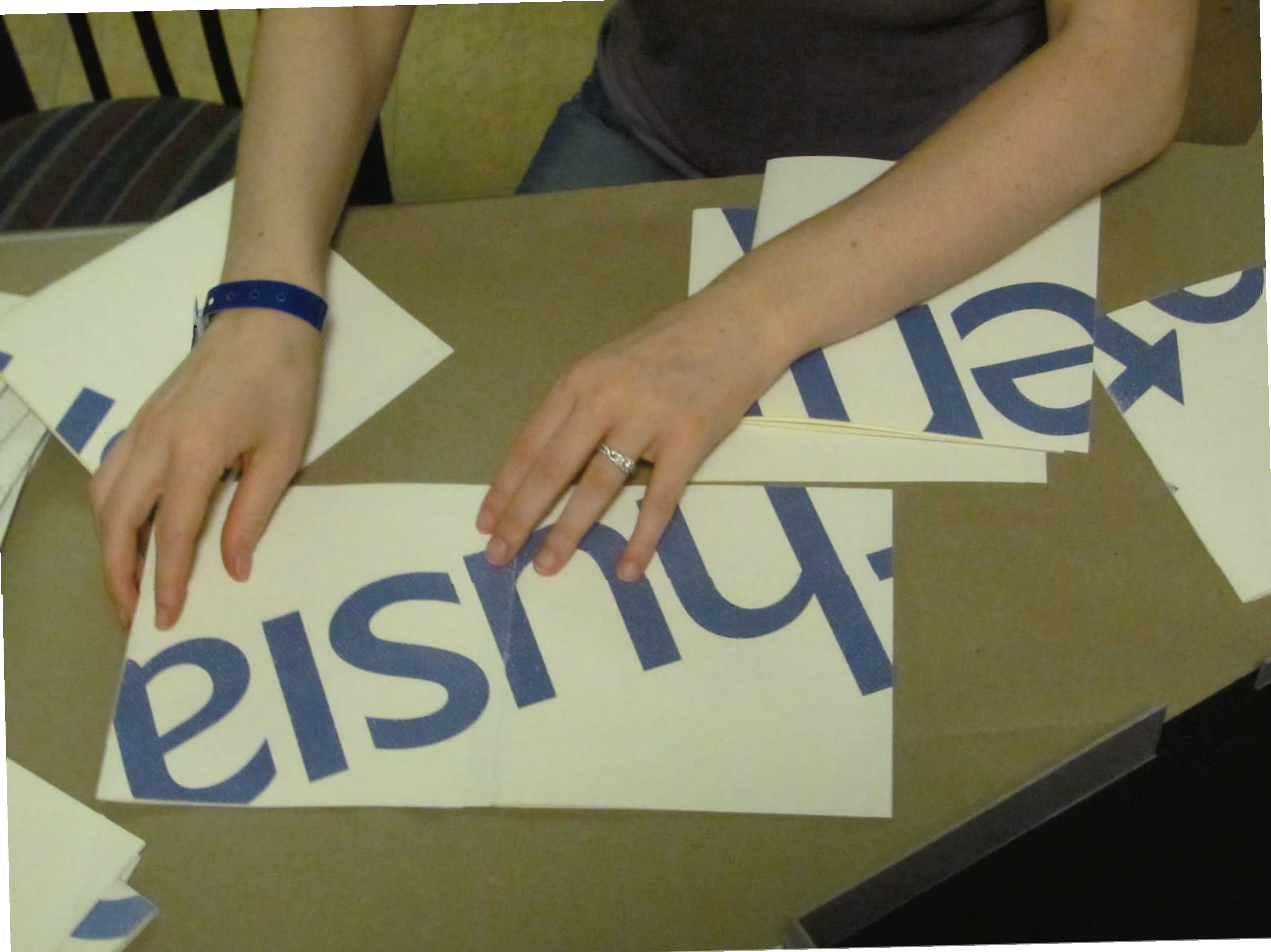


January 11, 20

Charlie  
Holy Frijoles, Baltimore  
3:48pm

Marilyn





EISMU





99163

WASH STATE

WASH STATE







if I need to discover some  
own places I have my own  
stuff about time and my  
that

ago I was in choir getting a little back massage (a normal activity  
to start off rehearsal), and the boy behind me leaned in and said,  
"Yeah, you have a lot knots in your back. Yup, right there. Feel  
that? You carry a lot of tension and stress in your shoulders and  
not news to me. I am often sitting at my desk typing or reading and  
suddenly become aware that my shoulders are much tighter than  
they need to be, that my upper back is aching. Next to nipping  
at the inside of my lips, tensing my shoulders might be number  
one sign of anxiety for me."  
I had a conversation with a friend yesterday about guilt-based  
self-concepts versus shame-based self-concepts. She said that a  
child raised to have a guilt-based self-worth, she knows that  
conflict between her actions and her self-worth. For example, if  
she accidentally breaks her mother favorite vase, she knows and  
what she did is not so good, but she is able to tell her mother and  
apologize because she knows that the accident does not make  
her a bad person. A child raised to have a shame-based concept  
will not be able to tell her mother because she feels that the  
accident is a sign of her worthlessness as a person. She will hide  
the broken pieces and never bring it up.





Rare Bar &

Charlie  
Holy Frijoles, Baltimore  
3:31pm

looking for a place to stay

Anna  
Lulu, Pittsburgh  
12:14pm















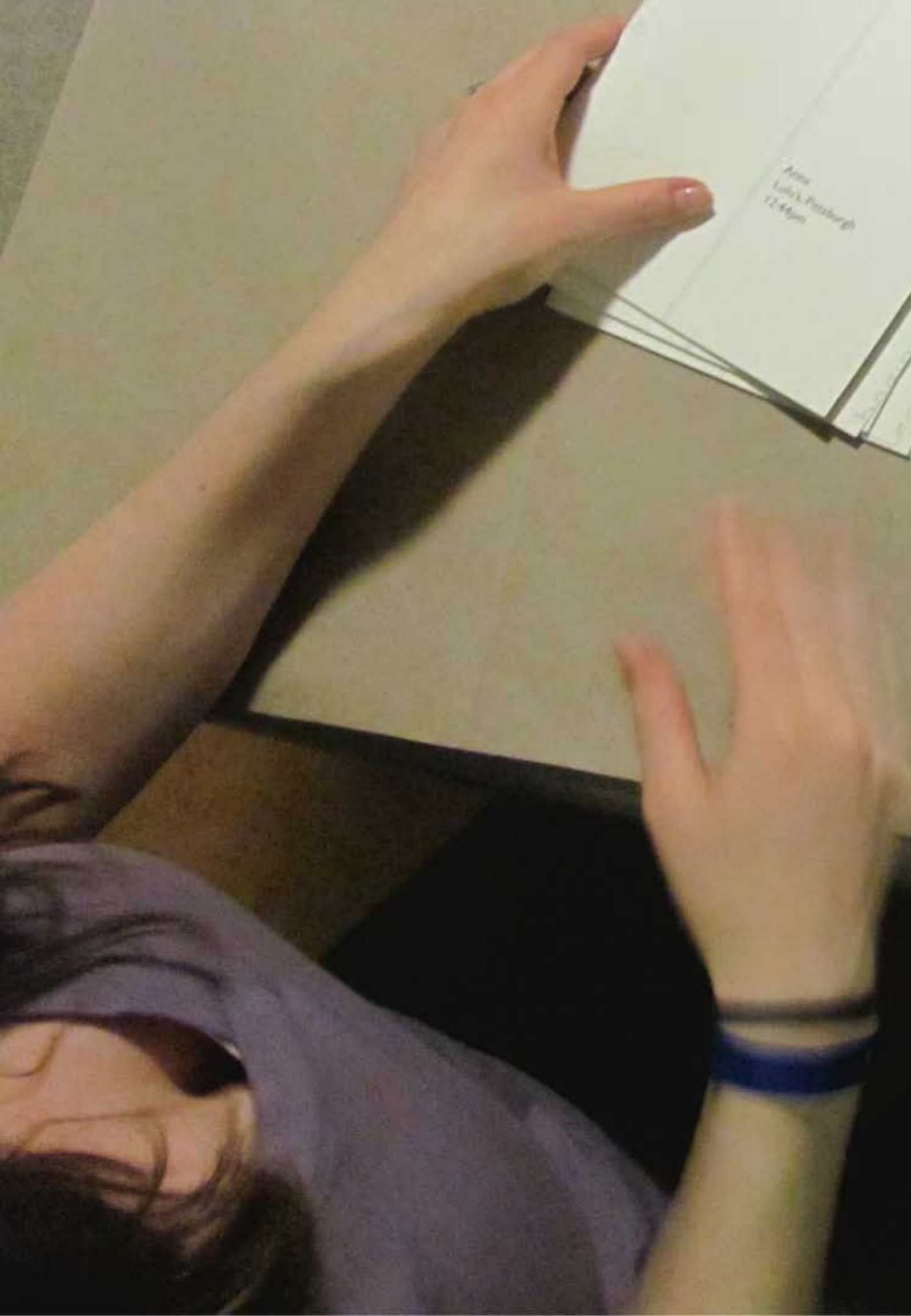


Anna  
Lulu's, Pittsburgh  
12:45pm

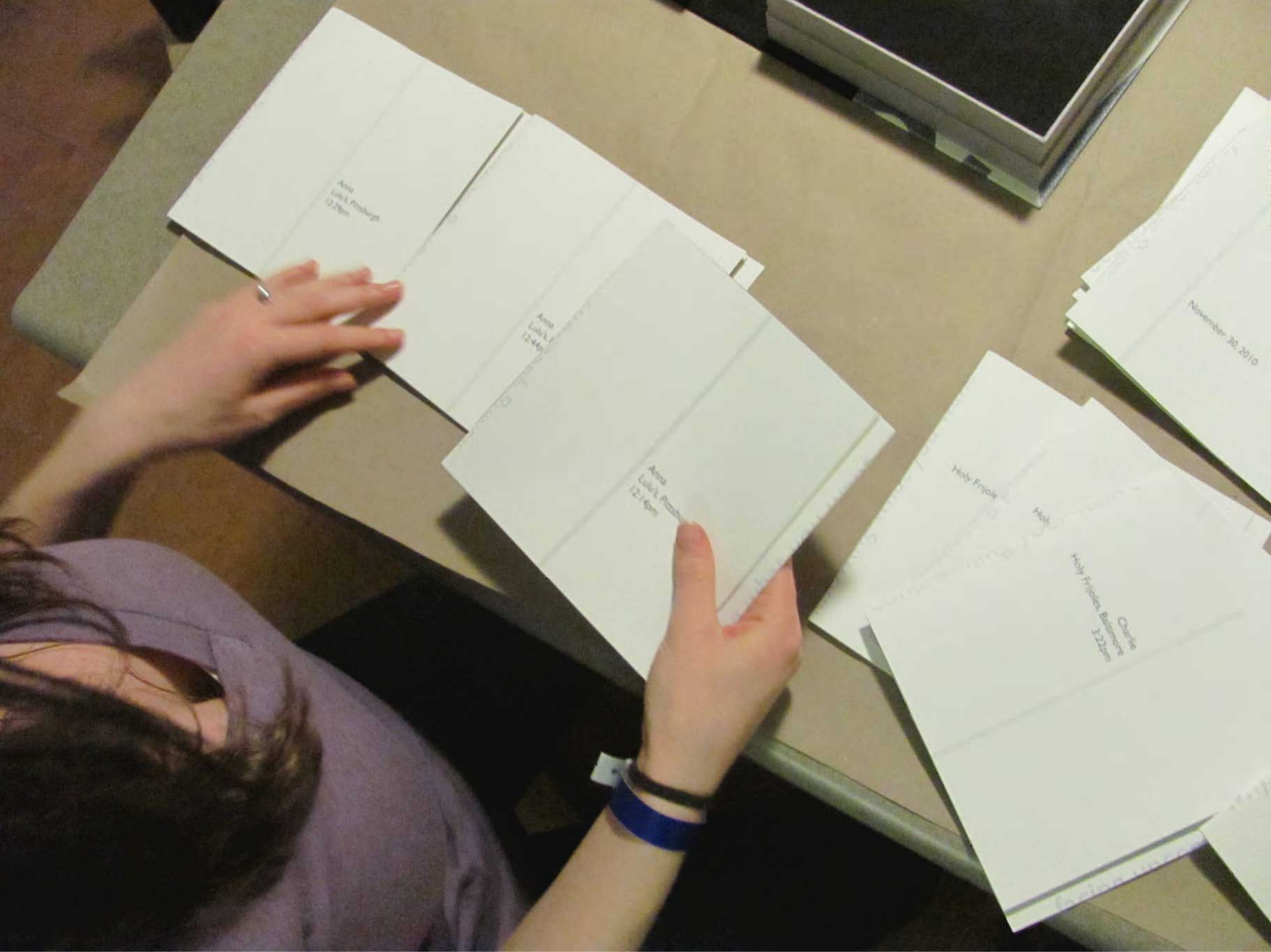
November 30, 2010

Holy  
Holy  
Holy Frijoles, Baltimore  
Charlie  
1:22pm

Rare Bar & Grill, New York  
Matt & Leigh  
10:02am







Ann  
Lake, Pittsburgh  
PA

Ann  
Lake,  
PA

Holy  
Family  
Baltimore,  
MD

Holy Family

Holy

Holy Family, Baltimore  
MD

November 30, 2010













Blue wristband

Ring

January 11, 2011  
Rare Bar & Grill  
New York

January 10, 2011  
Rare Bar & Grill  
New York

January 10, 2011  
Rare Bar & Grill  
New York

February 1, 2011  
Rare Bar & Grill  
New York

January 10, 2011  
Rare Bar & Grill  
New York

January 10, 2011  
Rare Bar & Grill  
New York

February 1, 2011  
Rare Bar & Grill  
New York

February 1, 2011  
Rare Bar & Grill  
New York

Mom & Leigh  
Rare Bar & Grill, New York  
9:37am

February 1, 2011

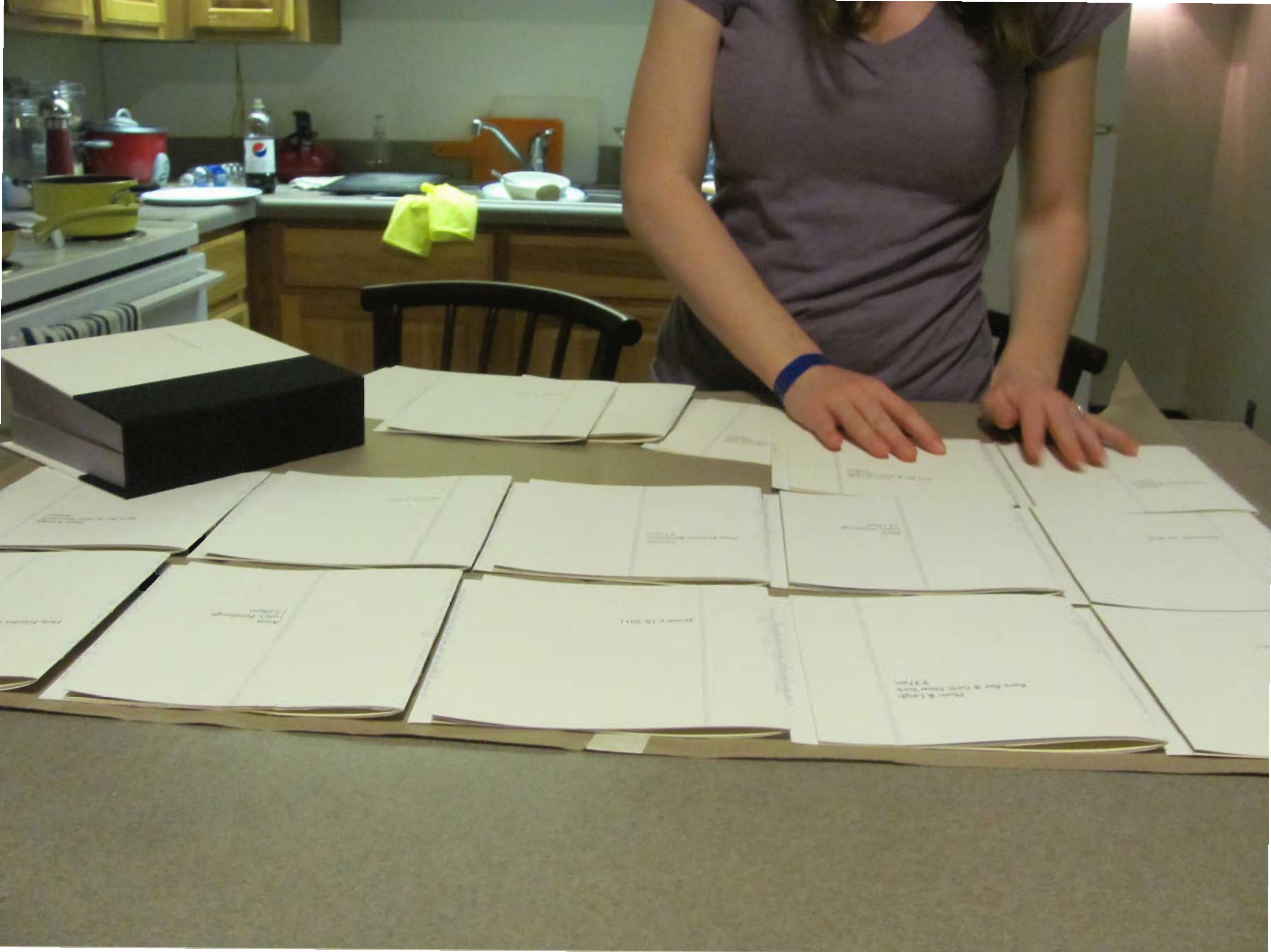
January 10, 2011

February 1, 2011

February 1, 2011

February 1, 2011





Stack of envelopes

Stack of envelopes

Stack of envelopes

Stack of envelopes

Stack of envelopes

Stack of envelopes

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Stack of envelopes















