

?Do I hear happiness in here??

Since we're all basking in the joys of spring following its unofficial Canadian start on Victoria Day this past Monday, I hesitate to write anything that might put a chill in the air, but maybe a bit of brrr! is good for us.

Let's look at the World Happiness Report, a survey done annually since 2002 which, using a series of metrics such as social support, life expectancy, freedom, internal and external perceptions, and the always popular Gross Domestic Product, determines which nations on our fair planet happen to be the happiest.

Back in March, the Report published its yearly findings and Finland, the top-rated country of conviviality, retained its position for the sixth year running. Finland was followed, in order, by Denmark, Iceland, Israel, The Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, Luxembourg and New Zealand.

?The ultimate goal of politics and ethics should be human well-being,? said Jeffrey Sachs in the report. ?The happiness movement shows that wellbeing is not a ?soft' or ?vague' idea, but rather focuses on areas of life of critical importance: material conditions, mental and physical wealth, personal virtues, and good citizenship. We need to turn this wisdom into practical results to achieve more peace, prosperity, trust, civility ? and yes, happiness ? in our societies.?

Given that eight out of ten of the apparent happiest places on Earth are countries that are famed for either their rugged, mountainous terrain, skiing conditions, and thermal activity, I guess the chill in the air is an idea too ?soft? or ?vague? to point out, but it is not lost on me. And I now see the wisdom of television's Rhoda Morgenstern relocating from New York City to Minneapolis, Minnesota, ?where it's cold and I figured I'd keep better.?

But Rhoda and I digress.

Yet, happiness is now being measured beyond national borders.

Recently, much ado was made about a Happiest Cities in Canada report published by the real estate outfit Point2 Homes.

Zeroing in on ?Canada's Largest Cities? (and, by the results, towns and townships as well), the top ten Canadian cities in which to live were deemed to be Caledon, with a ?happiness index? of 67.41; Milton, ON, with 63.79; Halton Hills, ON, with 63.06; Clarington, ON, with 62.50; Burlington with 62.47; Levis, QC with 61.34; Oakville with 61.09; District of Vancouver 60.70; Saguenay, QC with 60.70; and rounding out the top ten is Aurora with a rating of 60.57.

?To determine the level of happiness of the largest 100 cities in Canada, Point2 analyzed 30 happiness-related metrics to create our very own happiness index,? they said. ?From median after-tax income, poverty rate, perceived health, and a sense of belonging to the simplest practical factors like commute time, rainfall and air quality, we split the metrics across four happiness-relevant dimensions: Economy & Real Estate, Location & Demographics; Health & Wellbeing; and Community & Environment.?

Now, as the editor of The Caledon Citizen, serving the top-ranking community, and The Auroran, which serves the tenth-ranked happiest ?city? I read the list, and all its qualifiers, with some degree of pride, but I couldn't help but wonder how other members of the community felt.

After all, one person's measure of happiness is certainly not going to be the same as another.

For some, happiness is simply having a roof over one's head and just enough to make ends meet, rather than their respective commute time or the state of the local real estate market. For others, who have been blessed with wealth and health throughout their lives, happiness will likely be measured from different goalposts.

Pointing out that the 'Cities' survey was based primarily upon census data, Caledon Citizen columnist Sheralyn Roman mused last week, 'If instead a survey was to ask residents directly, you might hear some different responses.'

'The report alludes to the city's green landscapes, wellness retreats and 19th-century architecture as the reason why Caledon's residents are happy,' she shares from the survey, before adding her own perspective: 'Sure, if you measure happiness by proximity to the Millcroft Inn, I am about to get even happier than I already am. If, however, you measure it by my ability to afford regular visits to wellness retreats, that's a whole different story.'

She adds: 'A number of other metrics factored into the study as well including: 'median after-tax income, poverty rate, perceived health, and a sense of belonging, as well as practical factors such as commute time, rainfall, and air quality.' Apparently, these are 'happiness factors.' You may not be surprised to learn that my first question is, 'According to whom?' If my median after-tax income is good and I live in a community with a low poverty rate that must mean that I am relatively wealthy and thankfully not surrounded by those who are not. Ergo, I must be happy in my privileged middle-class existence. (Please, please know that I am being extremely sarcastic here) Is NIMBYism what makes people happy?'

Another benefit of asking the residents directly about their level of happiness living in Aurora or Caledon, or any community for that matter, might also shed some light on how our own markers of 'happy' have changed over the years.

The global pandemic changed our perspective on many things, and I think happiness is probably one of them. As our world shrank, we had to adjust, and I found that I and many of the individuals in my friend circle came out the other side with a newfound appreciation for the smaller things in life, perhaps even the things that were around us all the time.

Rather than material wealth, I am personally seeing an increased drive to instead collect 'experiences.' While that has always been a happiness element, maybe we're making up for lost time on all the experiences and memories we could have had and made during the more challenging years of COVID.

But these experiences have also exacerbated other things, such as mental health challenges, that can sometimes make even the seemingly simplest of the aforementioned goalposts just a little bit further out of reach.

But, again, it all comes down to the individual

So, what are your own happiness factors? How do you measure it? Have they evolved over time? Send your thoughts to brock@lpcmedia.ca.

*With apologies to Annie's Miss Hannigan