

## Happiness is a Choice

Written by 100 strangers at the Meredith Arts Festival

August 23-August 24, 2025

Once upon a time, there was a turtle named Theodore.

He woke up one morning and he knew it was going to be a special day.

It was August 27<sup>th</sup> and his friends were coming over to visit! They were coming from very far away to celebrate Corinne's birthday.

He thought it would be fun to wear his favorite fuzzy green overalls.

"What can I feed my friends for lunch?" he thought.

Looking in his kitchen cabinet, he found a can of peas.

"That just won't do!" Theodore said out loud...and off he went to see what he could find at the market.

His belly rumbled as he walked along.

"First, I think I'll stop at Winn Bagels for a tasty treat. It's not good to shop on an empty stomach". Theodore nodded his head slowly. Yes, this seemed like a good idea!

A girl named Aspen, with pretty braided blonde hair handed him a sweet cup of coffee and a toasted bagel.

At the market, he found pasta and a yummy charcuterie board.

"I need something special for dessert!"

Theodore made one more stop at Tali Milkbeard's shop to get some honey candy.

"Tali is a very talented and clever little gnome" he sighed.

His friends ooh'd and ahh'd over the delicious meal.

"Let's do something to celebrate all of us being together" Theodore suggested.

"What did you have in mind?" asked Corinne, the birthday gal.

“How about an adventure! There are so many things we can do here in New Hampshire...swimming, riding, boating, enjoying the beautiful sunshine...” suggested Theodore.

And off they all went!

On the way to the beach, they came across an outdoor art festival. There were so many beautiful things to look at. It was there that they met Davien, walking his young puppy named Ulla. They had just finished playing fetch with Ulla’s ball and had stopped to look at some pretty flowers

Davien and Ulla loved their new friends and decided to join them in their grand adventure.

As the group continued on their way, they heard soft music being carried across the wind.

“That is lovely” whispered the friends, “where is it coming from?”

As they rounded a corner, they came upon a wedding! The bride was walking down the aisle, and the groom was watching her make her way toward him. Everyone could see how much they loved each other.

“Ohhhh..I hope you dance the night away!” cheered the friends. “Happy life to you!”

The merry little band of friends continued on their way.

As they walked onto the beach, a group of riders splashed into the ocean with their horses! Over the laughter, they heard the riders calling to each other...

“Reba, you silly horse! It’s just a small wave. Look at how Andy stomps right through them.”

“My horse, Dan, loves the water! He would stay here all day if I let him”

“Look at Fifi and Steve...I think they like each other. I suppose even horses can fall in love.”

“Look how much fun they’re all having out there in the water,” said Theodore.

“Let’s join them!”

Theodore and his friends jumped in the water and swam past Dinosaur Rock. They felt so brave.

Davien and Ulla, who were collecting sea glass on the beach, called out excitedly “Look! Out there! I see a whale’s tail...just beyond the calm water.”

Theodore popped his head out of the water to get a better view.

The whale was curious about the floating friends...so he came a little closer. As he did, seventeen fish jumped out of his way.

"Hello new friend!" called Theodore. "Would you like to join us? What is your name?"

"My name is Robert" he said shyly.

Theodore swam toward Robert, while his friends swam back to shore.

"We have to go home, but we'll see you again soon" they called out.

Theodore wasn't ready to go home yet...he was having too much fun on his grand adventure.

"Where should we go now?" Theodore asked Robert. "I can't swim as fast as you can".

"You can ride on my back" suggested Robert.

Theodore tried to climb up, but he was very slippery. With a big splash of his tail, Robert launched Theodore into the air and onto his back.

Robert and Theodore followed a boat for over 200 miles to get to the Bahamas! They wore matching sunglasses and discussed all sorts of things along the way...like food they both liked and places they'd like to journey to.

"Robert, it is getting very warm up here..." Theodore said.

A spout of water shot out of Robert's blowhole, drenching Theodore.

"You are a good friend" Theodore laughed.

After leaving the Bahamas, the friends stumbled upon a small mountain covered in clouds rising up out of the ocean.

They could see a rooster and a cheetah roaming around. "Hello! My name is Juniper! Won't you join us at our camp-camp?" asked the cheetah. "We sleep in hammocks up here...and we always have extra hammocks for friends."

Delighted to meet new friends, Theodore and Robert headed over to the mountain. Just as they got there, a curious lizard named Maple greeted them. She was closely followed by a teeny tiny spider with eight legs.

The sun peaked out from behind the clouds and formed a beautiful rainbow.

"What a wonderful way to end the day" they all sighed.

The next day, Theodore woke to the smell of burning wood.

“It smells a bit like pine...and bacon!”

“I think I could build a home here and be happy” thought Theodore.

“Say, Robert, what do you think about living here with our new friends?”

“The ocean is my home dear friend...I need to swim to be happy” explained Robert.

“Does that mean that you’re leaving soon?”

“I’ll think on it a bit more” sighed Robert.

That night, a glowing white moth showed Theodore and Robert how to navigate with the stars.

The friends looked at each other and realized that they would always be able to find each other.

“Our walks together, and the laughter and the smiles we’ve shared...these are some of the lines that connect us and that will bring us back together” thought Theodore.

“Because of my friends, I have met creativity and I imagined new things I could do”

As Robert headed out to sea, he called back to Theodore...

“I loved you from the moment we met, my friend. I’ll be in the summertime breeze if you need me.”