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Part 1: A Recipe for happiness

CHAPTER 1: Time For A Happy Meal

Close your eyes for a moment, and let me take you away, far, far away, to the small tribal village of Madike, nestled against the foothills of the mighty Lebomobo Mountains in Southern Africa.

It's a small community, numbering just 60 people, representing four proud generations, from the 100-year-old Madike himself, down to Thabo and Enoch, identical twins born just four weeks ago. You scan your surroundings and your eyes take in a scattering of primitive mud and thatch huts, arranged around a communal open-air area, in a fashion that appears random but each position is by design.

As the cooking fires crackle, spit and hiss, the smell of burning stinkhout drifts towards the tribal members in the fields, an early indication that it's soon mealtime.

The women sing as they begin preparing the evening meal, a happy, soulful enchanting sound that has everybody winding down, an invitation to relax body and soul at the end of a day's toil. Punctuating this addictive rendition are the squeals of laughter of young children running around, and playing with simple, homemade toys.

There is an air of anticipation, as everyone gathers in the central courtyard. Stories are going to be told, folklore handed down, and there will be much laughter, and perhaps even some dancing. The agenda is quite flexible, in fact, there isn't one.

The bond of connection runs throughout the village, engulfing immediate and extended family. Everyone belongs, and everyone is valued, loved and cared for.

There is lightness, dare I say happiness, as the cast iron surface of the steaming pots radiate the heat of the communal fire, offering up smells of a nourishing feast to come. Curious members of the tribe sneak closer to have a peek, but MaMa Themba playfully admonishes them and tells them to wait their turn, it will soon be time.

Happiness seems to be all around, as the community gathers around the pot. In the words of the Beatles;

***“Limitless undying love
Which shines around me like a million stars
It calls me on and on across the Universe”***

Let me draw you even closer to the steaming pot, a metaphor for this happy society.

I wonder what’s in the recipe.

How is this pot of communal happiness constructed in a way that nourishes the fabric of this community on a daily basis?

In this first part of the book, I share my observations of the three core ingredients that determine why happiness just seems to be a ‘given’ with those who are perceived to have the least. In Part 2, I suggest a few spices of my own, as not everyone has identical tastes or needs, and in Part 3 we’ll take a brief look at how the core ingredients apply to the ‘corporate’ kitchens that so many of us work in daily.

I have gone in search of expert advice when it comes to this time-honoured recipe, and have asked my ‘BIG question’ of hundreds of people, as I tested my ingredients against theirs. Most have agreed that mine is a good recipe.

There are however, a few sceptics who have denounced the contents of the recipe, and reply to my questions with opinions such as, they are happy because:

- They don’t know any better (Ignorance is bliss)
- Wait until they discover money and commodities, that’ll change them
- They’re living in a simple world

To my sceptics, I respect your right to your opinions, but it would be remiss of me not to offer a gentle challenge to consider that:

- Perhaps they’re not ignorant, but have in many ways looked at their circumstances and chosen their attitude, and perhaps in this regard we’re possibly the ignorant ones
- I know many who leave the tribe, discover money and jobs, and send the money home, while working away from the village in trying conditions. Often, the smiles and happiness are still with them as they work, knowing that they have a purpose
- How many times haven’t we wished that our world was a little simpler?

The recipe

What follows in this book is what I have observed in my many travels, which was confirmed as I dipped my spoon in Mama Themba's pot, savouring the taste on my palate and searching for the ingredients that have combined to create this aromatic and nourishing sensation.

I look over to her and eagerly volunteer my suggestions of what I think the core ingredients are.

Mama Themba's face lights up in a broad smile, her eyes sparkle and she hugs me in the warm embrace that only grandmothers can give.

Well done Mister Pete, you got it right first time! Perhaps when you return to your world they will create television shows that relate to cooking!