

# How I Chose To Be Happy: An Autobiography

Tom G. Stevens PhD

## Introduction

During Summer, 1958 when I was 16 years old I decided to try an experiment to make happiness for myself and others the top goal in my life. One of my realizations was that finding the right person and having a happy marriage was one of the best ways to have a happy life (a happy wife does help create a happy life). At the time I wondered how long I would even remember making that commitment. It has led me to live a life filled with happiness from then until now in 2026 at age 84 for which I am so grateful. To crystallize my thoughts then I wrote a list of guidelines for myself entitled, “How To Be Happy” (see references).

This decision changed my life and career. It influenced me to become first a United Methodist Minister (briefly), then later a psychologist/professor at California State University, Long Beach for 31 years until 2004. Before CSULB I received a BA in Letters from the University of Oklahoma, MTh degree from Claremont in 1968, Served as a United Methodist Minister in Long Beach for a year, got my PhD in Psychology at the University of Hawaii, and taught Psychology at Honolulu Community College (HCC) and Whittier College (see my Vita).

During my formal career I enjoyed my psychological counseling with students and others, my workshops and classes, my research and writing, my program and class development, and the many other opportunities I had to learn and serve the university and the world. I believe that my book *You Can Choose To Be Happy: “Rise Above” Anxiety, Anger, and Depression* (1998, 2010) and its associated website are my best achievements. They allowed me to summarize what I considered to be the key ideas about life and happiness that I had learned through both my career and personal life. Since retirement I continued to work on my happiness research using my questionnaire, the Success and Happiness Attributes Questionnaire (SHAQ), publish my revised book, and develop my Cognitive Systems Theory.

I have also had a wonderful personal life. I met Jane Ellen Wotring in 1961 and we were married in 1964. We enjoyed our life in Norman, Claremont, Pomona, Hawaii, and Huntington Beach. We traveled a lot exploring CA and the west coast, crossing the U.S., and going to Europe. We made lots of great friends. During our 18 years of marriage we moved 10 times because of all our life changes. In Hawaii I began one of my major life interests--tennis. My friend David Cleveland, a fellow HCC teacher, got me on the tennis court, and we both played tennis 1-3 times/week for the next 50 years. It was one of the best parts of my life (and health).

The marriage to Jane ended in 1982. Shortly after leaving Jane, I found the love of my life in the woman who fulfilled the dreams I had at age 16, Sherry Suzanne Bene’ Stevens (formerly Snyder). She has two children, Tracie and Spencer. We moved in together in 1986, and lived in Bixby Village, Long Beach, across from CSULB for 17 ½ years. Sherry was a Counseling Intern when we met, and she went on to get her MFT degree and license, and ultimately a job similar to mine at Cal State, Fullerton in 1989. We both retired in 2004. We sold our Bixby home and moved to Palm Desert in June, 2004. We love living in our wonderful home in Monterey Country Club (MCC). We overlook a golf course and are surrounded by beautiful mountains. We have 1250 homes in MCC and it is like a small town. We are close to wonderful shopping, restaurants, and many activities. During the “season” there are many special activities that draw people from far and wide. We can ride our bikes to many fun and beautiful places nearby or ride them around in our beautiful development filled with palm trees, greenery, ponds, and friendly people. We also swim during the hot weather at the local pool across the street in our cul-de-sac.

One of my life’s dreams was to travel a lot—especially to Europe. After more than 24 trips to Europe, I can say that dream has been met. Sherry and I have been to what we consider many of the most charming, romantic, and interesting places to visit in Europe, and are continuing to go as long as possible.

We love life and love being healthy! We do our best to stay healthy by exercising almost every day, eating healthy, and taking about 50 supplements/day that we have researched and used for many years. Our goal is to live to be healthy and happy at 100 (or more). Our friend John Curran who lived to be 108 was an inspiration.

For more complete descriptions of my/our lives read my Christmas letters from 1968 to present (except 4 years when I didn’t write one). The letters were a brief summary of the events of each year, and provide an abbreviated autobiography of my life. My Professional life is best summarized in my Curriculum Vitae. I also wrote a brief autobiography summarizing my birth through college at the University of Oklahoma. See the references below.

## **MY Top Belief-Value Pillars: (HITL E)**

My Five Pillars are my anachronym for my TOP VALUES to live by, and the values I think would make the best possible world if all people would live by. They are:

### **MY FIVE PRIMARY BELIEF-VALUE PILLARS (HITL E)**

**H: HAPPINESS and Health for all**

**I: INTEGRITY with good Self-Management**

**T: TRUTH, Knowledge, and Honesty**

**L: LOVE, Gratitude, Empathy, Caring, Kindness, Giving for all**

**E: ENVIRONMENT Care and good management of both Our Physical and Social Environments**

### **SECONDARY BELIEFS-VALUES**

**Expectations: Hope and work for the best, be prepared for the worst, plan for all possibilities, accept any outcome.**

**1 Self-development, Skill building, Be the best you can be**

**2 Impact, Contribution, Productivity, Creativity**

**3 Beauty, Play, Fun, Art, Music, Sports, Non harmful humor**

**4 Balance across life areas**

**5 Kindness, Civility**

**6 Reason, Science, Technology**

**7 Good governance and organizational structure reflecting pillars for all**

## **References and More Detail**

This has only been a brief introduction to my life. I have written elsewhere about my philosophy and thinking, my psychological ideas, my early life, and I have written yearly Christmas letters which were actually summaries of some of the main events of each year since 1968 (except for 1971, 73). My book and writings are on my website at [www.csulb.edu/~tstevens](http://www.csulb.edu/~tstevens), on the Academia.edu and ResearchGate.net websites, and my book is on books.google.com (free to read) and Amazon.com. In addition the website **Archive.net** made exact copies of my website every few years, and they are permanently available. Search for my URL: [www.csulb.edu/~tstevens](http://www.csulb.edu/~tstevens) and it should always be there even after I am no longer here and my CSULB website is gone. Following is a list of these references and/or actual copies.

### **Biographical References**

**Tom G. Stevens Autobiography from 1942 (birth) To 1969**

**NOTE: These Christmas letters are a summary of each year's events**

**1967-81 Tom and Jane Christmas Letters**

**1982-2002 Tom and Sherry Christmas Letters**

**2003-2016 Tom and Sherry Christmas Letters**

**2017-Present Tom and Sherry Christmas Letters**

**2002-Present Christmas Photos**

## **Tom G. Stevens PhD Curriculum Vitae**

### **Toms Professional/Career**

**NOTE: Tom's Book and most of Tom's Papers can be downloaded from the following Websites:**

**Tom's website: [www.csulb.edu/~tstevens](http://www.csulb.edu/~tstevens); Academia.edu; ResearchGate.net; books.google.com (read book free);  
archive.org; amazon.com (Kindle or paper for sale)**

## **Tom G Stevens PhD Curriculum Vitae**

### **Sherry Professional/Career (To Be Added Later)**

## **Sherry's Curriculum Vitae**

# Contents

## Tom's Biographical References

1. How To Be Happy Guidelines 1958 by Tom Stevens
2. Tom G. Stevens Autobiography Time Line To 1969
3. Tom G. Stevens Homes 1942-present
4. Tom G. Stevens PhD Curriculum Vitae 2012
5. Tom and Sherry Stevens Misc Itineraries
6. Tom Stevens and Jane Stevens Year Summary Christmas Letters 1968-1981
7. Tom and Sherry Stevens Year Summary Christmas Letters 1982-present (except 1971, 1973)
8. You Can Choose To Be Happy: "Rise Above" Anxiety, Anger, and Depression (with Research Results) 2010 can be found on Amazon.com; FREE on Tom's website, Books.Google.com. Also on Academia.com, and ResearchGate.net search under Tom's name and book is part of larger article on How To Be Happy.

