THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
FALK AUDITORIUM

THE HAPPINESS CURVE: WHY LIFE GETS BETTER AFTER 50

Washington, D.C.

Monday, April 30, 2018

DAVID BROOKS, Moderator
Columnist
The New York Times

JONATHAN RAUCH
Senior Fellow, Governance Studies, The Brookings Institution
Author, The Happiness Curve: Why Life Gets Better After 50

BARBARA BRADLEY HAGERTY
Author, Life Reimagined: The Science, Art, and Opportunity of Midlife

* * * * *

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. RAUCH: Hi, everyone. So many friends here today. I am introducing us all before we turn it over to our real moderator today, David Brooks. It's wonderful to see so many of you here today, so many old friends and some new friends. And an incredible honor to have a book launch at Brookings, where I've been affiliated now for 22 years, which is a very long time. Special thanks to Darryl West, vice president of the Governance Studies division, who has made this possible, and especially the wine and refreshment which we'll all enjoy afterwards. And, above, all thanks to the two of you. I just can't imagine two better people to talk with about happiness in America.

You know these people. To my left, Barbara Bradley Hagerty, who had a long career at NPR, was recently named a contributing editor of Atlantic, and is the author of this wonderful book. I can't recommend it too highly, especially to someone who is reinventing in middle age. It's called "Life Reimagined: The Science, Art, and Opportunity of Midlife", emphasis on the word art, which is really interesting. Maybe we'll talk about that, the art of getting this right.

And David Brooks, who needs no introduction in Washington. He's of course a columnist for the New York Times, the author of many books, most recently "The Road to Character", in 2015, and I would argue the country's most interesting and prominent author on issues around character and civic culture.

I'm kicking it off before turning it over to David just because I want to show you a few images to get the conversation started. We're going to kind of think of this as a sort of book club experience. This isn't meant to be a formal presentation, but just to give you a sense of the background of this book and what's

maybe a little bit interesting about it.

In a way, the story of this book begins in around 1842. These are four images that are situated two miles from here in the National Gallery of Art. I first saw them when I was 19 years old. They're a quadriptych called "The Voyage of Life", by the great American landscape artist, Thomas Cole. They are magnificent paintings. Here's how they look today, just two of them. They have a room to themselves. They are masterpieces of iconography and draftsmanship. And I still remember, actually, the day when I first encountered. I was 19. And they also formed the light motif of my book because it turns out that they are 170 years, approximately, a head of their time. They get the science right about life.

Here is the first painting. It's the one that's not particularly relevant today. It's called "Childhood". You can see a baby is being born, coming out of the darkness of the womb onto the river of life. But this river isn't just any river, this river is time. One way you can see that -- I'm not sure if it's clear here -- but the prow of the boat, the figurehead is holding an hourglass. The guardian angel is out of sight of the child who does not know that he is being monitored and watched over this way. So now the three later paintings become especially relevant. I saw this painting, it's called "Youth", when I was the same age as the young man in the boat. As you can see, the guardian angel is now offshore, farther away, farther out of sight. The youth is reaching ambitiously toward the castle in the sky, his dreams of future glory, and as it turns out, future happiness. Part of the iconography here that's really interesting -- I don't know if you can see this, but over here where the river bends you see a dirt road. It's the road that leads to the castle in the sky, but that's the road not taken. From our elevated view we can see the river is going to

turn. The young man doesn't see this, but the river is going to turn away from the castle in the sky and toward rapids. And here's midlife, (laughter), manhood. So when I was 20 seeing these pictures I assumed there was no way my life would look like this because things would go well and I would be happy about it.

You can see here that the man, now in the prime of life, the boat -- the tiller is now missing, so he's lost his steering (laughter), he's in rapids, he is supplicating the heavens. Again, from our position, we can see what he cannot, which is through a gap in the rocks we can see there are calm waters ahead, but he doesn't know that and has no way to know that.

So when I was in my 40s I began entering these psychological rapids, I became dissatisfied, restless, obsessed with why I was wasting my life. I thought it would be temporary, but it got worse. And by the age of 45 I knew I was in trouble when I won the biggest award for magazine journalism out there and that gave me a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment for approximately 10 days. (Laughter) And then these inner voices, these harpies -- you can't really see it, but you can see them in the background there above; they look like clouds, but they're in fact blue-green demons -- began harassing at me again with the worthlessness of my life. And I became restless and dissatisfied and almost made some serious mistakes.

This is the last painting of the four, "Old Age". Now, finally, the voyager can see the guardian angel that's ushering him up to the peace of the higher realm and the voyage is now smooth and soft.

So, let's fast forward 160 years to this image. This is generated by Carol Graham of Brookings, who I hope is here today, and Milena Nikolova. There

she is in the back. There's a whole chapter about her. She is a pioneer and economist on study of happiness and age. A very important figure in the book and in my life. Thank you, Carol.

This is what researchers call the U-shaped "happiness curve". It shows happiness for very large population, survey population, by age. Now, this is tricky. This is not the happiness of any individual person, nor is it the average happiness of a population. This is what happens when you take a large sample of people all over the United States and you take out everything that is not age, income, education, employment, family, marriage. You take out everything you can take out. It turns out that time itself has an independent effect on how happy you are. It's not overwhelming, it's never the only thing going on, it's like an undercurrent in the river. It doesn't establish where you're going to wind up or what your journey will be like. That depends on your vessel and how hard you steer and how hard you want to get there. But it is a constant undercurrent. And what it's telling you is that it's making it harder to be satisfied with life in midlife than at either end. It's not just the United States, this is the world. Same type of curve. You see it's lower because other places tend to be less happy than America. There are lots of country comparisons.

So people ask all the time, so what's going on here. Is that because, you know, of the culture, the economy, whatever. Well, we factor those things out, but this really got my attention and got me thinking I needed to write about it and take it seriously, partly because it explained what happened to me, but partly because of this. This is the happiness curve for chimps and orangutans. (Laughter) Same pattern. What you see here today, the science of this is

interesting. We're not really here to talk science, but we can talk about it if you guys want to, what's going on. But what's interesting here about the images that you've seen, is what you see here of course are two images, two graphic representations of exactly the same thing, except Thomas Cole got there 160 years earlier

What does all this mean? And we'll talk about it a bit, but just a couple of things I want to say to maybe start the conversation. The first is that the way we think about aging and happiness is pretty much completely upside down. We think of midlife as a time of mastery, when we ought to be on top of things, and are happiest. It's a time of vulnerability. Meanwhile, old age is not a time of misery and unhappiness. Time continues to help you be happy, other things being equal, until your life ends. This graph, from Philip Jastay, a well-known psychiatrist, shows one line, a declining line, the number of people who are free of disability. And as they age, of course, fewer and fewer are free of disability, they're dealing with frailty. The other line shows successful aging, which is very similar to satisfaction with life. When Jastay saw this, he found it so surprising he went back and did a much bigger study, confirmed that other people, who confirmed it, people kept getting happier, even as they became more frail. But we don't know this. Society sends a very different message and a very counterproductive message.

If you go to Google and you Google midlife crisis this is what comes up. (Laughter) I mean, try it yourself. You can see the iconography here is mostly male, though, by the way, there's no gender difference in the happiness curve. It's been looked for everywhere, it comes up nowhere. But the iconography is mostly gendered, it's mostly male, it's the guy with the motorcycle, the guy with the inappropriate females, the guy who's a pistol to the head of a bunny. The female

iconography is oh, my god, I've got wrinkles, midlife crisis. And, of course, the red sports car (laughter), which has been the great icon, the signifier of midlife. It's not always red, sometimes it's yellow (laughter), but there you are.

That kind of concept in iconography is completely backwards. There's nothing abnormal or critical or dangerous or wrong or pathological about having trouble feeling happy in midlife, we're wired for it. And viewing it as a crisis, something that's urgent or dangerous, that we should be worried about, jut makes it all the harder, because it isolates people. I did a dozens of interviews for the book, you'll find a lot of it is conversations with people, and again and again I heard these stories of isolation. People don't even tell their spouse that they're having these issues because their life is great, they don't feel justified, they feel like they'll be whiny, and they also feel like they'll set off alarms. You know, are you going to quit your job and give up the marriage. It's the wrong way to think about it. This is a natural transition in life, in some ways akin to adolescence, and we need to view it as natural, normal, healthy, bring it out of the closet and help people, support people through it.

So there you are. And now over to our real moderator, David Brooks. (Laughter) (Applause)

MR. BROOKS: Thank you. So what are you driving? (Laughter)

MR. RAUCH: A 2001 Toyota Echo.

MR. BROOKS: Oh, wow. That's the saddest thing I've ever heard. (Laughter)

MR. RAUCH: Not as sad as I turned 58 on Thursday. Oh, it's David's anniversary by the way, first wedding anniversary. (Applause)

MR. BROOKS: I may not see a second having been here, but. So, anyway, thank you, Jonathan, thank you Barb. I'm going to turn it over to Barb. It's a pleasure for me to be here. Jonathan, Thomas Cole's fifth portrait there was if -- it's called Apotheosis in Ecstasy, which is a panel at the Brookings Institution on monetary policy. (Laughter) But, Barb, you wrote a book going over some of the same material in a different way, very different way.

MS. HAGERTY: Right.

MR. BROOKS: I remember when I read your book, and I remember you saying that midlife crisis was a myth.

MS. HAGERTY: Mm-hmm.

MR. BROOKS: So what do you think?

MS. HAGERTY: Well, I think it is a myth. And I think Jonathan's book is terrific, and I think everyone really should buy it. Midlife crisis, as he points out, we've seen the same science, it is actually a myth.

In terms of the happiness curve, I was really interested to see the science shows that people in midlife do something automatically but they can also do it intentionally. What they do is kind of pivot, they shift away from externals, you know, the larger car, more success at work, that kind of thing, toward two things -- Laura Carstensen at Stanford has shown this -- they focus on other people and a purpose or cause that gives them meaning and joy. And, for me, learning about the purpose was actually the big insight for my book. It turns out that purpose in life, if you have a reason to get up in the morning, that that actually is fundamental to making you extremely happy in the second half of life.

And as I kind of read through the science, I realized that you can kind

of divide it into two things. You can divide it into a little purpose and a big purpose. So the little purpose, and something I thought about when I met a woman named Cathy Utzschneider at Boston College. Cathy trains midlife elite athletes and she has this great analogy. She says, you know, when you're young there are a lot of milestones, you graduate from high school, you graduate from college, you may get married, begin having a family, launch your career. It's just one thing after another. But midlife, midlife is like one long run on sentence, right. (Laughter) There are no periods or commas or semi colons to kind of break up the monotony of responsibility. And her view is that what you need to do in midlife is to have little purposes, little goals. So it can be something like training for a marathon, something untethered to your normal responsibilities. It could be learning Spanish, it could be picking up the guitar after 20 years. For me it was cycling, trying to compete in the senior Olympics. So that will give you an enormous amount of joy, just challenges to punctuate your life and give it some joy and meaning.

And then you have the kind of the big purpose. And that one is harder and it takes a lot of thought, but that is beginning to think -- well, let me just tell you, when I was writing my book, I was thinking about the fact that I've been a write for, gosh, 35 years now, and it's absolutely true, I will never be as elegant or successful a writer as either of these two men here. They are terrific. So when you realize that you go, okay, I'm in my mid-50s and I may not win a Pulitzer. So what do you do about that? This was a conversation I had. And what I realized is instead of kind of scrambling for more accolades and trying to get more prizes and things like that, I had to shift to something that had intrinsic meaning in my career, that it didn't matter if I got accolades. And so I begin to kind of pivot in my career to

think about what can I do that I'm uniquely good at doing that is meaningful and that every day I feel good about it, regardless of whether anyone notices or not. It's not giving up. I have a lot of energy, I'm going to keep writing as long as I can, but it was that insight that helped me enormously shift my career in a way that gave me kind of great joy and a purpose and gave me a reason to get up in the morning.

MR. BROOKS: Okay. Let me give one reaction, and I'm going to push a bit against the whole idea of happiness research. I hesitate to do it with Carol in the room, but just for the sake of discussion.

So I wrote a book about 10 years ago called "The Social Animal", which had early bits of some of the research as far as I understood it. And I confess I've gotten a little letdown by the whole field. And I do it because a lot of the research is based on asking people are you happy, and asking in a number of ways, are you happy at the moment, and is your whole life project going well. And if you ask that question of Donald Trump, I feel highly confident he would say it's going awesomely. (Laughter) But if you ask that question of Abraham Lincoln, maybe a few more ups and downs. And then I think of pick out any novel. If you ask that question of -- my favorite novel is Anna Karenina -- if you as the question of Karenin, Anna's husband, who is a total schmuck, he would probably give himself very high scores. If you asked it of Levin, who is the hero and a really great man in the novel, up and down. And so, do I really want to go by the measure that Donald Trump rates himself very highly on or would I rather have Abraham Lincoln and be unhappy?

And it seems to me, and this is not an original thought to me, that there are different qualities of happiness. And if you evade the qualitative question

then you're evading the thing. And to me if you could rate those qualities you could say, well, there's material happiness, having a nice car, there's ego happiness, winning success, there's intellectual happiness of learning things and getting a greater understanding of the world, there's generative happiness, giving back to society, there's Eros, romantic happiness, which is the fusion of one's soul with another, one heart with another, and then there's transcendent happiness, which is a feeling of oneness with creation and with truth and beauty and justice. And Plato would say our purpose in life is to climb from one lower desire to the higher desires. And that seems to me what our actual purpose is. And it's not that happiness research is irrelevant to that quest, but it seems to me at best orthogonal and not addressing the core process of our lives, which is getting higher and more virtuous desire.

And so, again, I'm pushing this argument a little harder than I actually believe, but I think if you pushed it as far as you could say, happiness research is an attempt to find an amoral way to define how well your life is going, and that's probably not possible.

MR. RAUCH: Interesting. When I talked to happiness researchers, or at least the more sophisticated ones, they're aware of this and they draw a distinction, you know, there are these three types of happiness that they measure. One is, to get in the science here, but it's relevant, so I'll put it out there, one is affective. And that's how good do you feel today. And that's answered with questions like how often did you smile yesterday. And then you've got something called evaluative happiness, and that's very different. And that gets much closer to the Aristotelian idea of happiness, and that's how do you evaluate your life as a

whole. That's life satisfaction. And it turns out to be very different from mood.

In my 40s I had a contentment disorder, but not a mood disorder. I wasn't particularly depressed, but I felt like my life wasn't fulfilling in some way, that there was some kind of striving that I hadn't reached. And the problem was that became a self feeding downward spiral. It was becoming an obstacle to am I feeling grateful for the things that I felt I should be grateful for, a great relationship, an amazing career, and all those other things. So I felt the happiness curve as in a way fighting my attempt to be virtuous by being grateful for what people around me had done for me.

And also there's another concept of happiness, which I don't really understand, it's called eudaimonic. And it's even closer to what you talk about, and that's the big question of purpose in life. So researchers understand this and the kind of happiness that you see with the U curve is in fact evaluative. And it's largely Aristotelian. I talked to an economist, a famous guy, John Helliwell, who studies this. He calls himself Aristotle's research assistant because it turns out the things that help elevate life satisfaction look a lot like the things that the ancients, both in the West and the East, valued, caring for others, compassion, giving back, close trust connections, the daily virtues of life, the things that make up what you call character.

So, yeah, I'd say you're pushing a bit too hard and actually the science here can do more to help you than you might realize.

MS. HAGERTY: I was going to bring up Aristotle as well. I mean Carol Ryff, who is a researcher at the University of Wisconsin, says that happiness is overrated. And she's getting to your point, which is that short-term hedonic

happiness doesn't do you a lot of good in the long-term, but eudaimonia, the kind of happiness which comes from long-term goals, raising good kids, it often involved deferred gratification, it doesn't make you happy in the moment, but it makes you happy over the long-term, because you can look back with satisfaction and say all of that was worth it.

And what I would say is, if we could switch out the word, you know -- if we could use the word meaning rather than happiness, I think midlife is a very meaningful time of life. Yes, it's freighted with responsibilities, but it is also -- those responsibilities are powerful and meaningful, about your kids, about taking care of your parents, doing the right thing, you know, working in a job that gives meaning, volunteering. All of these things I think in the long-term are very satisfying.

And so I think happiness is probably -- I mean it is really terrific for a catch all and it's a great word for a title of a book, but you are talking about something much deeper than happiness, you're talking about eudaimonia, you're talking about these longer-term qualities.

MR. RAUCH: Yeah. And people I talked to and interviewed understood the distinction very well. It's actually very intuitive. People have no problem when surveyed or when you talk to them, rating their life satisfaction very differently from their mood.

MR. BROOKS: What about does the concept of happiness imply that we do things in order to be happy? And so, for example, we're all proponents of marriage up here, when you get married do you think well, I'll marry this person because this person will make me happy. And I'm suspicious of that because if that's why you went into it, as soon as you stop being happy you'll stop being

married. (Laughter) And so is happiness really more thought of as a byproduct of a life oriented toward something else?

MS. HAGERTY: That's a great question. Would you like to go with that one? (Laughter)

MR. RAUCH: Yeah. I mean the sages say, at least in this bigger sense of happiness, a life well lived, fulfillment, the worst way to get that is by aiming for happiness. You aim at other things. And that's right. But here's where kind of what's going on in the brain behind the U curve is interesting. We've got now psychology on this, brain science, a lot of data from economics, and what they seem to show is that the things that we chase in order to make ourselves happy, first they are kind of set by our animal brain, by our lizard brain. And if you think you're going to change that by going to university and reading Plato, probably not. And early in life we tend to chase status and achievement. We try to put in the bank all of the connections that we can and the degrees, and we try to get a lot of altitude, and we compare ourselves with others, we're competitive, we're ambitious. And that, of course, is what Thomas Cole is showing you.

And then we expect if we succeed at these things, well then of course we'll be happy. And that's what I expected. And then I succeeded at those things and they didn't make me happy. I felt less happy, which goes to your point. Meanwhile, in the background, ticking along, what time is doing -- you can even see this is brain scans -- is it's shifting our priorities away from the rat race, the competition, and toward connection, compassion, the kinds of things -- the small joys in life that turn out to be not so small, you know, like being there to babysit for the neighbors when they have an emergency, the sense of community, the hobbies

that can develop into social networks. It's not only what you said, Barb, which is that we can do these things to become happier, it's easier to get happy, to appreciate them as you get older. And this has been shown in the brain. Older people are more positive in outlook, they're less prone to regret, they're better at equanimity, at dealing will with extremes of emotion, they're good at navigating interpersonal relationships.

So we transition toward this later stage where we tend to value more the things in life that make us happier.

MS. HAGERTY: It's a really good question. I guess what I would agree with, sometimes I think of happiness as being a lure to get you to do something that you should do anyway. I mean I was very happy when I got married to my husband. And, of course, you know, you begin having bumps in the road, right. But it's that core happiness, that remembrance of the kind of hedonistic happiness that kept me going until I could develop a longer-term kind of happiness, a greater commitment, something that was more sacrificial. And, I don't know, maybe we're not -- maybe it's just kind of we aren't automatically sacrificial at the outset, but we become that way I think.

And I think your point about what I love to realize is that if you're unhappy right now if you're middle aged, just wait, because your brain actually will make you happier. I mean neurologically what happens is you begin to process things differently, you begin to focus on the positive, you become a glass half full not half empty person. It actually neurologically happens. You begin to kind of shift to those things that matter and perhaps might be more in your control, like the tenor of your relationships or the meaning and purpose in your life. The stuff that you

invest in that's worthwhile or not. And we automatically begin to do that.

And so what I think, what I always remember if I'm having a bad is, you know what, it's going to get better, it will be better tomorrow. It will just be better until I'm like 80. Isn't that great news?

MR. RAUCH: Yeah, well, on this point, for me one of the formative interviews in the book -- did I mention the book? (Laughter) Did I mention that it will be available here for buying and signing? One of the formative interviews was a friend in her mid-50s who had been around this curve and described it to me. And she said it's not that my life has changed, I do the same things I always did, but they feel different. There was an added element of richness as she began to feel more returns from taking care of her daughter, going to church, things which when she was younger didn't seem as significant. And that's gradually true in my case. I kind of turned this corner when I was 50. I mean, please, this is a secret from my publisher, so don't let the word get out of this room, but 20 years ago I thought being on the *New York Times* bestseller list would be like the best thing ever and a great achievement. And now it would be nice, but just to have a good book out there that's decent and helped some people, and is the best work I can possibly do, it feels like a contribution, that seems way more important. I don't know, you're a *New York Times* columnist. Is that like always great? (Laughter)

MR. BROOKS: Actually never great. Let me ask you -- I'm tempted to ask two questions, so I'm going to ask them both together -- the first is if we had a 21 year old here, can you short circuit this whole deal? Like can you say, you know, don't worry about it, or are we doomed to -- I always thought that the bottoming out at age 47 was mostly related to having teenage children, but you've taught me it's

more. (Laughter) But the second thing, and both your books actually filled me with this sentiment -- I also work at a show called the NewsHour on PBS -- and when you --

MR. RAUCH: I've heard of it.

MR. BROOKS: -- work on that show you get familiar with an older demographic. My joke is that if a 93 year old lady walks up to me in the airport, I know what she's going to say, I don't watch you show but my mother loves it. (Laughter) But one of the things that both your books encouraged me about was that there is sort of a -- because of increased longevity, increased energy, there is sort of another phase of life, and that there's a new phase of life sort of in yours 20s. People spend the decade -- because they have a long time before they get married -- just sort of wandering while their parents go crazy. But then 65 to maybe 80 you've got this people, this second career thing. I think of it as a second mountain. People, oh, I have this mountain to climb in my life, but they realize they've got another mountain. And it encouraged me that the midlife point, when you've got enough -- you can see the end but it's still pretty far away and you've got a lot of energy, and hopefully you've got your identity together, is actually the moment to take the big risk in life and to make the big leap in life.

And you both described this, what I think of as a surge, that starts in midlife, when you really swing for the home run. So if you could just talk about that.

MR. RAUCH: So did you know, maybe Barbara, you'd be better on the reinvention, but it's interesting, people don't know this but productivity of elder people is just as high as younger people and they make others around them more productive. People in their 50s and beyond do more startups than people in their

20s and 30s. This is actually a generative time. And the stereotype that the best is over when you're 50 is completely the opposite of the truth.

So on the first one, can you short circuit it and then I'll pass it to you, the second one. I explored that question in the book by talking to people who had had severe turbulence in their life. So remember, this curve, it's the undercurrent in the water, but it's not telling you what's happening to you on any given day. So, for example, I talked to someone who is about my age, who's in her early 40s, her parents, one of her parents, had cancer and then she had a cancer scare, which wasn't cancer, and then her husband had a severe health problem which took years to resolve, and she got breast cancer. The real thing, not a scare. So she's going through all of this in her 40s, and she comes out the other side. And you wouldn't wish this on anyone, but the result was kind of to accelerate this turn around the bend, because she came out of it saying, you know what, I just sit in a park watching kids play. Having gone through all that, it feels different now. I'm just there that day. So you can sort of accelerate some of these lessons, you just don't necessarily want to.

MS. HAGERTY: It's true. I want to say something in defense of millennials. The research actually shows that young people who kind of find out their purpose early on -- and it's a generative purpose, it's not about them, it's not about ambition and all of that, they actually are much higher and they are much healthier than young people who focus more on, you know, climbing the ladder and doing very well, having great ambition.

I would also want to say something good about millennials because they get a bad rap. And when I look at millennials, what I see are people who --

there are really two secrets that I found that are very important to thriving in the second half of life. One of them is purpose in life and the other is friendships. All relationships, but in particular friendships, actually they turn out to -- some studies suggest that people with a network of friends do better than -- or friendships are more important to health than family is for reasons like you can distance yourself from burdensome friends, but you can't distance yourself from burdensome relatives, for example. So millennials are really good at emphasizing friendships. They've got that piece really right and it's impressive. And I think it's going to help them throughout their whole lives.

I interviewed many people who did have their second or third career as of 55-60-65. And what was really exciting about this was that people had a real clear sense of how they wanted to spend that time. They realize that at age 55 you don't have an infinite number of spins at the wheel, so you've got to be really intentional about what am I going to do for this next 15-20 years. I really want it to count for something. And so the people who have done that have done very well. There is a psychoanalyst named Carlo Strenger in Israel, and he gave me one of the great insights for me, at least, as I thought through my career. And what he said is that by the time you are 45-50 you have enough biography to know what you're good at and what you're not good at, what you like doing and what you don't like doing. He has a term for it, he says, you know, your sign or your essence, the stuff that just really is you. Like it is a good thing that you guys didn't hire me to do your taxes, because I am not a detail oriented numbers person, but I do like telling stories. And so it's not surprising I became a journalist. So once you've reached this kind of middle time, you really do know, you have a good sense of what I'm

good at, what I find meaningful, and how can I pivot, how can I use these next few years to do that thing that is meaningful that I am uniquely qualified to do.

MR. RAUCH: And that's what your book is about, you actually worked through that process in your own life. You know, a big take away -- I've become an evangelist on this, and it's a huge theme of the book -- is right here, right now, people in this room and our society are getting the single biggest gift, I would argue, in the entire history of the human species. So while you're all busy being depressed at all the bad stuff in the newspaper, remember that we are getting an additional 10-15, eventually 20 years of additional healthy vigorous life in what turns out to be the most happy and pro social period of life. And all we need to do to take advantage of that is retire the myth that we peak in midlife and if we don't feel peaked then we are having a midlife crisis, and after that we retire, play golf, and die. That is the whole wrong way to think about it

MR. BROOKS: Okay. I'm going to ask Jonathan one last question and then we'll go to questions. And that is did writing this book change your politics at all?

MR. RAUCH: Wow. Wow, what an interesting question. It was a relief from politics. (Laughter) The word, the T word, does not appear in this book. And given what's going on around us, doing a three year project of immersing myself in everything from brain science to ancient wisdom about wisdom, reminded me of the things that are really important.

In one very nerdy respect, it changed my politics. This is Brookings, so I guess I have to go full nerd. So I would have said, like a lot of economic minded people, I said five years ago, inequality may not look good but it doesn't

really matter, what matters in life is reducing poverty and reducing social immobility. So if the poor are getting richer but the rich are getting even richer, that's just fine. Well, theoretically, I still think that's true, but I no longer believe it has any relevance to the human species. It turns out that people's happiness depends on their status above all, and they measure their status by looking at the people around them. And if they feel like they're falling behind other people, it doesn't matter if show to them that they're better off than their parents were, all happiness is relative, all happiness is local, and that's a big cause of malaise in this country. And I've come to think that if conservatives and classical liberals care about political stability and having a society where you don't have a lot of anger and a lot of bad policy, they need to start caring about inequality in a way that they have rejected in the past.

Does that count as political?

MR. BROOKS: It does. Okay, we'll go to the floor. We only ask that your questions be long and rambling with no question at the end. (Laughter)

MR. RAUCH: Now, we have 20 minutes for the first question.

MR. BROOKS: By academic qualification, we're going to go to Carol Graham in the back.

MS. GRAHAM: Thank you, Jonathan, for a great book, and to all of you for a great panel. David, I'm obviously going to push back a little bit, and I think --

MR. BROOKS: Why did I know that was coming?

MS. GRAHAM: I think your criticisms are valid when you look at the early studies, when we were just blunt tool economists using whatever happiness question happened to be in a survey. Over time, we've learned a tremendous

amount from psychologists and work very closely with them and have come to a lot of consensus on what Jonathan was talking about, that we're measuring well being more generally, happiness is a term that sells a lot of books --

MR. RAUCH: We hope.

MS. GRAHAM: -- it's in the title of my book because it sells books, but it's not particularly -- in the title of Jonathan's book -- but it isn't really a well defined term. There's short-term happiness, there's life evaluation. We're starting to measure eudaimonia directly, with a lot of interesting findings. But if you -- back to where you put Donald Trump on the happiness, it turns out if you look at a Bell Curve of the distribution of happiness across individuals around the world, the least happy people care most about money and the happiest people care about creativity, learning, volunteering, all the things that you talked -- spirituality -- all the things that you talked about as sort of higher purpose happiness. And so we're really starting to tease that out a lot and that's why there's this whole debate about how much income matters. Well, income matters because it's not good to be destitute, but after a certain amount of income it won't give you spirituality and friends and volunteering, whatever.

And I guess on Jonathan's point about inequality, mobility, mixed with purpose in life, we've been doing a lot of work looking at premature mortality among less than college educated primarily whites in this country. And if you look at their well being metrics, their hope for the future, their happiness levels, their anger, their stress, their desperation, they all match basically a profile of lack of purpose and complete desperation in life because they've lost their way of being and living and they're essentially doing the opposite of being happy, which is killing

themselves early.

So I think there's a lot we can get from these metrics. They have their flaws, but I couldn't resist pushing back.

MR. BROOKS: Understood. Unless you guys have a comment? Let's go right here and then we'll come up.

MR. LUCE: Thanks. Edward Luce from the Financial Times. I'm just about to turn 50 next month, so life after -- you've made me happy, thank you.

My question is, in your very good presentation at the beginning you showed that Americans are happier than foreigners. What's the matter with foreigners? (Laughter) And it seems also from your graphs that chimpanzees are happier than foreigners too. What's wrong with us?

MR. RAUCH: So the best work that's been done on that has been done by the person standing 10 feet behind you. I'm almost inclined to turn it over to Carol Graham because those numbers come from her.

Where you are matters. So that's why we know that the happiness curve is not completely biological. Countries like Scandinavia, which have stable social environments and high social capital and trust and solid income, do very well. America does almost as well, but not as well as Scandinavia. If you want to be happy, don't be Russian. (Laughter) Because not only is the happiness curve -- there is a curve there, but it is way lower because the average level of happiness is lower. And you still have a curve, but it bottoms out much later. Like in this country it's late 40s, early 50s or so. In Russia it's like early 60s, and in Russia the average person is dead by then. So, yeah, it varies a lot by country and by what's going on in that country and what the social climate is like.

MR. BROOKS: I'm reminded when the Soviet Union fell and Russia became an independent state, they wanted to teach the Russians -- the BBC did -- how to do capitalism, so they had a soap opera where people would start businesses. It was meant to display how you would start a business, what profit and loss is, but because they hired Russian writers they businesses all went bankrupt in the end and the owner committed suicide. (Laughter)

Right here in the front.

QUESTIONER: Thank you very much. Jonathan, Charlie Cobb. Two quick questions. One, whatever happened to second childhood? And then the second question is what has your work shown for couples that are married with a long age difference between them? My parents had I think a happy marriage, but they were 19 years difference between them. So they were at different points on the happiness curve. What has your research shown about what we used to call May-December marriages in law school?

Thank you.

MR. RAUCH: The second one, I just don't know. I haven't seen any research on that. Carol, have you seen any -- you're busy. Have you seen any research on marital age differences and happiness?

MS. GRAHAM: No. The one thing I've seen is that the -- well, that I know is that one of the findings about married people being happier is an artifact of construction in the data, which is a funny way to talk about marriage. But what you have is happier people are more likely to marry each other. And so the long-term effects of getting married lasts about 18 months and then the happier people just get back to their happiness levels. (Laughter)

There is work on asymmetry in happiness levels, so there is a paper by a good friend and colleague of mine, Claudia Senik, in Paris, called "You Can't Be Happier Than Your Wife". This isn't about age, but it's about happiness differences. And it turns out the probability of divorce is highest when you have a happy person married to an unhappy person. It's better to have two miserable people married to each other than a happy and an unhappy person. (Laughter)

MR. BROOKS: Carol, did you say 18 months? (Laughter) I've got to go.

MR. RAUCH: We're praying for you. And the first one, whatever happened to second childhood, isn't second childhood a phrase that meant senility, or it's now known as dementia?

MS. HAGERTY: Or as in adolescence? What is it?

MR. RAUCH: I don't know what second childhood means, but people -- whatever it means, people are now talking about second adulthood, encore adulthood. There's a bunch of stuff. There are people out there working right now mostly in the private second, but philanthropies and educational establishments and corporations, to harness some of this energy of all these people who are in their 60s and 70s who are in this mode of life where they're very vigorous and they know a lot and they want to give back, but they don't want to punch in-punch out in a sort of every day career job. So we're trying to figure out how to harness those people, and encore adulthood is becoming something that people talk about. So it's going to be second adulthood now, not second childhood.

MR. BROOKS: On the right, there on the aisle. Either -- just to your left.

QUESTIONER: Do you know why chimpanzees and other primates have a similar curve? I mean is there a reason?

MR. RAUCH: No. This is observed in observational groups on multiple continents and it's good reliable data, but no. Unfortunately, it turns out when you ask them (laughter) you do not get good data. So what we can do with that knowledge is it tell us that something probably fundamental is going on in other primates, including human beings. And in our case, we can do both science and introspection to figure out what it is. And it does seem that we are primed by evolution, for reasons that I get into in the book, but we are primed to reboot emotionally and be repurposed toward being less ambitious and self seeking and giving back more to our communities, our children, our grandchildren, generativity. And that may be why humans are almost unique in all of nature -- I think there are only two other species -- where the females live on for decades past the end of fertility. That doesn't happen -- in nature, if you're not fertile, you're useless, you go away. That's not true of humans. And the reason seems to be that keeping older humans around, like keeping older pilot whales around, helps the entire society to flourish, including younger people, and including people who don't have kids.

So evolution seems to be putting us through that, and maybe something similar is going through with primates.

MS. HAGERTY: And can I just mention one of my favorite -- as long as we're talking about animal studies -- one of my favorites was done of bees. And what they did was researchers had three generations of bees. And so you had the little tiny bees that needed to be tended to, and the parent bees, and then you had the Alzheimer demented grandparent bees. Seriously, like they'd fly around and

they'd bump into things and things like that. So what these researchers did is they took out the parent bees and so now the grandparent bees had to go out and find the food and take care of the young and all of that. Suddenly -- and they'd actually studied their little bee brains, and kind of looking at their bee brains and looking at their behavior, it's like they went back to being parent bees. They kind of stripped off years.

And so what that tells you is that we should always have a rule in life, and the worst thing you can do is just think oh, well, there's no use for me anymore, because that's a sure fire way to bump into things.

MR. BROOKS: Now, I just have a quick question from me. You both have spent years thinking about happiness. One of the things notorious in literature is it's very hard to describe. There's a Tolstoy short story, "Family Happiness", but have you come across either a biography or a novel where you think, that's a great description of happiness?

MS. HAGERTY: Wow.

MR. RAUCH: That's a good question because I -- you know, the best description is self revelation. And it doesn't sound very scientific, but it turns out that if you ask people this classic question that's been around since the '50s, which is imagine you're on a ladder and the first rung, one, is the worst possible life you can imagine for yourself and ten is the best possible life you can imagine for yourself. Where do you place yourself? It turns out people can do that very consistently and quite accurately. But we're not telling them what the best possible life for themselves may be. So, no, but if you push me to the wall, I would stay that Aristotle -- you know, there is -- sometimes somebody gets something so right, you

know, Madison and the framework for government and Aristotle and the deep relationship between happiness -- in the big sense -- life satisfaction, habit, and virtue, and you've written about this better than anyone, character. Aristotle nailed it.

MS. HAGERTY: I don't have an answer, but I wonder if you do.

MR. RAUCH: Yeah, you must. You work for the *New York Times*. (Laughter)

MR. BROOKS: I will say I have a hobby of collection descriptions of ultimate joy. And they're most transcended moments. They tend to involve a lot of collective movement. Dancing on the dance floor -- there's a great Zadie Smith passage about dancing and she feels her head explode. My old professor, William McNeal described marching in World War II, and the act of collective marching in unison with the other men in his unit, he said I felt expanded. And then the higher levels are the ones -- collective movement on behalf of some ideal. And so my favorite passage is from a rabbi named Wolf Schechtman who marched with King at Selma. And he said that was the most spiritual fulfilling experience I've ever had. We felt history could change, we felt this swelling outside ourselves. And what these descriptions all have in common is that which seemed formally inside yourself joined with something that's informally outside yourself. And the skin barrier seems to fade away. And so there are moments of self transcendence really. But they're just moments, not full -- the whole sense that your whole life is going well.

Let's go right here.

QUESTIONER: Herb Rose. I'm wondering whether science gets into this discussion by measuring the endorphins that one experiences and

comparing that to one's own estimate of their happiness.

MR. RAUCH: I haven't seen any work on that. But the reason is that all of the stuff I look at in my book is about life satisfaction. And that's a long-term evaluative measure. That's what we get by reflecting on our lives and feeling grateful, for example, feeling satisfied. Those are bigger feelings. That's a very different concept from endorphins, which by nature are short acting.

It kind of goes to what David was just saying, that transcendent moments or ecstatic moments or euphoric moments are just that. But what we're talking about here, and Thomas Cole's painting, what's so powerful about that is this is a very long journey and we're in it for the long haul. And that's why when I was middle aged, 45, and I felt so restless and disappointed with my life -- for no apparent reason, because things were going great -- and then I felt even angrier and more disappointed because I felt that way. I felt so ungrateful and wretched about myself for feeling so ungrateful.

I got some really good advice from Barb's brother, David, who was my boss at the *Atlantic*, and said he had been there seven years ago. And he said you'll feel restless and dissatisfied often at this stage in life, independent of your mood from day to day. And be very, very careful. This is a treacherous time in your life to make big decisions, don't do anything impulsive, pivot, don't jump. And that turned out to be, in my case, just precious advice. So I pass it along to all of you, and also in the book.

MR. BROOKS: Let's go right here. I'm trying to make you walk as far as possible. (Laughter)

QUESTIONER: Thank you. John Nelson. I work with something

called Wall Street Without Walls where retired investment bankers can give of their expertise as a form of philanthropy.

A quick question. Have you looked at how to use the wealth of a home to age and place? Aging of place seems to be a strategy, but the wealth of the home is the principal wealth of most Americans as they get older. Can you talk about how that could play into happiness?

And then a sort of Buddhistic question, do we have less desire as we get older and that's why we're happier?

MS. HAGERTY: I don't know about homes. What do you think?

MR. RAUCH: Environment matters. And this is a whole separate conversation which we probably won't get into. But in a previous life I looked into aging and aging options and why medicalization and hospitalization are terrible things for older people and why it really matters to have communities where you can age in place in a trusted environment. And all of those things are important. They don't directly bear on the happiness curve, which, remember, is independent of your circumstances and surroundings.

What was the second?

MS. HAGERTY: Do we have less desire.

MR. RAUCH: No, we don't have less desire. You know, you might think the reason why the happiness curve helps you as you age in being happy is because we've become more numb about our emotions. (Laughter) Or more confused about our emotions, or we don't feel as much. Turns out that's not true. We have strong emotions, we're just better at managing them and they pass more quickly. And by the same token -- wait, what was the specific aspect? I got lost for

a second time there, showing my age.

MS. HAGERTY: No, I think you answered --

SPEAKER: Desire.

MR. RAUCH: Oh, and desire. Yes. You still have the desire, but it changes its focus. As we age what it is, this castle in the sky that we're reaching for, it's a lot less about social status, which is a treadmill. There's not satisfaction in that. The further you get toward social status the more you want to get more social status and the more unhappy you become, even to the point of winning the presidency. Oops, I went there. (Laughter)

But it turns out the things that we tend to focus our desire on later in life, personal connection, giving back to our community, our families, our loved ones, those actually you can put in the back. They really do make you feel fulfilled. So desire shifts towards things that are better for people around us in many ways and better for ourselves.

MS. HAGERTY: And, you know, you can actually see this in brain studies, because Laura Carstensen, among others, has looked at people who are young, middle aged, and older as they viewed pictures. And some of the pictures are really disturbing, really upsetting. Some of the pictures are happy, happy faces, that kind of thing.

What they found is that the young people focus in on the disturbing pictures and the older people, they disattend, the ignore --

MR. RAUCH: Yeah, they see it.

MS. HAGERTY: They see it --

MR. RAUCH: But they process it differently.

MS. HAGERTY: -- but it doesn't process in the same way. And they focus heavily on the happy faces. And so it's not that people are feeling less, it's just what they're feeling, they have a different object to their feeling. They are focusing on the good things as opposed to the things that make them anxious. And so it's a much better way to live.

MR. BROOKS: Let's do one more. Way in the back.

QUESTIONER: Hi, my name is Jake. I'm 23 years old and I'm at a point where I have a general idea of what I'm good at and what I care about, climate change and the kind of impact I want to have.

But right now the job horizon is really divers. So I'm kind of wondering if you could kind of go back and advise your younger self on your first career move, would you have changed anything knowing now what you do about happiness?

MS. HAGERTY: That's a really good question.

MR. RAUCH: David Brooks is the perfect person to answer that question.

MS. HAGERTY: He is. (Laughter)

MR. BROOKS: You're not punting that easily. It's your damn book. (Laughter)

MR. RAUCH: There's a lot to say about that, but I'll make it very short because we're out of time and David has got an anniversary to celebrate. And I'll just say, what I found -- I took a conventional course. I started at a newspaper because I wanted to be a writer, but what I tell people who are 22 and 23, the labor market is really good at finding out what you're good at and encouraging you to do more of what you're good at and less of what you're not good at.

And all you really need to do is get a boat in the water, one way or another, and the current will guide you. It almost doesn't matter in your 20s what you do, as long as you're not bored and stagnant. That would be my general suggestion.

MR. BROOKS: Others?

MS. HAGERTY: That's great. Let's end it there. (Laughter)

(Applause)

* * * * *

CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

Carleton J. Anderson, III

(Signature and Seal on File)

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

Expires: November 30, 2020