

PÄIVI KANNISTO
SANTERI KANNISTO

La Habanera
The Escape from the Rat Race

Päivi & Santeri

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For the Reader



THIS IS A TRAVEL STORY of three different journeys. All of them are tied to each other, and happen in the same place, at the same time. They are: the journey into ourselves, the journey to the other side of the world, and the journey to find the meaning of life outside the rat race. We will define the concept of rat race and use it to describe our current thoughts regarding the meaning of life. We have also included some photos taken during our journey.

This book was born by chance. We discussed the possibility of writing it, but soon concluded that we should not waste our time in an effort that ties us again to the rat race. Later, however, some of our friends decided to change their lives and that made us change our minds and finally write the book.

We hope that our book will inspire the reader to reflect personal motives and goals in life from a bit more selfish perspective. In the beginning and at the end of the book there are tests that can be used for measuring personal happiness.

Happiness Test A

Let us start with a test to find out how happy you are. Please answer the following questions frankly. The same test is also available at <http://paivisanteri.blogspot.com> with automatic score calculation.

1. The most important things in my life are (please give numbers in the order of significance from 1 to 6 to each, where 1 is the most important):

__ Success

__ Challenging job

__ House, car, summer cottage, and other material things

__ Family, friends, colleagues

__ Free time, vacations, hobbies

__ Money, savings, investments

2. If I won big money in the lottery, I would:

3. I would be even happier in my life, if:

4. After my retirement I will do:

5. The most important things I own are:

6. I value most the following public services:

7. I cannot end up being homeless because:

8. The meaning of my life is:

Let us return to your answers at the end of the book on page 66.

Introduction



ASMOKE CURL PASSES QUICKLY BY my eyes like the first swallow right after sunset. Smoke disappears soon, and I sense the strong aroma of a Cohiba cigar. On dusty photographs that are hanging on the wall Fidel Castro and Che Guevara—the great statesmen—stare at me with cigars in their mouths. Waitresses circulate around the tables serving coffee. In the middle of the room there is a glass desk full of chocolate, vanilla, and banana cakes. In the next table there sits a long-haired, bohemian man of about 50, smoking a Cohiba cigar. He is reading a book about socialism. The peaceful atmosphere is disrupted by a boy who appears at the door to beg for a coin, a piece of cake, or a cigarette. The boy's hair is dishevelled and he is wearing rags. Suddenly two flies end up in my coffee cup. I lift them up gently and put them in an ashtray. One fly stumbles up, climbs on top of the ashtray, and starts to dry his wings. I feel happy for it. The other fly lies dead in the middle of the ashtray. Its meaningless death makes me feel sad. I might have been able to save its life if I had picked it up faster from the hot coffee or if I had not placed it in the ashtray. Still, I feel peaceful and serene. I am not hungry. I do not need anything. Holding another person's warm hand in mine provides me with calmness and security. Everything is finally well. I'm happy.



We use the term rat race to describe the main-stream lifestyle. The rat race works like a hamster wheel: no matter how fast you run, you still won't get anywhere. Even if you win, you are still a rat. The rat race is an entity formed by factors that make us feel safe, such as work, belongings, family, and social relationships. Most people live in the rat race, and its effects are seen everywhere, even to the extent that only those people who participate in the rat race and act accordingly are perceived to be rational and normal.

Everybody in the rat race feels from time to time that life is meaningless. The symptoms may include anxiousness caused by the inability to enjoy the present moment, longing for the past and, first and foremost, longing for a better future. Happiness right here and now does not seem possible. We suggest that happiness is a choice. When you make this choice consciously and stick to it persistently, you simply cannot fail. What makes us think this way?

We have had a good life. Santeri was able to have his dream job, work in his own terms and achieve everything he wanted. However, he lost the most essential thing in doing this. After achieving all the goals of the rat race, he did not know what he himself wanted out of his life. After spending months in an aimless and frustrating state of mind a sudden change occurred. Santeri remembered one of the most important values of his company: happiness. He dared, against his personal values and world view of that time, to think about happiness and tried to figure out what would make him happy. He did not find any answer to this question. Instead, he discovered that the sources of happiness he was contemplating on were not originating from his own personal needs but were based on general conceptions of happiness.



Finally Santeri found out that to be happy he needs a person beside him who he can love, and who loves him. He started to work for this aim pedantically as an engineer, and here is the result: we are sitting together in Fortaleza, Brazil, in a coffee shop. We have expressed our love to each other already twice today, and the tender moments of the morning are still warming our hearts. We have no aims, timetables or obligations to do anything. We live like gypsies circulating around the world without permanent residence. From Santeri's earlier frame of reference we could be classified as vagabonds who do not buy or consume goods to keep the rat race going. In spite of that, we feel happy and fortunate.

The change in Santeri's life happened in the spring 2004. Most of his life he had been thinking that the meaning of life is all about reproduction and dying, or—in

Päivi's words—accomplishing. Santeri understood the meaning of happiness and the existence of the rat race only after his second divorce, and recognized that he had only been accomplishing various tasks his life without any real meaning. He was expected to do so, and he genuinely thought that happiness would arise from wealth and success and the safety that comes along with them. This, however, led him even farther away from true happiness.



Päivi was work-oriented and searched the meaning of life through challenging projects. She changed jobs rapidly to take bigger challenges and to make a great career, but eventually she realized that none of the jobs met her expectations. She could not focus on her real interests which made working just a means to earn money. Päivi tried to adjust and lowered her expectations about working, but she soon realized that she did not have enough free time to do all the things she really wanted to do.

Like Santeri, Päivi longed for a partner with whom she could share everything. In July 2004, things clicked when we started to date. We wanted the same thing and we were a perfect match. It felt great that after a longish search we found each other.

What would you do, if you only did what you really wanted? Why would you

not do that in any case, and at all times? And, finally, perhaps the most important question: do you know what you would like to do in order to be truly happy? The biggest obstacle in achieving happiness is our own thinking. It is alienating us from our goals, and from the happiness that results from realizing those goals. We often see happy people as mere happy-go-lucky butterflies who wander around without any aim in their life. We too have been guilty of this kind of thinking, and we understand perfectly why people want to defend their own aims in life even though they are actually feeling dissatisfied instead of being happy. However, we do not want to believe that anybody chooses consciously to have an unsatisfactory life. That is why awareness is the first step towards happiness. Everything starts from the question: “What do I personally want from my life?”

Happiness is subjective and it is not possible to find its source from the outside. The process is demanding because our thinking is based on achieving happiness from all kinds of exterior sources. Why is that so? The answer can be found in the following stories where we tell about the reasons why we escaped from the rat race. We both had our paths and rationale. For Santeri, the most important driver was the disappearance of the feeling of security that the rat race had provided. For Päivi it was losing the motivation to work. ■





LIGHT BROWN SKIN WAS WET with small drops of sweat. Sunshine reflected from the drops and revealed the stress hormones under the skin. Her hair was covered with a black net and she was wearing a brown dress with strings. Under the dress she had a T-shirt and in otherwise bare feet little red sandals. The coffee shop was crowded with customers who were eagerly waiting for their orders, or placing new orders. There were tall German men with tattoos, some local 30-year-old women, a group of Swedish or Norwegian tourists, and three local families with small children. The waitress shuffled between tables delivering orders. Customers were waiting anxiously. She told everybody the same mantra to calm them down: "I will bring you your coffee in a few minutes." When she turned her back to one of the customers, she mumbled "God, what a rush!" and reached for an ashtray on the desk. The air was electrified by the unexpected flood of customers during the daytime. I was thinking about beggars and where they had all gone. I had not seen them today. Suddenly I felt a touch on my shoulder and blocked the intruder instinctively with my hand. It was a child beggar who was now staring at me amazed, holding his apparently hurting hand. He stood there beside me for quite a long time. When he finally walked away from the coffee shop, he went behind the fence showing me his middle finger. The rush in the coffee shop continued half an hour more, and after that we were alone again. We thought it was a good time to order one more round of coffee. We changed our mind after noticing that the waitress was wiping her sweaty forehead and eating a little pie behind the desk. It would have been a sin to interrupt her well-deserved break.

Santeri's Entrepreneurship and Longing for Security

I moved away from home when I got into Tampere University of Technology in 1989. I forgot about Sibelius Academy and a career as a musician in order to pursue more prosperous future. This was the beginning of my adult life. First months I slept on the sofa of a family friend and travelled every day from the city centre to the suburbs of Hervanta where the university was. Student dormitories were scarce. I was told I might get an apartment next term or later. The other options were renting a flat in the private market or buying my own. The real estate market was at that time overheated and there was hardly no supply in the private rental market. I opted for buying. It was cheaper in the long run and I considered the flat to be a secure investment.





I bought a studio with a 100% loan near the university. I dared to take the loan even though I had not done my military service yet. I was told that I wouldn't have to pay for the house during the service. In addition, my wife—who studied social sciences—told me that we could also have social security benefits if some unresolved problems should arise.

While I was in the army, I found out that there were no subsidies for covering the interests of the loan unless I used my savings first. I had to use all my savings that had originally made buying the flat possible. When my first wife moved to the flat with me and we bought a dog, we needed a bigger flat. Soon Finnish economy gave signs of the coming depression and a bank crisis began. I got a letter from my bank stating that they were bankrupt and they asked to pay the loan back immediately or to submit more warranties because real estate prices had fallen.

I sold the flat to solve the problem. As a result, I had a loan worth of 17,000 € with no mortgage or any realistic means to pay it back because I was still a student. With hindsight I was the one to be blamed. I had been a fool trusting that society would help me. If one wants to succeed, one has to stand on his own two feet.

In 1991, the employment opportunities were scarce, so I had to start my own business to pay back the loan. The solution was both good and bad. By the end of 1995 I had paid back my debt, I had succeeded as an entrepreneur, and I was doing work that I liked. The flip side of the coin was that I was married to my work and my company. As a result, my actual marriage ended up in divorce in 1996. My second marriage also ended in a divorce in 2003, and for the same reason. The double marriage did not seem to work for me. When we got married, I first divorced my company.

I had made a fortune as an entrepreneur, but it was causing me more and more worries all the time. When I had been poor I had only worried about how to pay everyday bills and house payments. I dreamed of being so rich that I would not

have to care about money at all. Finally, when I had the money, I started to worry about losing it. I asked myself how much money should I have so that my future would be completely secure. What amount of money would make me feel that I have enough of it? What if I would then lose the money for some reason? How should I guarantee my security, anticipate all possible problems that might arise, and prevent the loss?



With wealth came also the fortune seekers. I was sent fake bills and some money was stolen. I was personally sued many times for various reasons. Plaintiffs knew that instead of going to court it would be less expensive for me to settle the cases with money, even if all the cases were pure bullshit. Lawyers, unsurprisingly, consulted me that I should always settle the cases in the first meeting.



Security that was to be guaranteed by wealth, required hard work. Because of ever growing taxes I had to run faster and faster in the rat race. I had to take more salary to be able to pay the tax advances, and as a consequence, my income taxes went up. My efforts to maintain my wealth required more and more effort.

Taxes guarantee, naturally, the high standard of public services such as public health care. My grandfather was hospitalized many years ago. He was treated for a virus-based influenza for several weeks. I visited him in the hospital every day and wondered why he got sicker and sicker every day in spite of the treatment. He started to hallucinate, which I thought was a symptom of old age, but then he suddenly died. The autopsy revealed that his death was caused by a bacterial infection. Antibiotics costing only a couple of Euro or so would have been enough to save my grandfather but the public health care system that wasted hundreds of millions of Euro every year could not prescribe them for him. In all fairness, my grandfather was already over 60 and longer an important member of the society in the eyes of Finnish authorities.



When the society let me down, I sought security from family and friends. I was a Darwinist and believed that family provided the necessary continuation of life. I have two children, one with both of my ex-wives. I found out—however—that this source of security existed only as long as my wives stayed with me. I was left like Bill Clinton after the famous cigar play with Monica Lewinsky. In both divorces, my children became objects of a game called child support. I had also many friends, but most of them were just after my money. It seemed that the friendships from my poorer times were better.

There is good and bad in everything. After all that happened I did not become an alcoholic. Instead, I woke up from the illusion of security. Giving up this illusion made it possible for me to rely on insecurity, as paradoxical as it may sound. I felt that I have nothing to lose. The things I had previously valued suddenly lost their value and, vice versa, some things that had earlier been worthless to me now became important.

I dare to challenge good old Socrates' saying "Know yourself." It is not enough. It is more crucial to know what you personally want from your life, and to focus all your efforts on it. I wanted to be happy and I realized that to be truly happy I needed a person by my side who loves me and whom I love. Before this change I

wasn't even able to recognize the existence of the rat race. Now I would rather say:
“Know what you want and do it.” ■





MY EYES ARE WANDERING ON stained wooden walls. Paintings on the walls are very accurately lined and their order pleases my eye. A wooden shelf at the end of the hall has some bottles, an old coffee mill, and a wooden watering can on top of it. The watering can is decorated with flower paintings. In the shelf some coffee mugs—all different—catch our attention. We think they may belong to some VIP customers. They look like new and have stayed in exactly the same place over one month. Our conclusion is that they are part of interior design. Would it be possible to have our own labelled mugs on the shelf for our regular visits? At least if we purchased the coffee shop. My mind is filled with all kinds of ideas and business models for developing the coffee shop until the voice of reason silences them. Why should we return to the rat race just because of some coffee mugs? Well, there are even more stupid things happening in the world due to less rational reasons. A loud car engine noise interrupts my train of thought and wakens me to this reality. A beach buggy passes by rapidly. It is full of half-naked, brown-skinned and cheerful teenage girls.

Päivi and Meaningful Work

I studied Arts in Tampere University. During my first year I got only six credits. This happened because I only selected those courses that I was really interested in. Eventually I understood that I needed to study other courses as well to get my academic degree. After that I became an accomplisher and passed the exams one after another.



I noticed that my fellow students, who were a couple of years ahead of me, graduated in the middle of the economic depression. They had trouble finding work because the unemployment rates were all-time high. I realized I had made a naive choice studying literature but decided to continue on the chosen track. After my graduation I worked as a Researcher in the Academy of Finland. I could have enjoyed a bohemian lifestyle, but I selected achieving instead. I made a tight schedule and defined clear goals. At the age of 27 I hurried away from the sheltered university to the world of business with one PhD and two Master's degrees.

I had studied human sciences but also economics and journalism which I knew

would speed up my run in the rat race. I wanted to earn more money than the Academy or the University could afford to pay me. Moreover, I was not ready to accept short-term or temporary employment contracts, or to wait for a possible professorship for the next 20 years.

After four employers and half a decade in business I started to ask myself what was motivating me. I had fulfilled all the requirements of a middle class life including a flat and a car, and I enjoyed various fringe benefits. The work itself, however, felt meaningless and days passed by for nothing. Meanwhile, there was an over-supply of things that I really wanted to do: read, write, study Spanish, travel, exercise. But my free time was not enough for all this.



Travelling was my true passion. I spent every day at work for the sake of one month's vacation when I could travel to the end of the world and leave my mobile phone at home. I travelled in Asia and South America getting to know cultures that inspired me. Writing was a similar passion to me. After leaving the university I was happy to have a break in writing but I soon discovered that that was really what I wanted to do. I wanted to develop my skills further.



In business most challenges turned out to be corporate-based survival skills, like pleasing one's superiors and colleagues. A forward-looking employee had to boast loudly with his full calendar and run from one meeting to another in a well-ironed suit and a hands-free cell phone. There was also special training available for these survival skills. The message was simple: just follow the orders of your superiors, because one cannot question orders at war either. The comparison to warfare was a bit far-fetched, but on the other hand it described the pathos of the trainings. The goal was to earn respect from other people. The crucial question was: "Do you want to succeed?"

During one of those trainings I started to think that life is too short to be wasted for something I don't like. However, the worry of having enough money for easy living—or in current thinking, accepting a bit lower living standard—was too overwhelming. I did not dare to quit my job.

In the winter of 2004 the corporation I worked for started a mass dismissal. Labour union negotiations carried on almost a year. In the first round two thirds of our 12-person team left—some voluntarily, some being fired. At the end of the year there was another round in which our unit took part again. I was among those who were called to a meeting room downstairs to sign the termination papers.



Two weeks later I started a new job as a Management Consultant in a small consulting company. I was able to do more and the work itself was more meaningful. However, the hope of having a different kind of life never died. When we started to date with Santeri next summer, all pieces of the puzzle fell in place. I was no more a mere dreamer. I could finally start realizing my dreams. ■

The Rat Race



DARKNESS FALLS QUICKLY LIKE THE rain in the Amazon rain forest. Cool sea breeze blows in from the open doors of the coffee shop. It gives a gentle touch on our sun-burned, slightly red cheeks. We are sitting at our favourite table, others being still empty. I don't remember what day of the week it is and I realize that it doesn't make any difference. I end up wondering why the coffee shop is so empty. Maybe there is a Mass in a nearby church. Or maybe today is Wednesday, which is the most quiet day in the city. Suddenly three men in Bermudas and T-shirts enter the coffee shop. They sit down at a table next to us and order big cigars. We are surprised when one of the men starts to speak Finnish. They have not probably recognized that we are Finns as well because they start discussing their sexual experiences with local prostitutes. They compare girls' measures and colours of their hair, and then start talking about prices and motels they have used. The men seem to think that their vacation in the middle of hard work is true quality time. They have time to meet girls and enjoy sex. According to them, the girls have also enjoyed. One of the girls had even started to cry when she had been left alone in the motel. I ask, in Finnish, if we should order two more coffees. The men look surprised, they jump up, and leave the coffee shop quickly, cigars hanging in their mouths. Once again it's just the two of us. We have all the time in the world for our own thoughts.



We discovered through our own experiences that running in the rat race is easy. It is enough to act like everyone else. We did not need to know who we were and what we wanted. On the contrary, if our own aspirations had led us to question the authorities, our lives would have become quite unpleasant. It is easier to adapt common ideals even if they make as little sense as the words of a well-known song “Life is life.”

Next we shall discuss what fuels the rat race: success, work, property, social relations, free time, and money.

Success

The faster we managed to run in the rat race, the more successful we were perceived to be. Success brought respect from others and it helped to enhance our self-image. It also helped us to climb up career ladders, to get more friends, and to accumulate wealth. Still, success itself did not make us happy as the measure of success did not originate from us. Success was measured by comparing us to others. Therefore it is very hard to believe that success could make anyone feel truly happy.

Success is relative. Even if someone is considered more successful than others, he can feel unhappy. Success is primarily pursued because of the security it brings along. The downside of success is that it excites envy and fuels the rat race of other people.

What does fame and fortune matter if one feels unhappy in spite of them? How successful must one be that one's success never disappears, as happened to hugely successful Mr. Michael Jackson after his child molestation trial? And how successful one has to be to be the most successful person?

A successful person is alone with his success. He is only surrounded by yes-men who are trying to enhance their own social status. One good example of these

amazingly successful people are Formula 1 drivers.

Outside the rat race we do not care about success. We feel no need to prove anything to anyone. However, we are happy for someone who is valuing success and gaining it.

Work

We both felt that it is important to have a challenging and meaningful work. At the end of the day, the true meaning of the work, however, was only getting more success and more money. Would you work without salary? Or would you go to work every morning if you anyway enjoyed success and respect, maintained your current social contacts, and lived financially sound life? We bet you wouldn't because the false sense of security that work now provides would become meaningless.

The true essence of work is accomplishing. Things are not done because people enjoy doing them, but because they have to be done. The dullness of accomplishing is explained and justified with future material rewards. This leads to a life that is somewhere else than here-and-now. Being always in a rush prevents one from questioning one's choices of life, and if there is no hurry one is not important. Boasting about one's full calendar to the colleagues provides great satisfaction and the person can feel being a respected member of the group, a true professional.

What kind of memories does this never-ending accomplishing leave behind to be remembered when one is retired? Childhood, school, studies, work, retirement, death—what will be the highlight of your life?



Protestant work ethic, which is highly valued in Northern European countries, emphasizes the meaning of work. Through work you find the meaning of life and your identity. When meeting new people the essential question usually is “What company are you working for and in what branch?” rather than asking “What makes you happy?” Work is assumed to depict what one truly is: what one can do and accomplish, and how respectful one is.

The fundamental insanity of work became concrete, literally, in Germany during the Second World War. We hope this comparison does not cause the same kind of shock than Britney Spears’ smelling feet did in the air plane. Above the iron gate of Auschwitz concentration camp there is a text “Arbeit Macht Frei” which means in English: “Working sets you free.” This is actually what happens in the rat race. Working frees us from thinking what we really want, and what could make us happy.

Another way to achieve freedom is to become aware of the existence of the rat race and find out what one personally wants from life. If we had been created just for work, we would have no heart and soul.

Outside the rat race we are ready to work for money only if we must. We do not disrespect other people who work because their work makes our life easier.

Property Ownership

Success feeds the rat race. Successful people excite envy through continuous comparison to others. The easiest way to make comparisons is through material possessions. That is why the value of a human being so often boils down to what he owns.

Purchasing goods can become the meaning of life in the same way as struggling for a better salary and a bigger apartment. We get easily attached to material things. In the rat race we were never happy with the property we had, but longed for something more and better. When one need was fulfilled, there were always new and bigger needs awaiting.





The logic of buying and owning more and more is the same as in economics, where growth is assumed to continue forever. But one can ask: “What is everlasting growth good for?” If you won in the lottery, what would you buy for yourself to become happier?

Property brings happiness and increases the feeling of security only for a short time but at the same time it binds the proprietor for good. In the worst case, a bank loan of 30 years does the same to the house owner as a small piece of land to a peasant in the 19th century. The focus of life shifts to the future and the present time becomes work- and money-oriented accomplishing. Property also brings duties. A real estate, for example, requires furnishing, renovating, fire inspections and various taxes. Cars require regular technical inspections, service, and taxes. Furthermore, there is always the worry of losing the property and protecting it from fire and theft.

Outside the rat race property ownership has lost its meaning to us. We only need possessions to satisfy our primary needs. Nothing more.

Social Relations

Family and friends can be a cornerstones of the good life. However, if these relationships are only a façade for career ambitions or to be socially more eligible, they also bind one to the rat race. Children can be mere extensions of their parents if their only purpose is to make them stand out as good mothers and fathers.



Many personal relationships became a burden for us in the rat race, although they appeared to be chosen. Most of these acquaintances were work-related, such as clients, employees, colleagues, and superiors. They supported our self-esteem. Friends in remarkable positions and even celebrities made our social status higher. These personal relationships were not free of charge. Cherishing them caused us almost as much trouble as taking care of our property. We had to do small talk, attend different kinds of cocktail parties, try to please others, and stay friends with everybody no matter what.

Outside the rat race family and friends are an altruistic resource to us. We do not expect anything from them, and we do not want them to expect anything from us either. This way the relationship remains pure and unburdened.

Free Time

Just like work, free time is also tightly scheduled and goal-oriented in the rat race. It is called quality time and it is loaded with high expectations. In holiday trips all tourist attractions are to be visited and recorded with a camera. Postcards need to be sent to friends, and souvenirs bought to decorate the house. With these pieces of evidence one can also brag about recent travels and gain respect among the peers.



Hobbies boil down to accomplishing as well. This is a natural consequence of the need to schedule one's whole life. If your favourite hobby is something you genuinely want to do, why don't you do it full-time instead of sacrificing your time to work and other secondary functions?

In an ideal case one's job can be a former hobby. However, the concept of work

includes such components of the rat race that makes it eventually unsatisfactory. The hobby becomes forced if you must do it even when you don't feel like it. Or if it forces you to do things you do not fully enjoy, like filing tax reports, managing people, and selling.

Outside the rat race the concept of free time is absurd. We have nothing but free time. It is free from expectations and schedules. If we want to do something and it makes us happy, we focus completely on doing that; without making it feel like work or business.

Money

With money there was always the worry of safeguarding it and making more of it. It is possible to make more money by taking higher risks when investing for example in stocks. However, if there is no risk involved, money slowly disappears because of inflation and property taxes. One must therefore make more money to maintain the current level of wealth, and accept the worry and work it takes. Worrying and working did not make us happy. Does it make you happy?

Making more money and saving money are based on the same assumption as network marketing; that there is an unlimited amount of people in the world. The rat race keeps going because people assume that there is an endless amount of money in the world and plenty of it available for anyone who works hard or is lucky. The fact is, however, that there is only a limited amount of money in circulation and it is distributed unevenly. There is always someone who has more of it.





Outside the rat race money has become a necessary evil for us. We cannot eat it but we can use it for buying food. It allows us to do what we want, in case it requires money. Still, we are not willing to work for money unless we have no other option. Investments for us are a waste of time because there is no foolproof way to conserve money. To put it simply: nothing can be enough, and you cannot leave your property behind without any care and worries.

Summary

We have been discussing the most fundamental elements of the rat race that continue fuelling it and create an illusion of security. However, if everyone always thought the same way, the world would still be flat and no one would be happy. We hope that telling you how we escaped from the rat race can bring a message from the reality outside. It is a task similar to the one Mathias Rust engaged on when he flew to the Soviet Union with a small air plane and landed at the Red Square in Moscow.

Being different is not accepted in the world of mediocrity and group think. Everyone should be in the same boat for the sake of loyalty and solidarity. For example renting a flat, being unemployed, or accepting work that is below one's competence makes others pity that person.

We claim that by making things differently and pursuing goals can make you happy. There is no universal truth defining how you must live your life. You have to define it by yourself.

An Example

Let us look at one possible scenario: what would a truly happy person look like? We will illustrate two imaginative scenes of a happy man's life. One is inside the rat race and the other outside of it.



Scene A

The happy man has a challenging work that he enjoys. He lives in his own house and drives to work with his new car. The house is decorated with beautiful design products purchased from high-class boutiques. He lives with his gorgeous spouse, two beautiful children, and a handsome, pure-bred dog. The happy man is surrounded by many good friends who help him in his career and give good investment hints. His hobbies help him to succeed at work and they generate new friendships. On holidays the man has a privilege to travel to the capital cities of Europe and also

to distant, exotic countries. Thanks to his holidays, he returns to work revitalized, full of energy and new ideas. The happy man is taking care of his future by putting money aside, cherishing at the prospect of an inflated retirement fund. This money will provide the means to fulfil his long awaited dreams after retirement as well as a handsome heritage for the children. Thanks to his generous salary he is able to purchase long-term investment property such as a summer cottage. Weekends in the summer cottage are true quality time together with family and friends. The man is also pleased to pay taxes to keep up the welfare state. As a reward the happy man gets one of the best public health care systems for free, high quality education for the children, and a secure equal society to live in. "It is like winning in the lottery to be born in Finland," the man thinks while driving to work early in the morning with his brand new car.

Scene B

One month later the third round of layoffs ended at work. All employees who were enjoying excessive salaries had their contracts terminated because of the company's decreased profits. Unfortunately the happy man belonged to this group. Another disaster followed. Mould discovered in their beautiful house forced the family to move temporarily to the summer cottage. The insurance company refused to pay any compensation because additional mould insurance was not subscribed. A bit later the bank had to sell the house to recover half of the mortgage. The design furniture had to be sold in a flea market because the summer cottage was too small for storing them. Winter was drawing closer making life harder in the backwoods. Plumbing got frozen and roads were blocked by snow. The retirement fund had to be cashed out for financing the move to the cottage. In addition some extra taxes incurred because the laws were changed. The recently purchased car ended up in the junk yard after the happy man crashed with an elk. Unluckily the accident happened on an elk warning zone so there was no compensation from the insurance. The happy man lost his friends because of a too long distance and a lowered social status. Because of that he began to spend time in a local bar drinking beer. The spouse moved away and took the children and the dog with her. "Well, I did not have to wait for the retirement," the happy man thought while playing his flute in the balcony. Now he had all the time in the world to make his dreams come true.

In which scene the man is happier? Probably he is happy in both scenarios, or perhaps in neither. Happiness is not based on external yardsticks like work, money, friends, and property. ■

The Escape



FLIES ARE CIRCULATING AROUND US. They jump, tumble, and walk on us with their dirty little feet. How on earth can there be so many of them today? Or maybe we are unusually delicious because we were so sweaty. That reminds me of an old saying: shit isn't necessarily delicious even though 10,000 flies like to eat it. This time no flies end up in my coffee cup, but I sip all of it just to make sure that they will not do that later either. It is evening. In the nearby alley there is some fuss. Children dressed in rags move wildly around, swinging their hands up and down recklessly. We are watching them behind a black metal fence which is made of spears sticking to the sky. It is around two meters high and creates a feeling of security. From time to time we see plastic soda bottles in the children's hands. They raise the bottles up to their small noses. They grin and shake from pleasure. There is some sticky yellow stuff in the bottom of the bottle. It must be glue. Also the beggars that regularly invade the coffee shop have joined them, and they are seemingly enjoying their share of the fun. They are interrupted by a police car rushing to the alley. The policemen run out from the car and return with one big plastic bag full of confiscated glue bottles. None of the children are arrested. The police car drives away and a bit later social workers arrive by car. The boy with dishevelled hair is gone, permanently.



Escaping the rat race required us 1) to be conscious of the existence of the rat race, and 2) to know what we personally want. After that it was simply a matter of choice and making it happen. This chapter will describe in detail how we left the rat race.

Preparing our departure took months. During that time we questioned our solution and considered consequences. However, our goals were clear. Santeri wanted to concentrate on love and cherishing the relationship. Päivi wanted to travel to South America and develop her Spanish skills. These goals became one unified plan. We scheduled the departure date on the 29th of October 2004, three months ahead. The first destination was the capital of Brazil where one of Santeri's former employees and a good friend, Pedro, lived together with his wife. This was the only plan we made.

Two months before the D-Day we had a final discussion and realized that the point of no return had passed. After that we started the most radical activities: terminating our job contracts, selling property, and telling friends and families about the plan.

We received contradictory feedback when we quit our jobs. Santeri's employees were joking that he is going to turn his coat and work for Microsoft. There was a great worry concerning the future of the company. It was strongly personified to

Santeri: he was the public figure and spokesperson of the company. In Päivi's case her small work community was worried about continuity and finding a substitute for her. Our decisions seemed to leave our colleagues feeling deceived in some way. But work was no longer the source of meaning in our lives.

Fear of the future and longing for the remnants of security made the process of leaving feel like a journey into the unknown. We were thinking all kinds of night-mare scenarios, such as unfilled tax returns that could cause troubles later.



The society, officials, and bureaucracy do not take into account that somebody might choose to leave the rat race. The first real issue was the lack of any permanent address. We could not inform post office, magistrate, and other public registers of our future address because there was none. Our decision was to wander around the world. However, they seemed to assume that every decent citizen has a permanent residency. The only solution to the problem was to redirect all the mail temporarily to our parents.

We tried to avoid all kinds of troubles that could occur after leaving because those would automatically fall into our parents' hands. We visited the tax office

and informed them that we were no longer receiving any salary. They were a bit astonished, and we felt that they questioned our sincerity. The remaining challenge was the taxation of the previous year, when we still had income. Päivi received a pre-filled tax return form but for Santeri it was practically impossible to file his taxes because of the absence.



People are removed from official databases very slowly. We figured that we would not be responsible for the tax authorities after 2005, or at least after 2006. This required that we would manage to get rid of all of our property in Finland. Naturally, we would not have the right to use public services in case we visited Finland. In public health care the transfer period is one year. We would still have the Finnish nationality, though.

Getting rid of all the stuff we had gathered was quite an effort although we were prone to Spartan simplicity rather than piling up junk. The biggest effort was selling cars. Used cars turned out to be extremely hard to sell. The value of a car is cut in half at the very moment it is driven out from the shop. The same applied to other things as well. The bid for Päivi's CD collection was ridiculous, and we should have

actually paid money for getting rid of our furniture. We decided that we would not make any bigger purchases ever again. Our parents were very helpful in relocating, selling and destroying our things. Otherwise the three months we had reserved for the preparations would have been too short. Some things we kept so that we could give them away to our friends in our farewell party.

Preparing the escape was nothing but hard work, exactly like in the rat race. We made notes and to-do lists of things that would still have to be taken care of. After accomplishing something we ticked it off and felt great satisfaction. One of the most pleasant experiences was when we burned all the remaining documents in the fireplace. We cooked some sausages in the fire and enjoyed them with wedding present champagne.



We only left the things we could carry in our backpacks. Santeri took some clothes, a sleeping bag, and a tent. Päivi had to make quite many iterations and a strict classification to get to the same point. Now our property fits into two backpacks and still we feel we have too much. Getting rid of property felt good and our hearts felt lighter, too. Now it is not a problem to change scenery whenever we want.

We took a credit card and also some cash because VISA is robbing a hefty 2.5% fee for cash withdrawals. To our astonishment one of Nordea bank's branches in Helsinki city centre was willing to give us only 5,000 € in cash. They claimed that they don't have enough cash to give us. We should have reserved the cash in advance. We concluded that the money was probably in safe hands because even the owner could not get it. Luckily, the airport bank was more co-operative.

While practical things kept us busy we made sure we had time to meet our friends before leaving. When we told them about our plans we received sincere wishes of good luck but some also regretted that they could not do the same. A few of them felt a bit betrayed because we were abandoning the system and the country. Our solution made them defend their own choices and excuses behind them. These excuses included, for example, a new mortgage, new summer cottage, small children, and financial insecurity. They seemed to think that our wealth enabled us to leave. We tried to explain that it is simply a matter of choice, but in vain. We felt sad to leave our friends and families in Finland. Santeri's children stayed with their mothers. Surprisingly his daughter was allowed to participate in our wedding and farewell party. Santeri is naturally longing for both of his children and writes e-mail regularly to his daughter. His son cannot read or write yet so keeping in touch with him without the help of a mother is not possible. We do not expect that the children will be allowed to travel to see us abroad as long as they are underage.





We were thinking quite often why it is so hard to accept the escape from the rat race. One reason might be that it is so rare. As long as there are no examples in the family or among friends, it is hard to understand why someone wants to leave. It appears that only the rich and the famous can do so—all those people that others admire and want to be like, but do not dare. This makes the escape unreal, a pipe dream. The other extreme is labelling those who choose to leave as social outcasts and losers. This black and white thinking stems from the rat race. It is either a reward or a punishment for not being able to keep pace.

Our choice was based on our needs and feelings. We had numerous discussions and we searched for new perspectives by questioning everything. The list below contains some of the questions and thoughts that led to our escape.

- Existence is meaningless without knowing the meaning of life.

- There is always someone better and richer than you, but everyone can be the happiest.
- Do I dare to be happy?
- Happiness can be simply loving and being loved; it has nothing to do with work, property, or money.
- There is only one correct path in life; it is exactly the one you are walking.
- Don't trust anyone or anything except yourself regarding your happiness.
- Change can only start from yourself, because others preach you what benefits them.
- Yes and no together are the best answer to all questions.
- If you don't know what you personally want from life, stop until you find the answer.

We discovered that all our answers boiled down to what is important to us and what makes us happy. The most important observation was that the rat race could not offer us these things. This was a big step for us. ■

Life outside the Rat Race



IT IS NOON. THE SUN is shining right on top of the sky like a red ball of fire. Luckily our table is in the shadow. Otherwise we would burn and look red like cooked lobsters. A sneeze. Another sneeze. This cannot be true. Can one really get a flu when it is more than 30 degrees Celsius? The feeling is unreal. The sun is burning and my nose is running. On the other hand, it is luxury to be sick and still be able to enjoy life outside. The rule of thumb is that one has to keep warm when being sick. And here it is actually much warmer outside than in our air-conditioned flat. In the horseshoe-shaped bar a cupboard door clangs. It is opened by a waitress who is wearing a hair net. She has yellow rubber gloves on and a rag darkened by dust in her hand. The girl pushes the rag between the cakes and the shelves and cleans them. I am thinking about a cake which has been dusted. Would anyone order those cakes any more if they knew how they were handled? Is it better that there is dust on a cake or that the dust has been wiped away? I had wanted to order some banana cake which was praised in our guide book as a local delicacy but I think I will pass after all. Or maybe I will wait for a new cake delivery and take a piece then. In Amazon, banana is eaten with ash. Dead relatives are burned, the ashes are baked with banana and then served as a feast for funeral guests.



We wake up at noon. Since there is no rush we can devote time to each other. A few hours later we start walking to the coffee shop. A waitress we know greets us at the door and asks “Dois?” It is one of the few words we know in Portuguese. We nod and receive our standard order: two coffees with milk.

While sipping the coffee we talk about everything. Thanks to these philosophical sessions we have found out a perfect solution to one of the ancient mysteries of mankind: “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” The truth lies in the national epic of Finland, *Kalevala*. The answer is the egg. According to *Kalevala*, the world was born from the primal egg of great pochar.

Our connection to the subconscious mind has strengthened. Earlier we rarely recalled our dreams but now we remember them clearly almost every morning. We share them with each other like films we have seen. After our departure Santeri has lived through his whole life, all the way back to the childhood, in his dreams. He is building his new identity bit by bit outside the rat race. It would be interesting to know how Freud would have interpreted these dreams.

Today we will go to buy flight tickets to our next destination, Rio de Janeiro. This way we will realize one of Santeri's old dreams to get to the famous Samba

To clear our heads we enjoy some more coffee. While we have been away the clientèle in the coffee shop has completely changed, except the old bohemian artist who is still there. He sits there, as if being part of the furniture, much like us. We will miss the place when we leave. There is actually not much we need. A modest infrastructure will do, as long as we have a small flat with a gas stove for cooking, a good grocery store, a butcher's shop, a pleasant coffee shop, a possibility to use Internet from time to time, and a nice climate.

Life is very simple nowadays. We go to sleep when we feel sleepy and wake up when we have slept enough. Eating is not tied to lunch or dinner times; we eat when we are hungry. We have all the time in the world without the artificial limitations of daily rhythm. We have discovered that our rhythm follows tides rather than 24-hour cycles. The most important thing is that we have enough time. We can concentrate on each other and get to know ourselves better.

We wake up daily realizing that there are many small things that make us happy. In the morning there is no alarm clock ringing. We do not have to wear ties, suits, or any other uncomfortable business attire. Small talk or any other pointless chatter is no longer required. The greatest thing, however, is to be able to spend time in the best possible company. There is absolutely no stress left, partly thanks to the local mañana culture. It is no use getting frustrated because no one else does. Things will work out sooner or later, or then they won't. Whatever happens, happens. Any outcome is perfect in its own way.

We stop by in a grocery store and buy food for the next few days. Learning to use free home delivery service was quite difficult for Päivi in the beginning. She felt strange having someone running beside us with a shopping cart but after testing the service a few times she accepted it. Our groceries are quite heavy because we have to purchase drinking water. We also consume litres of soft drinks and kilos of water melons.

At home Santeri begins to prepare food. He is quite a maestro in cooking but he has not had a chance to exercise his skills due to the busy schedule in Finland. Now Päivi is treated with all kinds of yummy dishes. Today we have Chinese chicken stew. After dinner we enjoy a siesta. In the evening we go for a walk on the beach boulevard. We watch some joggers pass by and stop at our favourite beach bar under the palm trees to listen to the sound of waves.

At night, when the tide goes down, we walk back home through the sandy beach. We see a colourful crab watching us curiously with its blue eyes. "It looks like a toy," Päivi comments. Santeri touches the crab gently with a wooden stick and it quickly disappears into the sand.

It feels that currently love is a full-time occupation and requires all our efforts. We are ready to do the work because love makes us happy. Still, even love cannot provide a long-term 100% guaranteed safety in life. Therefore we enjoy every single day we can live with each other. ■

Shadows in Paradise



A BLACK CAR STOPS IN FRONT of the door. Two men jump out of the car and rush in. One is small and burly, the other rather tall. Both are wearing berets and bullet-proof vests. They have pistols and knives hanging in their belts and the taller one has a machine gun in his hands. The staff of the coffee shop are staring nervously at the men and at each other. Suddenly I remember an incident that happened in Estonia where the Mafia was collecting cover money by force. The shorter man twiddles his holster nervously. The taller man says something in Portuguese which we cannot understand. He draws his machine gun, locks and loads, and slides a bullet into the barrel starting to shoot the staff that is hiding behind the mahogany desk. We grab each other and hide under our rattan-legged stone table. Bullets are ricocheting on the floor and the walls around us. I hear a clang and turn to see what caused it. There is a hand grenade beside us ready to explode. Suddenly I feel a light touch on my side. I open my eyes and realize that my love is waking me up from my morning nap. She wants to have her morning coffee. We dress up and start to walk towards the coffee shop where hot and delicious latte is waiting for us. When we arrive, the familiar waitress is singing happily and the bohemian artist joins her in the chorus. Everything is fine, again.



This chapter is dedicated to the side effects of escaping the rat race. One of the key realizations is that we will most likely carry the rat race with us forever. The need to accomplish is our second nature. Santeri got frustrated because this book was not ready although we had already been writing it for three days and nights. He was setting deadlines and milestones to the writing project and organizing review meetings. This might sound as absurd as the talks of Tony Blair when he was lobbying the UK to participate in the military operations in Iraq. But thirteen years of process-oriented software engineering is hard to forget.

Santeri was occasionally feeling useless and needless because his identity was almost completely formed by work. He was longing for subordinates to whom delegate tasks. Päivi had milder detoxification symptoms. They were mostly related to gathering possessions and creating new business ideas.

We were seriously thinking about buying a Volkswagen beetle beach buggy for our South American tour. After seeing a few buggies and test driving one we found out that it would only be a nuisance to own one. It would be impossible to verify the condition of a used car and, anyway, driving thousands and thousands of kilometres would require constant service and changing of consumable parts like spark plugs. Moreover, we would have to worry where to park the car safely, and finally, how to get rid of it.



We also considered starting a new business. We enjoyed the coffee shop so much that we were thinking about buying it. We had talks with the owner regarding the price but luckily we came to our senses. While contemplating the potential purchase decision we suddenly started finding all kinds of flaws in the milieu that had earlier felt so charming. The Brazilian business environment would have probably offered at least as much troubles as the Finnish. Moreover, we do not speak any Portuguese.

We are not free from the bureaucracy of the rat race either. Opening a bank account in Brazil would have required obtaining a local social security number (CPF). Probably we could have received it, but the process itself felt complicated and required hard work. The lack of permanent residence and address is also problematic here. Even a prepaid mobile phone subscription required having a permanent address. Fortunately our Brazilian friend Pedro took care of that for us.

We have tried to avoid all kinds of contacts with officials because it is simply frustrating. When we tried to extend our visas with the Federal Police in Fortaleza we were first rejected because of wearing Bermuda shorts, and second time because it was too early to do the extension. The third time we tried in Recife airport but we were directed to another police station in the city centre. We still have not made the extension which means we might get deported.

Encounters with Brazilian officers remind us from Finnish officials. Will they

receive our tax returns in time so that we avoid possible problems? We still have some hard-to-sell property left in Finland which might also cause some kind of troubles we cannot anticipate. Fortunately the need to think about these nightmare scenarios reduced a lot already in Finland when the D-Day came closer. We are also aware that there are no choices that are right or wrong. One thing we are sure about is this: we do not want to go back to the rat race.

The biggest problem right now is the social vacuum we are living in. Communicating with other people is quite hard and not only because we do not speak their language. While talking with the rat racers it is hard to find common topics of interest. Usually when we tell people about our lifestyle a deathly silence ensues or it triggers some suspicious questions at best. We have not yet met other people who have made the same decision. Naturally we miss our friends in Finland and try to keep in touch with them by e-mail. Santeri is also missing his children and his dog, Boris, who died just before we left, as if he had instinctively tried to avoid the forthcoming severities of living in the tropics. ■

A Never-Ending Story



THE WOODEN DOORS ARE ALWAYS open. At the front door there are thick ropes that keep the doors open. The atmosphere is always welcoming. It is like coming back home. Sometimes the staff might be bored and tired but they still do their job and are sometimes even too attentive. Your coffee cup might vanish even if there is still some coffee left. I greet the waiter: "Bom zia, dois cafe con leitz e asugrina e un sinsero e un quorum e dois marlboro laitz, por favor" and things begin to happen. We receive the desired stimulants, and a welcoming smile flashes on our waiter's face when he reads the text printed on our T-shirts: "Nao obrigado!" Yesterday, when we were searching for a book shop to get a Spanish or English book for Päivi to read, we passed by a printing house. The numerous beggars and street vendors at the beach, in the coffee shops, on the streets, and in the buses had sparked an idea to make special T-shirts that would spare us from repeating the same mantra over and over again. Now there was a chance to do just that. Once the shirts were ready we tested them on the beach boulevard. Most understood the message and left us alone with a smile on their faces. Only a few illiterate vendors and beggars approached us. Even though the text was originally intended to be just a humble protest, it actually had a more profound meaning. While sitting in the coffee shop and enjoying a cigar I understood that the text summarizes perfectly the truest and deepest essence of life outside the rat race. We should say more often no thanks.



We both understand that these are only our current thoughts and they are subject to change as our travels and our internal process continues. Fortunately, we do not know where it leads us. There is nothing permanent except change. We do not worry about the future. We are living day by day, seizing the moment, and doing exactly what we want.

Returning to the rat race is no longer possible. The selfishness that originally led us to leave has transformed to altruism and respect for life. To us, every single day is precious. Our only wish is to encounter others living outside the rat race in order to share experiences.

One could hear Friedrich Nietzsche's Zarathustra say: "Dead is Superman: now we want a divinely happy human being to live" while Machiavelli turned in his grave. At that very moment the coffee shop La Habanera felt like a heaven on earth.

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P.S. We are no longer smoking, drinking, eating flesh, overeating, or visiting cafés and restaurants. We also prefer walking over motorized vehicles. Everything else is pretty much the same, we are happy. (2012-11-8) ■

Happiness Test B

This test is also available at our website.

1. Rate the value of the following things in relation to your personal needs. [0 = important to you personally, and 5 = important to you because of other people]:

- o 1 2 3 4 5 Success in life
- o 1 2 3 4 5 Having a meaningful job
- o 1 2 3 4 5 House, car & other material things
- o 1 2 3 4 5 Family, friends, colleagues
- o 1 2 3 4 5 Free time, vacations, hobbies
- o 1 2 3 4 5 Money, savings, investments

Answer to the following questions without using concepts of success, work, property, belongings, house, car, summer cottage, family, friends, money, savings, investments, loan, free time, hobbies, and vacation:

2. What makes you happy?

3. The meaning of your life is:

4. In the Test A there were questions: “2. If I won big money in the lottery I would?” and “4. After my retirement I will do.” What prevents you from doing these things right now?

5. Do you want to be happy in your life?

- Yes
- No

6. If you answered yes, please write in detail what you are going to do to be happy and to find the meaning of your life from now on:

How are your values divided into internal (your own, personal values) and external (what other people want or expect you to do)? Does happiness and the meaning of your life really originate from yourself? Do you know what you personally want from life?

The more points you earned in the first question, the better you realize the existence of the rat race. The maximum score is 30. Now you can compare these answers to the answers you gave in the previous test.

Rhoughts

The Rhoughts are a collection of Random Thoughts. The collection is in alphabetical order and covers the subjects of this book.

- 1) All living beings are one and connected to each other. Trying to separate yourself from others is fooling yourself.
- 2) Do you dare to realize your dreams or just give up without even trying?
- 3) Dreaming feels good, but making dreams come true feels even better.
- 4) How much money is too much for making your dreams come true?
- 5) How much would you be willing to pay for being happy for one day?
- 6) If you can do or buy something, it doesn't mean you must do so.
- 7) If you do something, why not do it well or at least as well as you can?
- 8) If you had only one day to live in the rat race, you would waste only one day of your life.
- 9) If you seek for victory, profit, or gain there are even bigger things to be conquered inside yourself.
- 10) Life outside the rat race means doing such things that one personally wants.
- 11) Love and sex are united in the same way as happiness and life outside the rat race.
- 12) Making decisions is important, and there are no right or wrong decisions.
- 13) Sad memories and past things tie you to the past, not to life.
- 14) Selfishness is a good thing but best of all is to be selfish openly and without shame.
- 15) The best way to win is not to play at all, because only losers play.
- 16) The chasm between happiness and the rat race can be crossed only when one understands one's personal desires.
- 17) The only absolute truth is your own understanding of the truth and

This is a travel story of three different journeys that are interconnected and happen at the same time: the journey into ourselves, the journey to the other side of the world, and the journey to find the meaning of life. On the way we will define the concept of the rat race and use it to describe our current thoughts regarding the meaning of life.

We hope this book will inspire you to reflect your personal motives and goals in life from a bit more selfish perspective. In the beginning and at the end there are tests for measuring your happiness. We have included some photos from Brazil along our way. Do you dare to be happy?

Päivi & Santeri Kannisto were born in 1970. Päivi worked as a Management Consultant and Santeri was the CEO of an open source company he founded in 1991. They left Finland and become Global Nomads in 2004, living their life outside of the rat race, travelling the world.



therefore you are the only one who can have an influence on it.

- 18) The only way you can be useful is to make yourself useless.
- 19) The road to hell is paved with good intentions.
- 20) There cannot exist genuine, unselfish friendships inside the rat race.
- 21) To be what you personally want to be, or not to be at all?
- 22) Travelling is in itself more rewarding than reaching a destination.
- 23) Why should you delay your dreams?
- 24) Why pimp happiness for money?