

tations of Life in the United States



美国 生活 万象

郑嵩怡 编译

汉 对 照 美 国 风 情 丛 书



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内 容 提 要

本书是《美国风情系列丛书》中的一种,采用英汉对照的形式编译而成。全书对美国人生活的各个层次、各个领域作了较为详尽的介绍,从中既可以了解美国人群体的生活面貌,又可窥见其个人生活的点滴,还可以借鉴他们为人处世的态度与技巧,如:他们关心在富足的物质生活中如何过简朴的日子,如何给别人带来快乐,如何节约时间以及如何面对挫折等。本书选材新颖精当,译文准确凝炼,是学习英语的良好辅助读物,同时也是了解美国人生活的“小百科全书”,适合于中等程度的英语学习者和对美国文化感兴趣的读者。

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英 语 原 文

1. The Shock of Happiness

For eight months the girl lay in a Swiss tuberculosis sanatorium making virtually no progress. One day her father arrived and, after a worried look at her, departed for a talk with the physician in charge. A half-hour later, a horsedrawn sleigh, jingle bells and all, was at the door. The girl was bundled in blankets and carried down — and away they went, up and down the snow-covered mountain roads, with a stop for chocolate and cakes, another for a gape at an Alpine valley, then off again for another 20 minutes.

No miracle happened, but it is on the record that from that moment recovery started. Less than a year later, the girl was home, well along the road to normal health.

This is as good an example as I know of what may be called cure by the shock of happiness. Webster defines a shock as "a sudden and violent agitation of the mental or emotional sensibilities." In other words, a brusque upsetting of routine, a rock tossed through the gray window of boredom.

Let the upset be joyous. The old wives have always known that happiness is a medicine. Administered sharply and dramatically, it can work wonders.

The business of living calls for an occasional squeal of delight, and that comes only from being brought up short by something we may have dreamed about but certainly did not expect. We all tend to get into ruts. Marriage counselors tell husbands to surprise the little woman with flowers; they tell wives to offer a new trout fly or a golf gadget. Gifts on birthdays, on anniversaries and at Christmas—of course! But the present that shakes awake the sagging spirit is one offered for no reason at all except tenderness, and on any old ragamuffin of a day.

Good advice, not only for husbands and wives—and why not turn a simple surprise into a jolt of joy by making the gift dramatically different or outsize? Calling on a woman friend, a man I know brought a bucket of freesias, 50 at least, enough to adorn and perfume the house for weeks. They are still remembered. On another occasion he came bearing a box of candy with a single white orchid caught in the twine. The rule about giving is to give more than expected. Knock the postman, the waiter, the cleaning woman off their feet with a

haymaker of a tip. You won't go bankrupt, and you'll get the money back in smiling service. And ditto for gifts to anyone at any time. The annual necktie from Aunt Emma always got a thankyou note, but the Christmas she sent a hydraulic jack, the house was lit up by the sparkle in papa's eyes, and instead of a letter she received a telephone call that rang with hosannas.

An evening out that follows a sudden impulse is worth a dozen carefully planned affairs. One night a friend, a business executive, telephoned his wife; "I'm waiting for you in the lobby of the St. George Hotel. We're having dinner out — I've found a swell new steak house." You could almost hear her stammer, "But the dinner—it's all ready." "Stick it in the icebox; we'll eat it tomorrow," said the brute.

The woman was rocked by vertigo, but secretly happy; it was as if they were back in the old days of courtship when nothing mattered except being together. And after dinner, instead of a sedate dancing spot, they went to a disothèque where, in shock abandoned, they rocked and twisted, imitating the youngsters about them. At one o'clock the husband moaned with a grin, "Oh, my aching back!" "Oh, my darling!" said the lady, and the glow of the moon was in her eyes. As marriages

go, this is one of the best, because the shocks come often and never fail to evoke delectable pins and needles.

"Every evening should have its menu," said Balzac. It may be an hour of skating under the moon on a remote lake. It may be exotic food. Instead of a show, why not go to a political meeting and get up and express your opinion? In a word, explore the possibilities—you will find they are as varied as your wit and imagination.

And let the daring young man remember to keep doing this after marriage. Once joined in wedlock, he usually falls off the trapeze; the inventor of surprise and tingling forgets what made him a hero. At work, he will still pummel his brains, but home becomes for him a place for *not* thinking. Not thinking can become a habit. Brilliance, too, is a habit and can be cultivated. If you create high-voltage shocks at home, you are more likely to shine at the office.

With children, shocks of happiness can even be a cure for misbehavior. Take a three-year-old who won't stay in bed and keeps coming downstairs. He is prepared for a scolding, or at best a quick trip back to his cot. One evening I tried a new maneuver. I heaved the boy up on my shoulders and walked outside. The sky was a snowfield

of stars. There was a fingernail of a crescent moon. The boy had never seen the night before, and he was awed, thrilled, frightened and elated all at once. I pointed out the few constellations I knew; Orion with his Belt, and the Great Bear with its Big Dipper. I reassured him that the strange sound he heard was an owl, the bird that works a night shift. As to the rustling, that was the leaves whispering in their sleep. This excursion did not put an end to the trips downstairs. But they became less frequent, less often the result of a bad dream or of lying awake alone in a dark room. Another cure or near-cure through the shock of happiness.

For some men and women, lack of self-confidence is almost pathological; the man who freezes when asked to address an audience, the woman who falls to pieces when there are more than four people for dinner. For such persons, the simple shock of sudden change may be better than shock treatment by electricity.

I have in mind a timid soul who lived in a small house in the suburbs. He had two children and a wife who ruled him in a peevish, unintelligent way. His job as an accountant gave him a knowledge of all aspects of the company for which he worked; one day, safe in the routine of memo-

passing, he sent a suggestion to the general manager. It was a good idea, but it required investigation, and so our Mr. Milquetoast was asked to pack his bag and tackle it. He wanted passionately to refuse the assignment but, standing on the executive carpet, he did not dare.

The news that this mild creature of routine was going on an unexpected out-of-town trip was like the explosion of a bomb in the little suburban house. The shock waves went on spreading as he settled in a first-class seat on an airplane, put up at the best hotel made telephone calls and appointments. Overnight our man became a man of the world. Life in the suburbs was never the same again. He bought a new car and gradually assumed command of his home. His wife, who secretly wanted nothing better than a dominant male, brightened up and rediscovered the joy of laughter. The explanation: a shock of happiness that came *from inside*, by the man's own efforts.

It is possible for all of us to create the shock that can change our lives. It may take a little courage to shake oneself out of the pajamas of habit. But it can be done, and it's easier than you imagine. In Finland, one rushes from the superheated sauna bath for a plunge into the icy waters of a lake. Stop to think and you won't do it—ever.

Dive in without hesitancy, and after the shock you feel more wonderful that you have ever felt before.

Everybody wants to know how to get more out of life. The answer is to make greater use of the power that drives us—our emotions. By agitating them in a wise but ruthless fashion, we can acquire the self - confidence and the feeling of power that will lead us to a life packed with interest, excitement and love of beauty. Franz Kafka once said, "We need an ice ax to break the frozen sea within us." The best ax is a shock of happiness.

2. Make Time for Love

That Friday night, when my husband and I began to remember what we had begun to forget, seemed quite ordinary at first. He came in, hung up his coat, looked around the kitchen. Suddenly, he asked, "Where *is* everybody?"

I looked up from the six baked potatoes I was buttering. "They must be around somewhere," I said. "I've been tearing around so much today that..."

He disappeared, and I heard the record player click off. Then the phone rang, and I took a message that his meeting for that night had been canceled. He appeared again, nodded thankfully when I told him about the meeting, and peered once more into the corners of the kitchen. "There's nobody here," he announced flatly.

I stopped putting the potatoes on a platter and thought for a moment. "Oh — I'd forgotten. Jim's gone on an overnight with the Scouts. And didn't Ted tell me this morning he was going to Billy's for the night?" I took two potatoes off the platter.