



The WordchipperSM

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My favorite things

I'm not an expert on mental health but it seems to me there's a lot of good therapy in the words to *My Favorite Things*, one of the best known songs from the classic Broadway musical, *The Sound of Music*. Those inspiring lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II, combined with the music of the great Richard Rodgers, were presented recently by the Straw Hat Players of Minnesota State University, Moorhead. Theater students did a highly professional job on the university's Delmar J. Hanson stage. The entire production was top notch, from singers to orchestra, to the sets, staging, sound, lighting and other tech work. Whoever was the director—and I can never find the name in the program—deserves whatever kind of TONY-like award they give to those responsible for college-level theater. If you didn't catch it, you missed one of MSUM's best shows.

I love all of the songs in that timeless musical, but Hammerstein gave us some real tools for overcoming setbacks, e.g., "When the dog bites, when the bee stings," by focusing on *positives*. While "raindrops on roses" and "whiskers on kittens" are okay, the song is getting closer to my own personal favorites with "crisp apple streudels" and "schnitzel with noodles." To these I would add pizza, lasagna, prime rib, a sirloin steak (with Heinz 57), a good-n-juicy cheeseburger in paradise (from Jimmy Buffett's kitchen), and, most certainly, crisp and sinful French fries. From my spouse's "Germans from Russia" cookbook, I love the calorie-rich pastry known as *kuchen*, and, my other favorite: *knoephla* soup. Yes, ma'am, that is gooooood stuff!

You only have to turn on a TV set, read a newspaper or magazine, or do some surfing on the Internet to realize the world we currently inhabit is nuts. "Stop the World, I Want to Get Off!," the title of another classic musical, says it all. What Hammerstein is advising is to try shutting-off negatives by thinking about "your favorite things." One can do this.

Beyond food—including popcorn—there's nothing quite like a really good book. It's fun to get lost in a narrative that keeps me turning the pages and reading into the night. A well-told yarn shuts off the noise. There's a sense of relaxation that also happens to me when I visit Barnes & Noble or B. D. S. Books in Fargo. Browsing bookstores is another of my favorite things. Add to that, lately, browsing my Amazon *Kindle*. In other words, changing what's going through your mind changes your mood, your attitude. No big revelation there, but ol' Oscar nailed it with his "favorite things" lyrics.

Of course, this idea of a self-creating a good attitude was first made famous by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale in *The Power of Positive Thinking* and there's another book that I have in my personal library that, I believe, is still in print and you also might find it at a good used bookstore. It's entitled *You Can't Afford the Luxury of a Negative Thought: A Book for People with Any Life-Threatening Illness Including Life* by Peter McWilliams, published by Prelude Press. This work is full of inspiring quotations such as this one from Glenville Kleiser: "Every good thought you think is contributing its share to the ultimate result of your life." It's the kind of book that can generate positive thinking just by browsing through it from time to time.

The positive feelings I received by watching the MSUM theatre students present *The Sound of Music* was a gift. Sure, I paid for the ticket, but what they gave me in those couple of hours was more than worth the admission price. Every performance seemed to come from the heart and, of course, so did Hammerstein's words. So, if you want to give yourself a lift, find a recording of *My Favorite Things* and play it. I can't get those lyrics out of my head and, as Martha Stewart says, "That's a *good* thing!"