



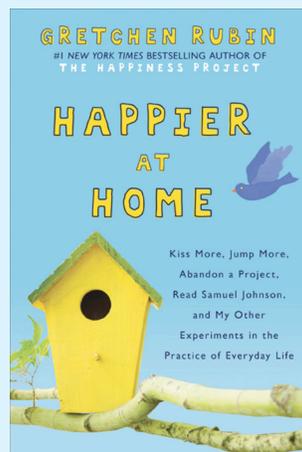
I've pulled together some material that didn't fit properly in *Happier At Home*.
I hope you enjoy this behind-the-scenes look at the book.
—GRETCHEN RUBIN

See for yourself! Because I thought readers might be curious to see for themselves some of the things I mention in *Happier at Home*, I made a “Behind the Scenes” video with a brief tour of some of the highlights. You can check it out on my YouTube channel, at <http://youtu.be/KC8HrPuFTLQ>.

In high school English class, when asked to identify an author's motif, you may have wondered, “Come on, do writers actually think about things like motifs?” Well, I do! *Happier at Home* has a blaring motif; did you notice it? This motif appears on the first and last pages of the book, and is repeated many times. Once I reveal it here*, you'll be surprised to realize how often the motif appears.

I debated for months about the book's subtitle, and wrote and discarded many. The other top contender was:
Or, Why I Decided to Read the Manual, Kiss More, Jump More,
Study Dr. Johnson, and Remember Now is Now

We spent months working on the jacket art. This is one of the most important and difficult stages of creating a book, and it's hard for me, because although I feel comfortable writing and editing, I feel out of my element when dealing with visual elements. Here's an early version. What do you think?



At the end of the “Preparation” chapter, I mention my law journal piece about torts. If you’re curious to read it, it was published as *The Persistence of Dread in Law and Literature*, 102 YALE L.J. 521 (1992). I can’t resist adding that for this paper I won the Edgar M. Cullen Prize, “for an outstanding paper written by a member of the first-year class.” Which is surprising, because it’s a bit....*unconventional* for a law journal note.

In “Possessions” chapter, in the discussion of simplicity, I quote a snatch of music without explaining its source. It’s a line from the Border ballad, “Raggle Taggle Gypsy.” YouTube has clips of several beautiful versions, by the Water Boys, the Chieftains, and many others. My inclusion of this phrase, however, is also an homage to Virginia Woolf. In an aside that has haunted me (clearly) for years, in her diary entry of December 19, 1932, she writes:

What I must do is to keep control; and not be too sarcastic; and keep the right degree of freedom and reserve. But oh how easy this writing is compared with *The Waves*! I wonder what the degree of carat-gold is in the two books. Of course this is external: but there’s a great deal of gold—more than I’d thought—in externality. Anyhow, what care I for my goose feather bed? I’m off to join the raggle taggle gipsies oh!

In the discussion of my resolution to “Cultivate a shrine,” I mention my children’s literature reading groups. Many people have told me they want to start similar groups and asked for reading suggestions. I could list hundreds of my favorite books, but here are a few recommendations, in a mixture of classic, modern, and contemporary:

J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*
 Frances Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess*
 Betsy Byars, *The Midnight Fox*
 Kristin Cashore, *Graceling*
 Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*
 Elizabeth Enright, *The Saturdays*
 Rumer Godden, *The Greengage Summer*
 E. L. Konigsburg, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*
 Madeleine L’Engle, *A Wrinkle in Time*
 C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*
 Robin McKinley, *Beauty*
 Robert O’Brien, *The Silver Crown*
 Philip Pullman, *The Golden Compass*
 J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Ring trilogy*
 Peter Cameron, *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful To You*

Each page of *Happier at Home* sets off a train of memories for me—memories of the events that I describe, of various trains of thoughts I followed, and of writing decisions that I had to make. For instance, I had to make the sad decision to cut out one of my pet words, “chirk.” I love this word, but every single person who read a draft of *Happier at Home* marked it as a typo, and even spell-check flagged it as a misspelling. “It’s a real word!” I kept insisting. I ultimately admitted defeat, but here will record the sentence as I wanted it to read. In the “Marriage” chapter, in the section about my resolution to “Kiss in the morning, kiss at night,” the original sentence read:

Then I realized, “Actually, Jamie really doesn’t like that kind of talk,” and instead, I gave him a long kiss. That seemed to chirk him up.

Two of my favorite phrases in the book: “mystical pigs” and “artisanal pickles.” When I read the phrase “mystical pigs,” a phrase from the Aristophanes play *Acharnenses* which is quoted in Kerényi’s *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, I marveled at this unpredictable pairing, and years ago, when I heard someone use the phrase “artisanal pickles” in conversation, I vowed that I would somehow use it myself someday. Check!

To make your own graham-cracker house, as mentioned in the “Interior Design” chapter:

- Make a base by covering a sheet of cardboard with tinfoil. Make rectangular or square houses with pitched roofs by “gluing” graham-cracker sheets together. For glue, use store-bought tub frosting (regular frosting makes a better glue than the “whipped” variety, which isn’t as heavy).
- Let dry overnight.
- Spread chocolate or vanilla frosting over the tinfoil and the houses. (The vanilla can be dyed any color.) Use frosting as glue to decorate the houses with peppermint rounds, chocolate chips, miniature candy canes, red-hots, nonpareils, M&M’s, etc. Pretzels make good wooden fences or stacks of firewood. Marshmallows can be sliced and cut into different shapes.

As a writer, the thing that I write best is endings. I love writing endings, and, I confess, I love reading my own endings. I get a chill every time I read the last line of my college application essay: “Read all instructions carefully; turn over your test papers and begin.”

With my endings, I try to draw together many threads of the book, so that the last page is a true culmination. Also, my endings are often allusions to pieces of writing that have unusual power or special significance to me. For instance, *Forty Ways to Look at Winston Churchill* concludes:

There he is, my Churchill; braced on the quarterdeck of H.M.S. Prince of Wales, cigar in his hand, surrounded by British and American sailors. For the moment, theurgencies of war have quieted the restlessness and ambition that dog him. His powers, too strenuous for peacetime, at last suit the hour.

Now he addresses the troops. “We shall go on to the end,” he promises, “we shall never surrender.” Flags snap in the breeze, and Roosevelt’s wheelchair creaks its way across the deck, and Churchill leads everyone, Britons and Americans together, in singing. In all his long history he will never see a greater day than this. Tears are running down his cheeks, tears not of sorrow but of wonder and admiration.

This isn’t everyone’s Churchill, but it’s my Churchill.

It all happened long ago and far away, but I can see Winston Churchill more clearly than I can see the page on which I write.

This recalls a passage from Joan Didion’s 1965 essay, “John Wayne: A Love Song”:

And then something happened. Suddenly the room seemed suffused with the dram, and I could not think why. Three men appeared out of nowhere, playing guitars. Pilar Wayne leaned slightly forward, and John Wayne lifted his glass almost imperceptibly toward her. “We’ll need some Pouilly-Fuisé for the rest of the table,” he said, “and some red Bordeaux for the Duke.” We all smiled, and drank the Pouilly-Fuisé for the rest of the table and the red Bordeaux for the Duke, and all the while the men with the guitars kept playing, until finally I realized what they were playing, what they had been playing all along: “The Red River Valley” and the theme from *The High and the Mighty*. They did not quite get the beat right, but even now I can hear them, in another country and a long time later, even as I tell you this.

But of all the endings I’ve ever written, the final paragraphs of *Happier at Home* may be my favorite. I get tears in my eyes every time I read it; I was able to express something exactly the way I wanted, which is very difficult.

As I wrote the ending, I thought about an observation by artist Alberto Giacometti:

The more I work, the more I see things differently, that is, everything gains in grandeur every day, becomes more and more unknown, more and more beautiful. The closer I come, the grander it is, the more remote it is.

Happier at Home’s last page includes a direct quotation from Laura Ingalls Wilder’s masterpiece, *Little House in the Big Woods*, of course, and concludes with this final paragraph:

As I turned the key and pushed open the front door, as I crossed the threshold, I thought how breathtaking, how fleeting, how precious was my ordinary day. Now is now. Here is my treasure.

* The motif of the book? Treasure.