

This is an excerpt from *The 16 Guidelines for a Happy Life: Up Close* published by The Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom.

Aspiration

“We are the generation we have been waiting for.”

(Craig Kielburger, Canada)

If we feel that our lives, or the world, are unsatisfactory, then aspiration is the fuel that will bring about change. Aspirations come in all shapes and sizes. Even the smallest of positive aspirations can help us find contentment and happiness. They are the call to action that brings meaning into our lives.

Aspirations serve to define what we want to achieve. They help ensure that the months and years do not drift by without doing anything that satisfies and fulfills us. The most powerful aspirations stretch our horizons and take us beyond our limited personal concerns. They challenge us to summon up our daring and creativity, and to draw on talents and qualities that we did not know we possessed. They permit us to taste and to realize our unique potential as human beings.

The life stories of the people in this book may seem daunting and out of reach. In hindsight they are towering figures. Yet everything they did consisted of small choices and steps, many of which are possible for anyone.

How can each of us acknowledge our particular gifts and passions? What will it take to turn them into action?

Why Craig Kielburger?

Craig Kielburger was twelve years old when he saw a newspaper headline about a Pakistani boy, Iqbal Masih, who had been murdered for speaking out about the working conditions he had endured in the carpet-making industry. From that moment, Craig's life began to change. He photocopied the article, went down to the local library to research statistics on child labor, and invited some of his classmates round for 'pop and pizza' to discuss what they could do to improve the lives of children on the other side of the world.

Twelve years later, Craig's organization, Free the Children, has inspired more than a million young people to get involved in humanitarian activities. It builds schools, provides health-care, improves sanitation and supports small business development in more than forty-five countries. Its mission is to free children everywhere from abuse or exploitation, and from the mistaken idea that they are not old enough, smart enough or capable enough to change the world. Free the Children is also funded, driven and staffed by children and youth.

In parallel with their humanitarian work, Craig and his brother Marc campaign about the importance of helping young people to realize their aspirations. In 1999 they established Leaders Today, an organization that provides leadership training to more than 350,000 young people each year. They run a website (www.globalvoices.org) that encourages young people to report on and discuss global issues. Their most recent book, *From Me to We*, proposes that every young person has an issue that hits them in the heart – and that the challenge is to act on it. “Find your gift. Find your passion. Put them together and you will change the world. It only takes one small act to make a difference.”

Craig blogs extensively about his encounters with street children and child workers. “They impress me the most because they never give up hope. They have this amazing spirit about them.” He also demonstrates a deep respect for older people: “All of us young changemakers have role models from whom we can learn.” He and his brother have sought advice from Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama and Mother Teresa.

All of the Craig Kielburger quotations are courtesy of Free The Children, www.freethechildren.com

How does Aspiration lead to Happiness?

Deep down, most of us thrive on challenge. We long to be stretched: to exceed expectations, build our confidence and taste new territory. Even if we're scared, aspiration makes our blood sing and our eyes shine. These are the moments when we sense that anything is possible – that human beings can create great beauty, resolve intractable problems, show vast compassion and develop enduring wisdom.

How often do we reflect on what really fires us up? Can we give a day, an hour or even five minutes to honestly ask this question? What are we afraid of? Is it the risk of admitting, at least to ourselves, that we're not satisfied? Part of us longs for change even if another part of us is running scared.

When we're feeling bored or uninspired, the hours drag by. We seek out entertainment and distraction to get some temporary relief. But when we look back on that time it seems to have disappeared in a flash, like a shooting star across the sky or water down a plughole. There can be such a sense of waste and disappointment if we haven't discovered how to use our time and energy well.

There's nothing wrong with eating, sleeping, going to work, shopping, seeing movies or making love. But if our whole life is taken up with the pursuit of pleasure and personal comfort, it becomes like salty water that never quenches our thirst. The result may be nothing more than quiet desperation. The happiest human beings seem to be those who have created some meaning to their existence beyond simply taking care of themselves.

It can be argued that low self esteem is at the root of all the world's problems. When we think that we are not capable of shaping our lives in the way that we long for, or of contributing something however small to create a better world, then resolution fades and energy drops away. Believing we are not good enough we leave the challenge to someone else. Our cynicism is often a mask for disappointment and frustration, fear or laziness. The gap between where we are now and where we'd like to be is painful.

Where will we find the inspiration to shift our focus and direction? In music or literature, in company or solitude, in a church or under a tree? Inspiration literally means "to breathe in" – to draw into ourselves whatever gives us hope, strength and insight. It is a wake up call that kindles a fire in our heart that can spread through our whole being. Sometimes we have to travel long distances to find inspiration. At others, it comes as a surprise in a quiet moment when the rushing around has stopped. Whenever it happens, it's like breathing different air.

Inspiration is so powerful that it needs to be handled with care. It's possible to suffer from too much; to get overwhelmed or lost in grandiose ideas. It can be a challenge to stay with the task in hand and to resist the urge to flit like a butterfly from one source of inspiration to another without exploring anything fully. Inspiration can overwhelm us with excitement, and lead us down false paths. Discernment is vital.

Since inspiration and aspiration take us on a journey, it helps to seek companions who can share advice and laughter on the way. If we take on a demanding job, is there someone we can turn to when things are tough? If we choose to support a good cause,



Craig Kielberger: Photo by Elin Berge, The World's Children's Prize for the Rights of the Child, an award by sixteen million children and a global citizen process which honored Craig in 2006 – www.childrensworld.org

Challenge

Do you ever dream of how to make the world a better place? What would you like to see happen that is so big and inspiring that it would take more than one lifetime to accomplish? Are you willing to start it now? What would be the first small step?

*Trust in what is said by the
eminently learned:*

*When you've achieved the honor
of a highly regarded family,
And reached a stage in life
advanced in study and learning,
You'll come to know contentment
and well-being.*

(From *The Necklace of Precious Advice for Choosing without Confusion What is to be Adopted and Rejected within the Spiritual and Mundane* composed by Gelong Wangchuk Chösang and translated into English by Jampa Gendun in December, 2006 and revised August, 2007.)

'Aspiration' From Ready Set Happy

Words and visuals by Denise Flora.

A *16 Guidelines Children's Kit* – fun, skill-building activities for children, their parents, caregivers and teachers – is due out in February 2008. Here is one of the stories in the kit:

Race for Rampal

A short play about two sisters set in a summer field, to be read by two people.

Jenny (a small child, laying on her back, listening to her older sister play the flute, looking up at the clouds): Look at that one! It looks like a cat. Like our cat at the old farm. Oh, now it's going away. I wanted to draw a picture of it.

Sonja (putting down her flute): But it's okay, now it looks like a swan. Do you miss our old cat?

Jenny: Yes, things are always changing like the clouds. Sometimes I don't like it.

Sonja: But sometimes you do, like at the beginning of the summer when you grew out of your old shoes and it made you mad at first...

Jenny: ...but then I got to wear your pretty shoes because I was big enough to fit into them....I also liked it when summer came and it wasn't dark so much anymore.

Sonja: At school they told me that even our skin is changing new cells for old, all the time.

Jenny: Won't I look like me when I get big?

Sonja: You will, just little changes all the time. A little taller, a little stronger.

Jenny: Good! I want to be the fastest runner and win races. What do you want to do?

Sonja: I want to play beautiful music on my flute, like Rampal. When I hear the music he played it makes me feel wonderful. I want to be able to do that, too. And, of course, I will come cheer you on at your races!

Jenny: Yes, yes, we can because everything is changing!

Sonja: If everything is changing, anything is possible!

is there a group who share our concerns? If we follow a spiritual path, is there a community of people who will encourage us to stay on track?

Aspiration raises the stakes. When it isn't followed through, it can turn sour. The heart grieves for what has been tasted but lost. Yet when aspiration leads us into action, we feel a transformation – and usually we look different too. Bad news and disappointments are faced with more equanimity. We have a greater urgency to ease the suffering of others. We feel more at peace. Even in the darkest moments there is hope. ☸

*Excerpt from **The 16 Guidelines for a Happy Life: Up Close**, a high-quality illustrated book that links each Guideline with a contemporary role model. Published October 2007 by the Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom, London, UK in a limited print run of 1000 copies, and available from www.amazon.co.uk.*

The 16 Guidelines for a Happy Life: Next Steps

The 16 Guidelines is the first initiative of the Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom set up in January 2005 to take forward Lama Yeshe's vision for 'a new kind of universal education' – now called Essential Education.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Honorary President of the Foundation, says: "Wherever you start Essential Education, this should be the practice... We're proposing things that have an immediate effect, so that if someone puts them into practice, it brings peace of mind. That's the key thing about Essential Education: that it leads to fewer problems, and less confusion."

A paperback version of *The 16 Guidelines for a Happy Life* is due out in April 2008. It will act as the 'standard' version for use at work and at home, and will be translated, printed and distributed worldwide.

Other plans for 2008 include:

- Children's Kit
- Adult Study Program
- Training Courses in Europe, Australia and North America
- A set of interactive games
- A multi-media wiki for sharing resources relating to the Guidelines

*For more information visit www.16guidelines.org
For regular updates join the Foundation mailing list on www.essential-education.org*