

ELLE

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What does happiness feel like? For me, it's a deep sense of security. It's being busy but not stressed, and knowing that my life is now full of kind, supportive people who uplift and inspire me. One of my favourite writers, David Sedaris, made me aware of the Four Burners Theory in a funny piece he wrote for *The New*

Yorker back in 2009. Picture a four-burner stove: one represents your family, one is your friends, the third is your health, and the fourth is your work. The gist, he explained, was that 'in order to be successful, you have to cut off one of your burners. And in order to be really successful, you have to cut off two.' I've spent a long time playing around with this idea; sacrificing my health for work or my family for my friends as I tried to live 'successfully'. But last year I think I finally cracked it and figured out a way to keep all my burners on a steady heat. Finding this balance led me to have the best year of my life (to date). I'm almost ashamed to admit it as, globally, 2016 will go down in history as an annus horribilis, but amid the political turmoil, war and injustice, and the deaths of much-loved legends, I personally had a lovely time. I got engaged and married, I won a prize for my writing, and I became Acting Editor-in-Chief of ELLE – my dream job. Nothing bad happened to anyone I love and I made some big, positive decisions with my partner about our future together.

When you've experienced a lot of loss from an early age, as I have, you know that bad things can happen unexpectedly and life can quickly spiral out of control. Because of this, I've previously never liked to admit that things are good and I've been reluctant to acknowledge my own happiness in case I jinx it. Every small joy I've experienced has reminded me of its opposite – of what sadness feels like – so I haven't been able to relax and enjoy the moment. But I've now reached a point,

at 34, where I'm ready to admit to myself that I'm happy and, instead of worrying that it might not last, I'm just going to be grateful and enjoy the present.

It's so important that we talk openly about not being OK, about grief, and the anxiety and depression that affect one in 10 of us. But the fact that other people are suffering, or that we may one day suffer too, shouldn't mean we have to be coy about our own happiness when we do feel it because it's the lows that make us truly appreciate the highs. As Leonard Cohen, one of the greats who died in 2016, wrote: 'There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.'

I wanted my first issue of ELLE to capture some of this unapologetic joie de vivre, and to celebrate the good in life without negating its serious and challenging aspects. For me, Elle Fanning was the perfect person to embody this, as she has both spirit and substance. Her advice on page 108 proves the depths of her experience, despite the fact she's just 18. Wearing the most bright and upbeat of the trends, from Miu Miu to Dior, she sets the tone. Fashion reflects the mood of a milieu, and in Fashion Director Anne-Marie Curtis' Collections (page 80), we're taken on a journey through the season's defining moments, from playful to pragmatic, with each shoot wrapped up beautifully in its own sense of optimism.

This issue is full of women who are finding their own way to happiness, whether it's the asexuals we speak to about leading a contented life free from physical intimacy on page 76, or Ruby Tandoh who shaved her head to feel truly herself for the first time (page 70). Frontwoman of The xx, Romy Madley Croft, talks candidly about losing both her parents before she reached her mid-twenties (page 58) and how, through songwriting with her two best friends and bandmates, she feels more positive than ever. The new album, *I See You*, out this month, is the band's lightest and most uptempo work to date. It's a joyful celebration of youth and possibility, yet the songs touch on issues of loss, addiction and heartbreak. I believe the best art comes from this tension between light and dark, revelry and reflection.

Happiness might be fleeting, but that's what makes it so precious and why, when you are lucky enough to find it, you should tell the world. In the words of The xx, 'Go on, I dare you.'

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