

Flash Nonfiction
Hermit Crab Essay
Kathy Fitch
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Allerton Articulation Conference

Dear Sir or Madam:

We regret to inform you that your application for unending happiness and unceasing personal bliss has been summarily denied.

Given the obvious sincerity of your application, we will break from our customary stuffy formality long enough to offer a few of our collective hard-won insights, because we here at Prayers and Petitions, LLC (P&P, LLC) do appreciate how complicated a notion "happiness" can be, and how readily assurances of one's freedom to pursue it can be confused with promises of fulfillment.

Consider, for a moment, the happiest things you can imagine. Your wedding day, for instance. Or your dream job. The welcome arrival of a brand new healthy baby, perhaps. Or maybe untold wealth is more your speed. We urge you to contemplate the many moments of struggle, pain, disappointment, frustration, and downright mess built right into all of these, and into every similar dream.

Weddings are followed by marriages which, without exception, will involve bills, disagreements, compromises, and many fairly dull but mostly inescapable routines, such as laundry, lawn care, and tending to dirty dishes. Thus, we heartily recommend not getting so preoccupied with flower arrangements and flowery vows that you blithely skip over the nitty-gritty realities to come, including socks on the floor and heated "over or under" toilet paper roll debates.

Similarly, any dream job will likely come with occasional interminable meetings, plenty of less than thrilling paperwork, and at least a handful of coworkers with an uncanny ability to fray your very last nerve. Professional athletes must practice constantly, skip dessert often, and deal regularly with pain and injury. Rock stars fade into obscurity. Novelists develop writer's block. No career lacks challenges and disappointments

Do we even need to bother pointing out what a chore babies really are? Sure, they tend to be fascinating at first--it seems to have something to do with the tiny but perfectly formed digits that are miraculous every time, to say nothing of that fiendishly clever head to body ratio that prompts caregiving--but their assorted drawbacks are crystal clear, and diapers are the least of it. Don't plan on much sleep once one of these creatures arrives, and brace yourself for the terrors to come: illness, school, driving, romances, college. If you imagine walking around with your heart outside of your body forever, you'll about have it right.

"But untold wealth," you might be thinking to yourself, "surely there's no drawback there?" We beg to differ. How will you keep a firm grip on your moral compass when you can buy anything at all? How will

Details	
Words	697
Characters	4,234
Sentences	32
Paragraphs	16
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Speaking Time	3 mins 52 sec

you sort the people who truly love and respect you from those who will agree to your every whim because of your purchasing power and the influence it brings? Will anyone ever have the guts honestly to disagree with you again? Can you grow and change the way humans should without that friction? What will you do when you discover that you can have any material item on earth, but still hunger after some unnamed thing that clearly can't be purchased? We have read tens of thousands of applications like yours. We know that moment of yearning always comes.

Might we suggest revising your application to emphasize developing the capacity for joyful absorption? Despite the apparently negative tone of the above, we here at P&P support and promote this capacity without reservation.

Our team believes in looking up from a sinkful of dirty dishes to admire a rosy sunset through the trees, in chasing a career you love so passionately that braving its drawbacks is worthwhile, in getting so caught up in the fun of bathing a baby that you barely even notice what a sodden wreck you and your bathroom are by the end. We believe in generosity, true purpose, and treasuring honestly critical friends, too.

We do have serious doubts about untold wealth, however, and would suggest directing applications for that to Root of All Evil, Inc., though we hope you will get far too joyfully absorbed in the rich and complicated challenges of your actual and imperfect life ever to submit that application.

Warmest Regards,

The Application Review Team
Prayers and Petitions, LLC
prayersandpetitions.org