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# 7 Ways to Make the Most of Your Time With Your Grandchildren

BARBARA DANZA

If you're so blessed to be called Grandma or Grandpa, your life is rich. All over again, you're given the opportunity to be inspired by the innocence and wonder of childhood; to see the world through the eyes of a child; to love unconditionally with all of your heart; and to bestow your wisdom and family traditions to the next generation. What a gift.

One of the greatest blessings of my life has been bearing witness to the overwhelmingly beautiful relationship between my parents and my children. The joy they bring each other and the immeasurable love they share are gifts our whole family treasures. Each of them is better in every way because of it.

Time spent with grandchildren is precious. Here are seven ideas to make the most of your time with yours.

## Tell Stories

Children are naturally curious and love stories. Give them details about when you were a kid—what you played, what you liked to eat, where you lived, what life was like then, the people you knew, the dreams you had, where you went to school. Describe the jobs you've had, the places you've visited, what it was like when their parents were born.

You'll be helping them to understand their place in your family and in the world; where they've come from and what life can be like. You'll bond with them and laugh with them. They'll understand you and themselves more as a result.

## Play Games

One of the greatest benefits of being a grandparent is the excuse to play again. Play checkers or hide-and-seek, toss a ball around, and soak up the joy in sharing a most important pastime with your grandchildren.

## Teach Them Skills

Kids these days, right? Don't let them grow up not knowing the life skills you know to be invaluable.

Bake a cake with them, show them how to sew a button on a shirt, ask them for help fixing the car, or ask them to help you with the laundry.

They'll love doing these things with you and they won't forget the lessons you've taught them for the rest of their lives.



HEDGEHOGBA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Let your grandchildren regale you with their stories and all they have to say.

## Trace Your History

Take a walk down memory lane with your grandchildren. Show them old pictures of their ancestors. Trace your family tree, making connections. Get together with extended family and teach them how they're related. Point out where your family hails from, studying maps or a globe, and discussing the characteristics of those places.

## Listen to Them

Let your grandchildren regale you with their stories and all they have to say. Be a good listener and a comfort to them. From the little things to the big things, be attentive to it all.

## Bend the Rules

As a parent, perhaps you ran a tight ship. Your children may be doing the same with your grandchildren. But now that you get to be a grandparent, it's time to have fun!

Let your home be a place where they get a second, even third scoop of ice cream if they want; where they can stay up as late as they

Children are naturally curious and love stories.

want when they sleep over; where they can help you use "dangerous" tools; where they can try on your tie or your lipstick.

Of course you'll care for them and respect their parents' wishes, but who's really going to know if you bought them a toy just because they liked it at the store and they ordered the extra-large popcorn and had candy at the movie you took them to? It's OK. They were with their grandparents.

## Make Visits Regular

Life is super busy—especially for families with children. If possible, establish a standing appointment to be with your grandchildren. Perhaps their mom could use a day of the week to run errands and you can watch the children for her. Perhaps you can all save a weekend evening for a family dinner together.

Making a routine of time together will greatly increase how often you see your grandchildren and strengthen your family bonds in immeasurable ways.

# 4 Keystone Habits That Can Change Your Life

These good habits may be the 'key' to unlocking others

BARBARA DANZA

In architecture, a keystone is the central stone of an arch, where both symmetrical sides come together at the top, and upon which the integrity of the entire arch relies. Without the keystone, the arch would crumble.

When it comes to habits, certain habits can act as keystones in your life.

Habit expert and author of "The Power of Habit, Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business," Charles Duhigg described the idea of keystone habits, arguing you don't have to alter every habit in your life to make significant change, but instead identify and focus on your keystone habits that will have a ripple effect on the other aspects of your life.

So what habits tend to be keystone habits?

## Exercising

Exercise is commonly identified as a keystone habit. James Clear, the author of "Atomic Habits," shared his experience of identifying exercise as a keystone habit. "I started to notice a funny



ZDENKA DARULA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Meditation has been shown to have a significant effect on mental and physical well-being.

thing," he wrote on his website. "When I worked out, I wanted to eat better. Even though I could have rewarded myself with chocolate bars and ice cream, I felt like eating real, healthy foods."

He continued to explain how working out also led to better sleep and increased productivity when awake. "Especially in the hour or two after working out, ... my mind seemed to think clearer and my writing was crisper. Thoughts flowed easily," he said.

So, without focusing on the ancillary benefits, exercise revealed itself to be a keystone habit that unlocked other positive outcomes without any attempt to adjust any other habits.

## Meditating

Many people point to meditating as a keystone habit. Meditation has been shown to have a significant effect on mental and physical well-being and has been associated with numerous benefits

including improved sleep quality, slowed brain aging, lower risk for stroke and heart disease, lowered anxiety, and increased happiness.

## Making Your Bed

In a speech that went viral online a few years ago, U.S. Navy Admiral William H. McRaven begins, "If you want to change the world, start off by making your bed." In this talk definitely worth watching, he enumerates the many ways in which the simple act of making your bed ripples through your day, and indeed, your life to allow you to "do big things."

A made bed starts your day off with a small win. A made bed makes your room look cleaner and, perhaps may encourage you to straighten the room further. Having made your bed will give you "a small sense of pride," as McRaven says, and "may encourage you to do another task, and another, and another." It reinforces the importance of doing little things well. "And if by chance you have a miserable day, you will come home to a bed that is made," he adds.

## Eating Dinner as a Family

Some things we used to take for granted have now become rare, due to our busy lives. Eating dinner together as a family might just be one of those things.

The nonprofit The Family Dinner Project encourages families to rekindle this important habit. It notes the many ancillary benefits that eating dinner together as a family has been shown to have, including "higher grade-point averages, resilience and self-esteem" among children. "Additionally, family meals are linked to lower rates of substance abuse, teen pregnancy, eating disorders and depression," according to the organization.

Eating dinner with our families leads to deeper connection, offers a sense of security and comfort, allows for better nutritional choices, and keeps what's most important in life at the forefront, even when things get busy or stressful.

What habits would you like to improve in your life? Can you identify one simple habit that could have a ripple effect on the others?



The wise are right to warn us against attachment to the things of this world. Sometimes, though, these things attach themselves to us through people we have loved or events we have witnessed.

## The Things We Love

# Our Memories Make Our Treasures

JEFF MINICK

It was just a hunch.

Even before she got out of the van, I suspected the woman was crying. Maybe I thought so because she sat for a few moments in the driver's seat with the engine off, hands on the steering wheel, staring into space through a pair of sunglasses.

My daughter and I had left Front Royal, Virginia, at 6 that morning to drive to Gettysburg in Pennsylvania to purchase a 12-passenger van for her burgeoning tribe of children. She had found the van for sale online, had spoken with the woman, a mother of five, and learned that she and her husband were selling the van because their children were almost all grown.

My guess about the tears proved correct. Her husband, who had driven separately for their return trip home, emerged from his car with a pleasant smile, but the woman's face was tight, and you could hear the tears in her voice.

"Maybe it sounds silly," she explained, "but this van is full of memories for me. Not just because of the kids. We've hauled kayaks and camping equipment in this van. We used it to bring building materials for the addition to our house. It's a part of our past, a part of our family."

Down through the ages, philosophers, prophets, and theologians have warned us about the dangers of materialism and the misplaced attachments to worldly goods. In the end, they tell us, all such possessions are meaningless, becoming dust, like us, unto dust.

They have a point. An old joke demonstrates the truth of the adage "you can't take it with you."

A rich man wants to take his wealth to heaven after he dies. He begs and begs God to grant him this privilege. Finally a celestial messenger appears and tells the rich man he can take whatever he can carry to paradise. The man converts all that he owns into gold bars, deposits them into three leather sacks, and soon afterwards dies. He hugs the sacks of gold toward his new home. The journey seems to take forever, but finally he arrives at the gatekeeper's table and with a thud deposits each sack on the table.

"You can't bring anything in with you," Saint Peter says. After catching his breath, the rich man says, "I have

permission." Saint Peter checks his record book and nods. "So you do." He then opens the sacks, holds up one of the gold bars, and says with surprise, "You brought paving stones?"

I understand the dangers of materialism. Consider the Mac laptop on which I am writing these words. My computer is my most carefully guarded possession. I protect it against grandchildren, thieves, and after one terrible incident, spilled drinks. I value my laptop for the writing I do here, the entertainment and communications it provides, the easy research it affords me.

But I have no real affection for it. My Mac is a machine. When I replace it someday, I won't be shedding tears. But what of those things more deeply imbued with our personal history? Scattered around my apartment are material objects, things made of metal, wood, canvas, paint, and plastic, which I love and treasure, which are a part of my past. Here are just a few of these artifacts.

Thirty-seven years ago, my wife gave me the desk on which I am typing these words. The desk is six feet long, a roll-top desk missing the rolltop, a battered old monstrosity I once had to saw in half to fit through a doorway. A casual observer might comment on its size, but only I can apprehend the beauty of the life I have shared with this desk.

My father painted some of the framed oils and watercolors hanging on these walls. A physician, he was only an amateur artist, and his work will never appear for auction at Sotheby's, but when I pause to think on those paintings, I see my dad late at night at his easel.

The bureau behind me, replete with shelves, drawers, and a desk, is unremarkable so far as furniture goes, but in my mind's eye my mother sits at that tiny desk, paying bills and writing out letters to friends and family.

In a corner sits a cane given me by Sue Willard Lindsey, Sue, who never married and who was once my neighbor, died at age 100 two decades ago. The cane, now itself more than a century old, belonged to her father, a veteran of the Civil War. I remember Sue every time I look at this gnarled stick with its metal tip.

The glass punch bowl squatting atop my mom's bureau connects me to the parties my wife and I used to throw many years ago at our home in Waynesville, North Carolina, sum-

moning up a platoon of friends and family.

The box of Lincoln Logs from my boyhood, now a delight to my grandchildren, conjures up my brother Doug and my friend Allen when we built forts in our basement playground on winter afternoons.

That Raggedy Ann cookie jar on the shelf recalls the heady days of my courtship of my future wife in Boston. We were in a coffee shop where the jar was a part of the décor. After Kris noticed it and told me how much she'd loved Raggedy Ann as a child, I returned to the shop and convinced the owner to let me buy the jar, the first gift I ever gave her. Today the jar reminds me of our youth and passion, and of our four children who used to snag chocolate chip cookies from Raggedy Ann's interior.

The wise are right to warn us against attachment to the things of this world. Sometimes, though, these things attach themselves to us through people we have loved or events we have witnessed. They serve as visible explanations of our lives, telling us who we were, what we have seen and done. They embed themselves into our hearts and minds until, like our flesh and bone, they make themselves a part of us.

The people passing through that parking lot in Gettysburg acknowledged the four of us with a nod or a hello, but never gave the van a glance. Why would they? If they noticed the van at all, they saw only a white vehicle designed to transport up to 12 people.

But the woman in sunglasses saw the van with different eyes. Embedded in it were 10,000 memories of her husband and children, the conversations they had, the places they'd seen, the struggles they'd overcome, the love they'd shared.

That woman had every right to weep. She was mourning not the loss of a van, but the roll and sweep of time, beauty and the past, the end of an era in her life.

Nothing could be more human than her tears.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See [JeffMinick.com](http://JeffMinick.com) to follow his blog.

## MY MOST PRIZED POSSESSION: 'ANDY'S LETTERS'

When my mother passed away in 2004, we found a small box tucked away in a far corner under her bed labeled "Canceled checks and Andy's Letters." Andy is our dad who passed away in 1982, during my childhood.

Inside the box (along with canceled checks from the 1950s) were about 43 love letters that my dad wrote to my mom in the early 1950s while he was stationed as an officer in the Army Corps of Engineers during the Korean War. The letters

encompass the time around their engagement through shortly after their wedding in 1954.

The letters cover a wide range of topics, including details of planning their

wedding, day-to-day life in the Army, and more, including my dad's love for my mom. The letters are like a time capsule providing a first-hand glimpse into mid-century life, in addition to documenting a real-life love story that developed across long-distance from Iowa to Europe. There is one letter in which Dad begs her not to postpone or cancel the wedding date—she was concerned about our dad signing up for three more years of service, and where he would be stationed. (She went forward with the date as planned, and they lived in Germany for the first 9 months of their marriage.) They went on to have 4 kids and were together until my dad passed away in 1982.

Because we lost our dad at such a young age, and I recall so little about him, these letters allowed me to get to know my dad in a way I thought I never would be able to. We didn't know these letters existed until our mom passed away, more than 20 years after our dad died. Additionally, there is a letter from a fellow officer praising my dad and informing our mother what an amazing man she married. The officer provides several anecdotes and includes input from other officers, too. "Andy impressed me right away with his terrific sense of duty, friendliness and overall sense of responsibility... we really like the guy and hated losing him from our ranks, but it was to a worthy opponent: YOU," the officer wrote to my mom. The letters are extremely special, but even more so because my dad has been gone for so long and I knew him for such a short time.

Andrea Clement  
Winder, Georgia

# New to Classical Music? Start With Mozart

CATHERINE YANG

**N**EW YORK—Louis Langrée often meets people while traveling, and they'll ask what he does. "I'm a conductor!" he'll say. They ask whether they might have seen something he conducted or where they can catch a performance, and he'll mention the Mostly Mozart Festival in New York.

"They go, 'Really! When I was a kid, I don't know, 40 years ago, this is where I heard my very first classical concert,'" Langrée said.

These encounters bring him joy, speak to Mozart's accessibility, and affirm to him the relevance of the festival.

Fifty-three years ago, the first festival began as a way to bring some summer programming to the city. It was comparatively casual, affordable, and took advantage of the newly built and air-conditioned Lincoln Center facilities. Today, the summer experiment has become a New York City favorite.

"Mozart's music speaks to not just our sensitivity, but our sensibility," Langrée said.

Mozart himself is elusive in the music; he speaks to us, but not of himself, Langrée said, and scarcely any other composer wrote this way. He combined the mind and heart so masterfully you barely notice it.

Like this, Mozart elevates the listener. He wrote not at the behest of any one king or parish, but took his own commissions, and wrote music that could be understood by anyone. Mozart's genius is such that the scholarly can enthuse about his work all day, but someone who knows absolutely nothing of classical music will too say, "Hey, I enjoyed that."

You need to know absolutely nothing about history or Mozart to enjoy him.

"I try to get this Mozart lesson in my mind when I come to the programs," Langrée said. "It can be complex but not complicated."

Langrée made his New York debut with the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra (MMFO) in 1998 and was then appointed music director in 2002. He recently had his contract extended through 2023, and by the end of this season will have conducted 167 performances with the orchestra.

On opening night of the festival, Langrée conducted the full-length production of Mozart's "The Magic Flute," a first for the festival.

After the precision required of the opera, Langrée says the July 23 and 24 performances of Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony No. 3 and Violin Concerto in D major were a kind of reprieve.

"With 'The Magic Flute,' we are so disciplined that if you play it a little bit too much or not enough, you destroy it completely. If it's too much it becomes vulgar; if it's not enough it becomes dull," he said.

"With Beethoven you can open it, you can give, especially with 'Eroica,' the drama and the battles of the first movement," he said.

## An Orchestra's Identity

The Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra is a chamber orchestra dedicated to the classical period—Mozart in particular—but more broadly Viennese Classical, Langrée says, and they build on this year after year.

Langrée sees his role as really to help cultivate this identity. The 40-odd piece ensemble is more individualistic than a symphony orchestra expressing a conductor's voice,



Music Director Louis Langrée conducts the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra.



A silverpoint drawing of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart from 1789.

**“After Baroque, and before Romanticism, is this golden, miraculous era of classicism, where the emotion for the meaning of the piece is in perfect balance with the form and balance of the piece.”**

Louis Langrée, music director, Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra

he says, and it gives him pride to be able to stimulate the sort of musical dialogues among musicians to achieve the ultimate goal, a result that is undeniably Mozart.

"Mozart cannot be separated from his time, his moment was [a turning point in] the history of the Western world, history of art," Langrée said.

"After Baroque, and before Romanticism, is this golden, miraculous era of classicism, where the emotion for the meaning of the piece is in perfect balance with the form and balance of the piece," he said. "The architecture of classicism, with the laws of symmetry ... and the clarity of structure elevates the content."

## Into Romanticism

The festival also explored Mozart's laying the groundwork for the Romantics.

"Don Giovanni is an opera which always fascinated the Romantic generation," said Langrée, who conducted MMFO on July 30 and 31 in a concert of Mozart's "Don Giovanni" overture and Brahms's Symphony No. 3. Pianist Martin Helmchen joined for Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, with a cadenza written by Clara Schumann, a muse of Brahms's.

"[Don Giovanni] is almost Romantic, it certainly opened the gates to Romanticism," he said.

This is the third year that the festival offerings include a symphony of Brahms, who was a tremendous fan of Mozart.

"The roots of his musical knowledge are completely rooted in the Baroque and Classical, even if he was a Romantic, he loved, so much, Mozart that he purchased the manuscript of the G minor symphony, he loved it so much," Langrée said.

Brahms brings to mind a large orchestral ensemble, which is what Langrée says will make this chamber orchestra performance so exciting.

"It's good to refresh our ears, to give a different angle of listening and performing these pieces, because when you play a Brahms symphony with a chamber orchestra size ... it's not a smaller symphony, it's an expanded chamber music," he said.

"And I think the specialty of a festival is to bring different angles ... open our ears and open our hearts," he said.



Brahms, known for his love of the music that came before him, certainly begs the question what's next, after Mozart? Langrée says the following concert seeks to answer that question.

In Vienna, a generation after Mozart, Schubert composed his "Great" Symphony No. 9, which quotes Beethoven's Ninth.

On Aug. 2 and 3, guest conductor Gianandrea Noseda, who also makes regular appearances at the Met, pairs Schubert with Beethoven, and pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard joins for Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4.

## A Voyage East

The last week of the festival is a journey eastward, Langrée said. Joshua Bell, who has performed at Mostly Mozart every year alongside Langrée, is performing Dvorak's Violin Concerto in A minor on Aug. 6 and 7.

"Because we have this Eastern European flavor, we thought to link it to Mozart we should perform the Prague Symphony," Langrée said. "Prague's a very important city for Mozart, because it was probably when he was the happiest man."

The program also includes Kodaly's "Dances of Galanta," based off folk tunes and gypsy

melodies from a northern Hungarian town now part of Slovakia.

"So we will have a voyage into Eastern Europe," Langrée said.

The next and last concerts bring things further east, into Russia, with Shostakovich and Schnittke.

On Aug. 9 and 10, Langrée and MMFO will be joined by pianist Steven Osborne.

"We will present for the last concert a wonderful funny piece," Langrée said. Schnittke's "Moz-Art à la Haydn" is entirely a collage of works by either Mozart or Haydn, both composers who played musical games. Of course, the program includes a piece from Haydn as well, "Overture in D major" to open the event.

The Shostakovich piece, "Piano Concerto No. 2" also contains some humor—it was a gift from the composer to his son, which ends up quoting some piano exercises, as he thought his son didn't practice enough.

To end, Langrée chose Mozart's Haffner symphony.

"It is one of the most celebratory, jubilant, which is the best way to close a festival full of innovation," Langrée said.

## Genius and Genre

Langrée has interesting thoughts on Mo-

The Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra.

**Mozart himself is elusive in the music; he speaks to us, but not of himself. Langrée said, and scarcely any other composer wrote this way.**



Joshua Bell will perform Dvorak's Violin Concerto in A minor on Aug. 6 and 7.

zart's innovation. All of the music he performed was new during his time, and he was a wonderful inventor and improviser, but Mozart famously didn't create new forms of music.

"He is a genius in every genre—in sacred music, in symphonic music, in opera, in chamber music, piano concertos—he is pure genius," Langrée said. Yet, he didn't invent any of these forms. He wasn't famous for one particular genre, but managed to write literal masterpieces in every one of them.

"Mozart was a genius in all these genres, and you just could give him anything, he would be a master, an absolute master ... he embraces every genre with so much, on a level which is probably unmatched," Langrée said. His mastery was such that in even, say, his comedic operas like "The Magic Flute," you find a touch of sacred music; he could apply any necessary genre to great theatrical effect.

The Mostly Mozart Festival tries to emulate this in its programming.

"Everyone will find a reason to come," Langrée said. For those who prefer the ballet, there is dance. There is theater, opera, chamber music, film, and so on.

"The music is so accessible—this is his genius," Langrée said.

## The Most Universal Instrument

Kian Soltani says the cello 'has basically no limits'

CATHERINE YANG

Kian Soltani is a musician with a keen sense of aesthetic and plenty to communicate.

The cellist, together with pianist Julio Elizalde, made their Mostly Mozart Festival debuts in a salon-style program as part of the Stanley H. Kaplan Penthouse set series, A Little Night Music. They showed, perfectly, how to make serious music fun.

Born in Austria in a city bordering Germany, to a musical family of Persian descent, Soltani shared his heritage through a program exploring his roots.

The pair warmed the audience up with

an exuberant take on Schumann's Fantasiestücke, originally named "Soirée Pieces" before the composer changed the title to capture the mercurial mood changes. From Germany we journeyed into Persian folk tunes, in a piece Soltani commissioned of Reza Vali. Virtuosity was on display with a Chopin piece that featured the piano Popper's Hungarian Rhapsody to show off the cello. Soltani also performed a piece of his own, Persian Fire Dance, a playful piece with moments where you might even forget you're hearing a cello.

In an interview ahead of the performance, Soltani spoke of his role as a young artist.



Kian Soltani.

The young cellist made his breakthrough at age 19 and has since toured the world with a number of renowned ensembles and musicians, plumbd the depths of the repertoire with interesting collaborations, and released a debut album. Now 27, Soltani says he is part of the first generations of musicians in an essentially a vastly connected world—it's what he loves about what he does, and he says he has the perfect instrument for the mission.

"It has basically no limits," Soltani says of the cello.

"Almost no other instrument apart from the piano has such range, but the thing with the piano is that you cannot sing so beautifully," Soltani said. "It has this range where you can be the lowest voice ... be the beautiful melody in the mid register ... and you can go as high as the violin almost. The violin sounds beautiful at the top but it just cannot go any lower, you're missing those basses. Cello has it all."

And he wants to play it all.

"I really want to play it all, I want to take it all in," Soltani said. His musical voracity is not unchecked by a discerning intellectual curiosity.

"Just because it has the label classical music doesn't mean it's great," he added. And music of other genres is not automatically better or worse. Classical just happens to be the mode in which his instruments speaks.

So luckily, classical music is the most universal language. It's a system encompassing endless styles and capable of representing with clarity the voice of any unique culture—making even the cello a suitable medium for Persian folk music.

Think of French composer Saint-Saens's Oriental themes, Czech composer Dvorak's Americana pieces. If you really want to understand music, you have to understand the history—much of which is classical.

"That is a privilege that we have now, that we can go back and play all of the music that

has existed—and I love it," he said. Today there are even more style and quote-unquote genres, but Soltani isn't interested in what label or category a piece falls under, he just wants to listen to and play good music.

"No generation before has had this access before, really they have not, especially because of the internet—with immediate access to everything," Soltani said. "So we should use that, and educate ourselves in all kinds of music."

"I think it's important to really appreciate and understand that we have this incredible privilege now, being born in this time, to have access to so much music," he said.

Soltani says it's important that his generation take advantage of this and lead the way. "I think by doing that we can slowly really break down those barriers, and also maybe break down the negative stereotypes that surround classical music—that it's not for everyone, that it's boring, or people think it's better than the other genres," he said. "There

**“The violin sounds beautiful at the top but it just cannot go any lower, you're missing those basses. Cello has it all.”**

Kian Soltani, cellist

are always some people that are like, 'Well I've never been to a classical concert before—and I can't believe I actually liked it!'

"I see a lot of that already, and that gives me hope and inspires me also to keep going down that route," he said.

His philosophy is that classical music doesn't have to be, and won't be, everyone's favorite, but it's where music evolved from and worth our attention.

"It's such natural music, how is it possible that someone would not like it, those masterpieces of the history of music," he said. If you weren't introduced to it early on, there may be more negative preconceptions to break through, but "all it takes its one great performance."

"So it's our responsibility, even more so, to always perform on the highest level, so that people can be inspired," Soltani said.

"I really like to make a connection with the audience, and take them into my world," he said, "and I hope that it works."

# JOY VILLA

THE SINGER-SONGWRITER'S JOURNEY  
BACK TO HER CONSERVATIVE ROOTS

CATHERINE YANG

Joy Villa is, at her very core, a performer.

She has lived the creative process through and through in her lifelong journey of transformation. Some of her most vivid and affirming memories from childhood are those of being alone in her room, writing songs that she could then share with the world.

Now, the chart-topping singer-songwriter, model, actress, and fashionista is currently starring in a romantic comedy, and feels the need to add: "[Many of the cast are] pro-America. They know I'm a conservative, they know I'm a Trump supporter, and they love that about me."

That's because being a conservative in Hollywood tends to raise eyebrows—and also sometimes attracts death threats.

Villa has had a front-row seat in witnessing the upending of values in recent decades, having gone from being a conservative preacher's daughter to a left-leaning liberal to one of President Donald Trump's most vocal supporters and realizing many things she once believed were lies.

She experiences the irony of the current cultural landscape daily and adds that she just recently released a single, "Freedom (Fight for It)," a song about freedom of speech, and fans are flooding her inbox with messages and screenshots of how it's being censored on iTunes.

"I'm fighting every day to say 'Let me be who I am. Just respect me—I'm not even saying believe in what I say,'" she said. "Just don't try to shut me up. Don't limit my speech because you don't like it or you disagree with it."

"It's funny, conservatives are really the free speech fighters," Villa said.

## Long Way From Home

Villa said she grew up with very conservative, American values, although she didn't make much of it at the time. Her father was a preacher, fundraiser, and a salesman, and very much a Republican. Her mother was apolitical, but had many relatives who were Democrats.

"My dad was my best friend. My mom was a stay-at-home mom, church singer, writer, artist; my mom would create rugs and needlepoint and knit. A very old-fash-

“**My dad was my best friend. My mom was a stay-at-home mom, church singer, writer, artist; my mom would create rugs and needlepoint and knit.**”

Joy Villa



Villa attends the 60th annual GRAMMY Awards at Madison Square Garden on Jan. 28, 2018, in New York City.

ioned African American lady," Villa said.

Life was idyllic in Santa Barbara, California, where she joined musical theater from a young age, and sat on the student council, and had many friends from military families. Politics was not a divisive thing back then, Villa remembers.

She graduated high school at 16 and by then, had already had nearly a year of producing television for the local youth network with Comcast Cablevision.

"I was like, one day I'm going to move to New York, I'm going to move to L.A., I'm going to make movies, I want to be in TV. I always knew this is what I was going to do: have a hit album, touring the world," Villa said.

Around 2009, Villa moved to Los Angeles and got her first taste of "this Hollywood brand of liberalism," where everyone churned out the same social justice rhetoric. As an African American-Latina woman, Villa was supposed to be part of this oppressed minority meant to rebel—and she rebelled.

"Hashtag feminism, hashtag this and that," Villa said. "And I'm picking up the lingo and I wanted to be liked, I wanted to get more roles, meetings with producers and directors."

Adopting the vernacular was her ticket into that culture, and Villa didn't know what a dark place that would lead to.

"I was fresh into Hollywood and trying to make my mark," she said. "I started drinking a lot. ... I used to say I'd never touch

drugs—and that just went out the window." "And I would just try anything at that point. I didn't care, MDMA, drinking every day—not just drinking but partying, going out to clubs," Villa said. "I just became wild, became promiscuous. I really lost respect for myself."

This was the ideology she learned was acceptable from the year she spent steeped in the left-leaning culture, yet she was miserable. Villa was expending all of her energy on this wildness, and draining her creative energy so there was nothing left for art. She was performing for people who ultimately wouldn't appreciate who she was as a person.

Then she got pregnant.

## Respite

Villa says she has always believed life begins at conception.

During her time on the Hollywood scene, everyone around her was pro-choice, because that was the only option acceptable to the left. As an artist and an individualist, Villa knew she wouldn't want an abortion but also knew she didn't want to force anything on other women. She started calling herself pro-choice too.

She would be tested in her belief at the most-trying time.

Villa had been in a tenuous relationship. It was "drug-fueled, party-filled," and would begin with screaming matches and end with shoving and her being thrown into a wall.

"I thought this was crazy love," Villa said. "And I'm very stubborn, like once I'm in something, I stay the course. And I just thought this is what I deserved."

While Villa was in this relationship, her mother had a stroke and suffered a debilitating fall. Villa was by her mother's side in the hospital for three days while her mother was in a coma and ultimately passed away.

Not long after her loss, Villa went to her clinic appointment where a nurse confirmed she was pregnant.

Villa's first reaction was happiness. Reality set in a moment later and she remembered the violent arguments she had with the man who fathered the child—Villa didn't want to bring a baby into that.

"I didn't say that out loud, but I guess she [the nurse] saw my face. Immediately, she went into, 'You're so young, who's the father, what are you doing, you need to get an abortion. It's easy, it's fast, it's safe. I've had several abortions,' and she just kept going on," Villa said.

What the nurse was saying sounded like a way out, and she sounded comforting.



Singer Joy Villa (C) and designer Andre Soriano take part in a pro-Trump rally outside the Washington Monument on March 4, 2017, in Washington.

But something within Villa rejected her.

"I looked at her and said, 'No, I'm not getting an abortion,' and I walked out of that clinic," Villa said.

Villa still had no idea what to do, but it was a mixed blessing. She pulled back from Hollywood, crashed at a friend's place, and started doing odd jobs. She prayed constantly. She tried to fix her relationship. She became sober.

Then, at four months pregnant, she had another fight with her boyfriend, and once again, he threw her against the wall. This time, she had another life to protect. The police came, and because he already had warrants out for his arrest, he went to jail.

"I was extremely brokenhearted. I said, 'OK, now that's the father out of the picture, there's no way I'm going to make this happy family,'" Villa said.

"I am at the end of my rope, and that's when God gave me adoption. I looked down and there was the newspaper. It said, 'Loving homes looking to adopt,'" Villa said.

She called the number and spoke to a woman who had been adopted herself, and learned all about the process. The organization helped connect her to a loving family, helped Villa financially, and get back on her feet.

"My daughter deserved everything. I had had a lot of issues I had not confronted," Villa said. "I wanted her to have the best life."

It was an open adoption, and Villa maintains a relationship with her birth daughter to this day, often with Skype calls. "Adoption is something that's being left out of the pro-life/pro-choice argument," Villa said.

## A Renaissance

Things would get worse before they got better.

Villa said she got sober and clearheaded while staying with her dad during the pregnancy, but at that point, she still hadn't dealt with the death of her mother, or her terrible relationship. And now that she had handed off her baby girl, there were three losses she wanted to avoid.

She took to what she knew—drugs, alcohol, and partying—once again to fill the void.

"Now I got into just dark days. I didn't care what club I went to, what I looked like. It was just dancing on tabletops, taking off my top," she said. "I hit rock bottom. I was drinking every day, hated myself. To everybody else, I was happy and smiling."

She was still auditioning for roles in film and TV and booked a role on the show "Heroes," but was aware she wasn't really



Villa's latest single is "Freedom (Fight for It)."

“**I was fresh into Hollywood and trying to make my mark. I started drinking a lot. ... I used to say I'd never touch drugs—and that just went out the window.**”

Joy Villa

creating anymore.

Villa ended up hospitalized from all her alcohol consumption.

At the bottom of the barrel, Villa reached out to God.

"Lord, I can't do this anymore. I'm not creating anymore," Villa said. At some point, she turned to the person next to her in the hospital, who she learned used to be alcoholic but was now sober, and a light bulb went off in her head.

"That's it, I don't need to drink," Villa said. "God brought me to my bottom. He let me go to my bottom so that I could go, 'OK, this is not the life I need.'"

She made a major decision to turn her life around. She moved back in with her dad, cut off the phone or social media, and disconnected from the culture she had been addicted to.

"I just started doing music, just started playing guitar," Villa said.

"No alcohol, no drugs, no parties, just work; just getting up early, getting in the gym, helping people my dad was ministering, going to church, trusting in God, being back into my art, painting every day," she said. "I was reading the Bible every day, I was reading books on personal growth and health."

She was learning, healing, and finally dealing with the grief and loss she had buried.

"It was a pure Renaissance moment," Villa said. "And I was happy."

With a clear head on her shoulders and music in her heart, Villa started volunteering at church, where she met Mr. Skip, a Beat, a producer.

"He said, 'When I see you, I hear music,'" Villa said. He turned out to be a music producer, and together they created her first single, "Cold Wind."

## That Trump Dress

During the 2008 elections, Villa voted for Barack Obama. He was racially mixed-like Villa—he was charismatic, and he promised change.

Villa hadn't been interested in politics at the time and didn't look too deeply into the issues. When the promised changes didn't materialize, she became jaded and lost interest in politics.

When candidates starting campaigning for the 2016 elections, Villa had been working on a colleague's music video. She asked who everyone was voting for, and everyone enthusiastically responded with Bernie Sanders.

So she hopped on the bandwagon too, as she skimmed headlines that didn't reveal the full story. A week or two later,

she decided she would actually read this time—and discovered supporting Sanders was supporting socialism.

"I knew enough that I knew socialism was bad, communism is bad," Villa said. She dropped Sanders too.

Villa was then touring Europe and Asia, busy living out a whirlwind romance as a newlywed with her husband, photographer Thorsten Overgaard.

Only vaguely keeping up with the elections, she remembers that all of a sudden, Trump started dominating the headlines. Each story was crazier than the next, even purporting he was a plant to make Hillary Clinton win the election.

"I'm reading all these scare-tactic headlines and listening to my family members, listening who my friends who are just anti-Trump and all offended," Villa said.

Then at the end of the 2016 summer, Villa landed back in the United States and a close friend told her to look into Trump.

"You would like him, actually," Villa remembers her saying. She was baffled but trusted this friend, and started doing her research. It ended up being a deep dive, and she watched interviews going back decades. She learned about Trump, his background, his family, and she educated herself on the policy issues so she could better weigh his promises.

"I'm going, 'Wait, this is the stuff they did not show,'" Villa said.

Very secretly, Villa became a Trump supporter. Still registered as Independent, she voted for Trump, then went on social media and said she voted, but not who for, and used hashtags for every candidate. The year was winding down, and Villa was still researching, and her tentative support became more and more enthusiastic.

She was 100 percent behind "Make America Great Again."

People often throw this back at her: "When was America great?" She says it reminds her of 9/11. When the tragedy of 9/11 struck the nation, people banded together in the aftermath.

"I remember the spirit of America," Villa said. "Terrorists may have attacked us and hurt our people, but we were not going to be scared to be American. There was this fight back against the fear—because that's what terrorism does, it makes everyone scared."

People fought back then and proudly stood for America, Villa said. Fifteen years later, she realized she was being scared into silence by the left—and Trump was speaking up for her.

Continued on B8

## FASHION STATEMENT

Villa wears a dress with "Build the Wall" written on it, at the 61st annual GRAMMY Awards at the Staples Center in Los Angeles on Feb. 10, 2019. She tweeted, "I don't care what anyone thinks. I 100% support the wall & our President @realDonaldTrump. Do you want more drugs brought in? (70% of heroin from Mexico) More illegal women getting sexually assaulted (1 in 3)? More children being trafficked? (Thousands a year) because I DO NOT!"



MATT WINKELMEYER/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE RECORDING ACADEMY



VALERIE MACON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



JON KOPALOFF/GETTY IMAGES



# JOY VILLA

THE SINGER-SONGWRITER'S JOURNEY  
BACK TO HER CONSERVATIVE ROOTS

Continued from B7

"It's to be yourself, to be proud of who you are. We should never be ashamed of being Americans," Villa said. People were decrying America everywhere on social media, and Villa, who had just spent a good part of the year traveling the world, knew they were wrong. There was no other nation founded on the principles of the liberty and individual rights that Trump was defending.

"Trump really woke me up," Villa said.

Villa's career and fan base had been steadily climbing, and she was afraid to risk it all just to talk about politics.

But as President Trump took office and started fulfilling his promises, she saw the echo chamber of anti-Trump rhetoric grow to ridiculous levels. Villa realized all the hate she saw was coming from one side: the left.

"I'm going, 'This is disgusting,'" Villa said of the careless mudslinging she was seeing. She was angry.

"I can't be closeted as a conservative when they're not closeted," Villa said. She wanted to publicly support the president and make a statement. The Grammys were right around the corner and a designer she'd worked with joked that he could make her a Trump dress.

"Andre Soriano, he's a gay Filipino immigrant," Villa said. "And we started getting hyped together about this dress."

She held the phone for a moment to ask her husband what he thought, and he looked at her like she was crazy.

"I put the phone back to my ear, I said, 'Let's do it,'" Villa said. "I was like, I like that reaction."

Villa thought it'd be a big deal for a small moment; her biggest fear was that someone would rip off the dress, but there were cameras everywhere and that was unlikely. She and Soriano devised a white gown to go over the dress, and she made it past the media interviews and to the cameras all in white. Then she revealed the dress, and there were exclamations as she was on the red carpet. Reactions to her face were mixed, and largely passive-aggressive.

Villa thought that was that.

## Full Circle

It was only the beginning; afterward, her publicist informed her that her sales were charting. Villa checked, and saw her 4-year-old album was selling by the thousands.

Friends called: "You just passed Drake [on iTunes]."

"I was blown away," Villa said. It didn't stop there; she topped the Billboard charts, and she found her photo plastered all over the media.

"All my music videos explode, all my social media explodes. I get something like 20,000 Twitter followers overnight, 50,000 Instagram followers overnight," Villa said.

Not all of them were fans; death and assault threats poured in too, and Villa didn't leave the house for three days because she knew she would be recognized and it was all too much for the moment.

Still, the good outweighed the bad. Attention was something Villa was used to, and something she knew from her Hollywood days was easy to gain. But this time the spotlight was on her for standing up for what was right.

"It was such a humbling, beautiful moment. It was a life-changing moment," Villa said. This album she wrote all by herself, with a tiny team and shoestring budget, was reaching so many people. And they were supporting her because she took a chance and supported the president.

"In supporting the president, I actu-



SEMUELLEBERG/GETTY IMAGES

ally have gone back to my roots and my values, the pro-America conservative values I was raised with," Villa said. "And I knew in that moment, my dad would be so proud of me."

Villa has since appeared in the media commenting on politics and policy, been invited to the White House several times and met the First Family and members of the administration. She's joined the Walk

**Villa ended up hospitalized from all her alcohol consumption. At the bottom of the barrel, Villa reached out to God.**

Away movement and the Save the Storks charity, which provides pregnant women with free ultrasounds.

"I love being American and I will never apologize for that, ever again," Villa said. "You don't have to think the same way as I am, but you're not going to shut me down."

Villa continues to support the president and policies she believes in via fashion. Past red carpet looks including a bridal gown with a hand-painted picture of her unborn daughter, a "build the wall" dress reminiscent of the Statue of Liberty commenting on the president's border policies, a red, white, and blue "Freedom" dress, and many others.

"The hate has gotten really worse, I get more death threats," Villa said. "This year, when I wore my wall dress, I actually got screamed at by the photographers."

Villa says she's done being silenced. Her latest single is about freedom of speech and it's been something she's wanted to produce since she started supporting the president back in 2016. In the past several months, she's seen so many conservative voices be silenced on social media, and feels it's her responsibility as someone who does have a voice to continue to speak the truth.

"We have to wake up the youth," she said. "To say, listen, I'm not going to tell you what to do but you need to do your research."

"Black unemployment is down, Latino

Singer Joy Villa attends the 60th annual GRAMMY Awards at Madison Square Garden on Jan. 28, 2018, in New York City.



DUNINGS/KAMBOURIS/GETTY IMAGES FOR NANA

unemployment is down, the economy is booming, jobs are flourishing, America is better than ever," Villa said. She points to the Opportunity and Revitalization Council expected to bring \$100 billion in private investment to 8,000 communities, and the First Step Act that's taken effect.

"This First Step Act is something the Democrats fought against, but in essence, this is what they've been waiting for," Villa said. "The President has proven time and time again he's for the people."

Villa sees more and more young people coming to events—and they're revitalizing the conservative movement.

"It's invigorating young conservatives to come out," she said. "There's a fresh wind."

She tells people if they want to "come out" as a conservative or publicly "walk away," they don't have to do it in as bold a manner as she did.

"But do something to rid this feeling of being closeted and quieted, because I remember how ugly that felt, to deny who you are," Villa said.

More often than not, the stories are encouraging, and the 17-, 18-, 20-year-olds are the people Villa sees will lead the future. It's what keeps her going despite the craziness of it all some days. Villa has long set aside the goal of fame for fame's sake but feels it's her mission to use her art and platform to, as in her latest piece, fight for freedom.

"There's not really any conservative singers out there that have the platform I do, I might as well put it out there—I think I just became more responsible with caring about other people," Villa said. "I'm always growing and learning, I've made mistakes, but I feel like today I'm a much more caring and more empathetic person even compared to two years ago. Even a year ago!"

"It really did start with this walking away," she said.

Her journey has been one of coming into empathy and honesty, of shedding lies and shame as she grows.

"I have no regrets," Villa said. "Who I am today is based on the choices I made yesterday, and my past is part of my life. It's my testimony."



MOLLY RILEY/AFR/GETTY IMAGES

Villa and designer Andre Soriano take part in a pro-Trump rally outside the Washington Monument on March 4, 2017, in Washington.



Though the benefits of gratitude take time to develop, the effects are long-lasting.

## How Gratitude Can Rewire Your Brain for Happiness and Success

BRITTANY HUNTER

O

ver 40 million Americans are struggling with mental health concerns, according to Mental Health America (MHA). Since MHA released its first State of Mental Health in America report in 2015, there have already been "alarming increases" in adult suicidal ideation and major depressive episodes in young people, demonstrating how serious this problem has become.

As someone who suffers from depression, I can tell you firsthand how debilitating mental health issues can be and it can feel as if there are no remedies available to really address the problem. If you go see a doctor, you will likely be prescribed medication. And while some find this approach helpful, others, like myself, have fallen victim to some of the horrendous side-effects of antidepressants, which include severe weight gain, an increase in suicidal thoughts, and even death.

### Not Just Self-Help Mumbo Jumbo, It's Science

A few years ago, Dr. Joshua Brown, a professor of psychological and brain sciences at Indiana University and his colleague, Dr. Joel Wong, an associate professor of counseling psychology at Indiana University set out to answer one question: "How can they help clients derive the greatest possible benefit from treatment in the shortest amount of time?"

Over the course of their research, the pair came to the conclusion that the answer to this question could be found in supplementing traditional therapy sessions with gratitude exercises.

Over the last decade, several studies have found that those who routinely count their blessings are overall happier and experience less

depression. However, while much of this research focused on those who did not suffer from mental health concerns, Brown and Wong set out to see if gratitude could make a noticeable difference for those struggling with mental health issues.

Brown and Wong, along with others, conducted a study comprised of nearly 300 college students who had each sought mental health counseling on campus. The participants were recruited right before they began counseling and each suffered from some degree of anxiety and depression. The student participants were separated into three groups. In addition to therapy, the first group was asked to write a letter of gratitude to another person each week for three weeks. The second group was asked to dig deep and write about their negative life experiences. And the third group was not asked to do any sort of writing activity. And the results were fascinating.

Brown and Wong write: "What did we find? Compared to the participants who wrote about negative experiences or only received counseling, those who wrote gratitude letters reported significantly better mental health four weeks and 12 weeks after their writing exercise ended. This suggests that gratitude writing can be beneficial not just for healthy, well-adjusted individuals, but also for those who struggle with mental health concerns. In fact, it seems, practicing gratitude on top of receiving psychological counseling carries greater benefits than counseling alone, even when that gratitude practice is brief.

Digging even deeper into their findings and looking specifically at how gratitude impacts the mind and body, Brown and Wong made four groundbreaking discoveries:

1. Gratitude unshackles us from toxic emotions.
2. Gratitude helps even if you don't share it.
3. Gratitude's benefits take time.
4. Gratitude has lasting effects on the brain.

“Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”

Albert Schweitzer

From personal experience, I can attest to the findings discovered in Brown and Wong's research. Like so many others, I periodically find myself trapped in a thick darkness from which it feels as though there is no escape. Over the course of my three decades—give or take a few years—on this earth, I have tried every remedy known to man from medication to psychotherapy and everything in between. While some resources have helped more than others, nothing has had as profound an impact on my mental state, and my life, quite like gratitude journaling has.

### A Little Gratitude Goes a Long Way

The winter of 2019 was particularly rough for me. Already in the midst of a depressive episode, my mental state was worsened when my boyfriend broke up with me a week before the holidays, just days after my doctors had discovered a large tumor in my left breast. To make matters worse, my career was struggling, my finances were a mess, and I was missing my family, who lived 2,000 miles away. Generally speaking, my life was not going the way I had hoped and I was slowly drowning in my own self-pity.

"Why do bad things keep happening to me?" I thought to myself. "For once, can't something just go right?" Depression or not, we have all arrived at this place before and we have all experienced these types of negative thoughts and emotions. Truthfully speaking, in a world full of suffering and obstacles, it's quite a feat to not feel this way a majority of the time.

My mind seemed eager to remind me of all the things that had been going wrong in my life and everything I didn't have. Yet, I finally found solace when I started making a concerted effort to pay attention to all the blessings I had been given.

Just when things were at their darkest, a friend suggested that I begin keeping a gratitude journal. I wasn't initially sold on the idea that something so simple could re-

verse my mood and penetrate my darkness. But I figured I didn't have much to lose and decided to give it a try.

Even on mornings when it was hard just to get out of bed, I forced myself to get up and make a list of everything for which I was grateful. Oddly enough, while my life had felt devoid of meaning and goodness for the previous several months, each morning that I sat down with my journal I never found myself at a loss for what to write.

The words effortlessly flowed from my pen as I jotted down at least 10 people or things for which I was thankful each day. In the depths of my sorrow, I had been so focused on what I didn't have, I had completely forgotten to be thankful for everything I did have.

How fortunate I was to have a roof over my head, food in my kitchen, and, most importantly, a group of friends who refused to give up on me even when my depression made loving me a trying task. After a few weeks had passed, and my gratitude journal was filled with pages of tangible blessings—mostly comprised of the amazing people who were a part of my life—my mood slowly began to change. As it turns out, showing gratitude can serve as a light that can help lead us back to where we need to be when we get lost in darkness.

As Albert Schweitzer once wrote, "At times, our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us."

To say gratitude journaling fixed everything and cured my depression would be a lie. But it played an integral role in getting me out of the crisis I was in.

**The Five Minute Journal** Modern humans live busy lives. With everything that is going on, many probably wonder how they could possibly manage to spare the time to sit down and list all their blessings in a daily journal. The truth is, for the sake of our mental health and well-being, most of us can't afford

to skip this vital practice.

Showing gratitude doesn't have to be a complex or time-consuming exercise. In fact, for those interested in starting a journal but wary of the time it may take, The Five Minute Journal offers a great way to get started and, as the title says, will not take up a lot of your time.

Each page of The Five Minute Journal features an inspirational quote and is separated into a day and night portion. For the day section, you write three things you are thankful for along with three things that would make your day great, along with a daily affirmation. At night, you write about three great things that happened to you during your day and fill out a sentence or two about how the day could have gone even better.

While not a strict "gratitude only" journal, it sets the foundation for gratitude journaling for those who, like I was in the beginning, are not yet completely sold on this tactic. And, if you are mindful and consistent, in a matter of a few weeks you will begin to notice a change in your mindset, however small it might be at first. As Eckhart Tolle says, "Acknowledging the good that you already have in your life is the foundation for all abundance."

Every time I get inside a car, I put my seatbelt on to guard against potential accidents. I don't forget this step, because it's important to my livelihood. Likewise, every morning when I wake up, I get out of bed and fill out my gratitude journal to stave off the negativity and guard against depression. My gratitude journal is not a luxury that I attend to only when it is convenient or when I have time. It is a necessity and a reminder of how much I have, even in moments when I feel as though I have lost everything.

To set yourself up for success and keep the demons at bay, showing gratitude is just what the doctor ordered.

Brittany Hunter is a senior writer for the Foundation for Economic Education. This article was originally published on FEE.org.

# The Good and the Beautiful: A Conversation With Homeschooler Jenny Phillips

BARBARA DANZA

If you're a homeschooling parent or have ever looked for homeschool resources online, you've likely come across the popular brand, The Good and the Beautiful. As the company's founder recently told us, though, The Good and the Beautiful is not just for homeschoolers.

Jenny Phillips, who enjoyed success as a songwriter and music producer, is a homeschooling mom who started The Good and the Beautiful in 2015. Her company provides educational tools for teaching subjects including language arts, math, history, and science. We asked Ms. Phillips about her homeschool experience and where she's headed with her growing business.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF JENNY PHILLIPS

**“We also have a large number of non-homeschoolers that use the curriculum after school, on weekends, or in the summer.”**

Jenny Phillips

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** Homeschooling seems to be an increasingly popular choice among today's parents. What led you to decide to homeschool your children?  
**JENNY PHILLIPS:** It hit me quite suddenly one day that I was in charge of who taught my children, what they were taught, and how they were taught, but I had zero control over any of those things. Homeschooling has allowed me the beautiful experience of choosing what is best for each of my unique children and to incorporate the things that matter most to us into education: God, family, nature, and high character.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** As if homeschooling doesn't keep you busy enough, you started a homeschool curriculum business: The Good and the Beautiful. How did that come to be?  
**MS. PHILLIPS:** It was never my intention to start a company. My husband had an incredible job, and I had just left my record label after selling over a million CDs, in order to simplify my life.

I was excited to homeschool, but quickly discovered that no curriculum had the depth of meaning and beauty that I was looking for. I had a vision of my dream curriculum, and I created a language arts curriculum for my own children. It made homeschool much easier and more beautiful.

Some of my homeschool friends were overwhelmed and were about to quit homeschooling. I told them, “Wait!

Try this curriculum I created first.” It worked! They loved it.

I realized that it could help so many more parents. With resources I had saved from my CD sales, I was able to put together a team of experts to help refine the curriculum, and then I gave it away as a download on my music website for free. All I wanted to do was help others.

I still had absolutely no desire to start a company. But people wanted the curriculum printed. And I had a vision of my dream science curriculum and history curriculum, and before I knew it, I had a business in my basement.

We had no marketing employees. We attended no homeschool conventions. We did not do much to push the curriculum, but it spread like wildfire through social media. Within four years of posting that first free curriculum (which is still free!), we had over a million downloads of the curriculum, hundreds of thousands of children using the cur-

▲ Jenny Phillips with one of her children.

nately, many children's books today are packed with negativity and disrespect. The Good and the Beautiful booklist recommends books that contain only clean language, that have high literary value, and that never made appropriate behavior seem cool or acceptable.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What advice would you give parents who are considering whether or not to homeschool their children?  
**MS. PHILLIPS:** Almost without fail, people's first question or worry about homeschool is about social skills. When people ask me, “Aren't you worried about your children's social skills?” I reply, “Yes! That is one of the biggest reasons I am homeschooling.” The positive socialization developed through homeschooling is one of the best reasons to homeschool.

Some mothers shy away from homeschool because they don't feel they could be with their children all day—especially children who are not well-behaved or whom they struggle to get along with. Some parents worry their children will not

▼ The curriculum from The Good and the Beautiful.



respect them, listen to them, or obey them. These are great reasons to homeschool! Homeschooling will allow you and your child to face your challenges and discover how to work through them. Most likely in the process, you will develop deep traits of charity such as patience and long-suffering, your child's behavior will improve, and your relationship with your child will strengthen.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** Do you think non-homeschooling families could also benefit from The Good and the Beautiful's resources?  
**MS. PHILLIPS:** We have been surprised at the way the curriculum has appealed to groups of people we did not even target. For example, our curriculum is non-denominational Christian, and yet, we have a following of secular homeschoolers who do not believe in God that use the curriculum. One secular homeschooler told me at a convention, “I'm not spiritual, but we feel so happy and uplifted every time we use the curriculum. It just so ... 'good and beautiful!'”

We also have a large number of non-homeschoolers that use the curriculum after school, on weekends, or in the summer. One parent told me they do my history program in the car each day on the way to and from school. Some use our language arts to catch up their public school children who struggle with reading. Others use our handwriting or typing programs to supplement. Our top-selling product, musical multiplication, is for all children—a way to learn multiplication facts quickly and joyfully through the power of music.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What are your future plans for The Good and the Beautiful?  
**MS. PHILLIPS:** Whenever I say, “I have an ideal!” my husband and development team braces themselves. I think big, and I have an incredible team that makes things happen.

One of the things I am most excited about is our plan to reach out on a much greater scale to non-homeschool families with campaigns about the impact books have on children's lives. We want to flood the country with our free book list and our message that parents can literally change a child's life by becoming more aware of and involved with what their children are reading and learning.

## 5 Things Parents Need to Know About ‘Summer Loss’

Some researchers—like me—question if summer loss even occurs

ABEL J. KOURY

When it comes to news articles about the impact that summer has on student learning, the news is often bad.

For instance, The Economist proclaimed in 2018: “Long summer holidays are bad for children, especially the poor.” This headline is fairly typical of how summer loss is portrayed. Summer has come to be seen as a time when children lose as much as a month of school learning.

Nearly 50,000 media stories on summer learning—such as the one by The Economist—appeared in 2018. The message influences policy as well. Lawmakers introduced 293 state bills related to summer programming in 2017. These bills dealt with summer learning in a number of ways, from a vetoed Maine bill that tried to establish a “Summer Success Program Fund” to a California bill that enables up to 30 percent of funds for before and after school programs go to summer learning.

Despite the seeming consensus that children lose

learning during the summer, a 2017 report from the Brookings Institute showed that the research on summer learning is actually quite mixed.

Another 2018 analysis found evidence of learning loss every summer between second and ninth grade, but findings differ vastly from one study to the next.

This has led some researchers—like me—to question if summer loss even occurs.

Using current, nationally representative data, I attempted to determine how big of an issue is summer learning loss. I focused on elementary school students. Here's what I found:

**1. Most Kids Aren't Affected**  
 My study using national data suggests that, by and large, the issue of summer learning loss is overblown. Specifically, only 7 percent of students lose the equivalent of one month of school year learning in reading and 9 percent in math over the summer between kindergarten and first grade. Over the summer before second grade, this increases to 15 percent in reading and 18



VIDAR NORDLI-MATHISEN/UNSPLASH

Research is mixed about whether children lose learning during summer break.

percent in math. This suggests that the majority of youngsters do not experience summer learning loss.

In fact, my research suggests most children gain or maintain their skills over the summer.

**2. Losses Aren't Long-Term**  
 I also wanted to know if children who slid over the summer would stay behind during elementary school. Using national data,

my findings suggest that summer sliders and gainers are not much different by the end of fourth grade. For instance, the average score for children who gained versus slid over the summer before second grade differed by just 0.04 points for math and 0.12 points for reading two years later.

**3. Strongest Students Lose the Most**  
 I was also curious to see

if it was possible to figure out what kinds of student characteristics and background factors relate to summer learning loss. You might predict—as I did—that children with weaker skills before summer would be more likely to lose over the summer. And you would be wrong—as I was.

It was actually children with higher reading or math scores before the start of summer who were more likely to experience a summer slide.

**4. Summer ‘Homework’ Not That Important**

You also might think that students who do regular math, writing or reading over the summer would hold onto more knowledge over the summer. Overall, this was not the case. For instance, 78 percent of parents of gainers and 79 percent of parents of sliders read books to their child regularly; about half do writing activities regularly.

The only exception is that children who read to themselves more frequently were less likely to slide in reading between first and second

grade. This is based on my study that shows 71.44 percent of parents of gainers reported that their child regularly read to themselves, compared to 67.81 percent of parents of sliders.

**5. Let Them Play**

All this is not to say that summer vacation doesn't come with its share of risks to children, because it does. But if I were going to worry about a threat that summer break poses to my child, it wouldn't be summer loss. I'd be more concerned about the research that shows children gain more weight over the summer than they do during the school year.

I have no quarrel with parents or educators who want children to read books or study math over the summer to stay sharp academically. But let's make sure they get to go outside and play so that they can stay in shape physically as well.

Abel J. Koury is a senior research associate at The Ohio State University. This article was first published on The Conversation.



## FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES

Thursday, August 1, 2019



### The Horn

From “Songs of Childhood” by Walter de la Mare

Hark! Is that a horn I hear,  
 In cloudland winding sweet—  
 And bell-like clash of bridle-rein,  
 And silver-shod light feet?

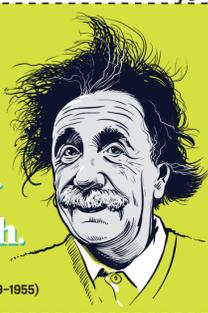
Is it the elfin laughter of  
 Fairies riding faint and high,  
 'Neath the branches of the moon,  
 Straying through the starry sky?

Is it in the globbd dew  
 Such sweet melodies may fall?  
 Wood and valley—all are still,  
 Hushed the shepherd's call.

Hark! Is that a horn I hear  
 In cloudland winding sweet?  
 Or gloomy goblins marching out  
 Their captain Puck to greet?

“Play is the highest form of research.”

ALBERT EINSTEIN (1879-1955)



WHAT DO YOU CALL A DEFECTIVE BOOMERANG?

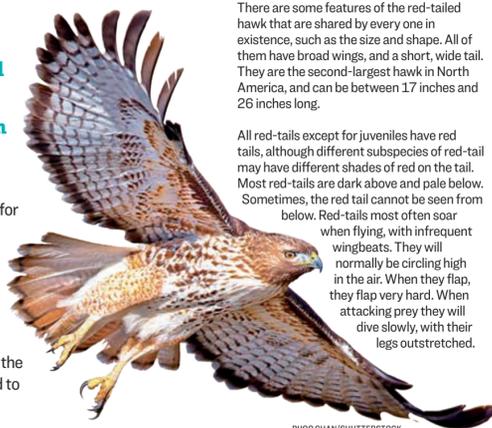


By Aidan Danza, age 13

## SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: RED-TAILED HAWK

**R**ed-tailed hawks are probably the most well-known hawk in the country.

It lives in every state of the United States except for Hawaii, and is frequently found on roadsides, perched on any high object, natural or manmade. This is probably the first hawk you'll see while driving on the highway, and it is not hard to identify.



PHOO CHAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

There are some features of the red-tailed hawk that are shared by every one in existence, such as the size and shape. All of them have broad wings, and a short, wide tail. They are the second-largest hawk in North America, and can be between 17 inches and 26 inches long.

All red-tails except for juveniles have red tails, although different subspecies of red-tail may have different shades of red on the tail. Most red-tails are dark above and pale below. Sometimes, the red tail cannot be seen from below. Red-tails most often soar when flying, with infrequent wingbeats. They will normally be circling high in the air. When they flap, they flap very hard. When attacking prey they will dive slowly, with their legs outstretched.

Red-tails often nest at the top of tall trees, or sometimes manmade structures as high as towers, telephone towers, or, in the case of a famous hawk named Pale Male, buildings on Fifth Avenue. Both hawks build the nest or use one they previously built. They pile sticks and branches up to 6.5 feet high and 3 feet across. The lining of this nest is bark strips, fresh leaves, and dry leaves and grass.

Red-tails will lay one-five buff to white speckled eggs, which will hatch in 28-35 days. When the eggs hatch, the mother stays with her hatchlings, while the father brings most of the food in. The mother will prepare the food for the little

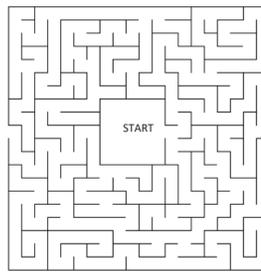
ones by tearing it into small pieces. After four to five weeks have passed, the parents will simply drop their catch into the nest and let their hungry chicks eat it. Two-three weeks after this, the young leave the nest but will stay with their parents for a few more weeks.

Red-tailed hawks are territorial birds and will chase off other large birds that are trespassing. During courtship, the male and the female will sometimes lock talons and fall to the ground. They will separate their talons just before they hit the ground, and swoop away.



PATRICK ROLANDS/SHUTTERSTOCK

## AMAZING ESCAPES!



**USE THE FOUR NUMBERS IN THE CORNERS, AND THE OPERANDS (+, -, AND X) to build an equation to get the solution in the middle. There may be more than one “unique” solution but, there may also be “equivalent” solutions. For example: 6 + (7 X 3) + 1 = 28 and 1 + (7 X 3) + 6 = 28**

Easy puzzle 1



**Solution for Easy 1**  
 2 × (1 - 2 + 6)  
 1 × (2 × 6)

Medium puzzle 1

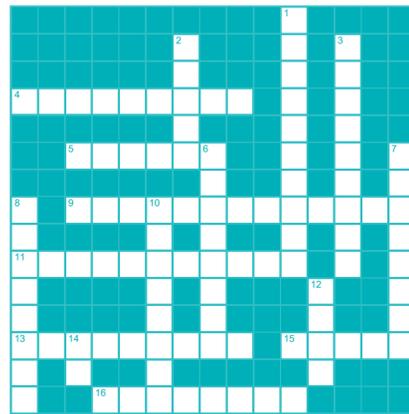


**Solution for Medium 1**  
 1 - 61 × (61 - 91)

Hard puzzle 1



**Solution for Hard 1**  
 6 × (22 - 8 + 9)

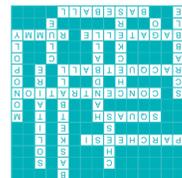


Across

- 4 “The Classic Game of India” (9)
- 5 Played in an indoor court (6)
- 9 Memory game (13)
- 11 Similar to Squash but with a bigger ball (11)

Down

- 1 Steph Curry's game (10)
- 2 Speed \_\_\_\_ (5)
- 3 Lonely card game (9)
- 6 Played off-the-wall (8)
- 7 Played with a car, a hat, thimble, and a boot (8)
- 8 Board game with tiles (8)
- 10 “King Me!” game (8)
- 12 Col Mustard in the library with a lead pipe (4)
- 14 Strategy game played with “stones” (2)



- 13 A type of pool (9)
- 15 “Gin” card game (5)
- 16 “Field of Dreams” sport (8)

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*Stan Krzyston, pastor*



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