

THE EPOCH TIMES LIFE & TRADITION

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The Power Of Beauty

We Can All Contribute

JEFF MINICK

Stripped of its furniture and accouterments, the house in which I recently spent five days would be unremarkable, a typical home from 20 or 30 years ago. On the second floor are two bedrooms, a shared bath, and a small attic. On the first floor are a kitchen, a laundry room, a dining room, a living room, two parlors—one might easily serve as a bedroom—a master bedroom with an attached bath, and another bathroom at the end of a hallway. The unfinished basement offers parking for two cars and an abundance of room for storage.

The property on which the house sits is also commonplace, three acres of hillside in the mountains of Western North Carolina. In the front, a sloped yard ends at a thin rank of trees. In the back, the same slope of earth runs up to more trees. Maples, oaks, and a few firs on all sides hide this house from neighboring homes and from Henn's Plant Farm, a nursery just across the pitted dirt road beyond the trees of the front yard.

As I say, an unexceptional piece of property in this region.

Enter Becky and Tom Polonsky, my sister and brother-in-law.

In the four years since they bought this house and property, Becky and Tom have created a place of tranquility, a sanctuary of peace and beauty affording an escape from the bustle of the outside world.

Surrounding the house are beds of flowers—black-eyed Susans, morning glories, daisies, sunflowers, and more. Here, too, is a miniature arborium of shrubs, ferns, and mosses. Wooden boxes and clay pots hold an abundance of herbs. Vegetable gardens, some in wooden frames, some tucked away near the woods, produce squash, okra, carrots, lettuce, and tomatoes.

Ornaments and small sculptures decorate these gardens. An imitation turtle sits on a rock; an angel kneels beneath a flower basket; a clay pot of herbs tops a piece of weathered statuary. Stones pulled from the yard and



Whether through gardening, decorating, or cooking, there are many ways to add beauty to daily life.

Among us are creators of a different sort, neighbors, friends, and family members, who win little renown in the exercise of their talents and who in fact often don't regard themselves as artisans.

woodlands stand artfully stacked on the patio and walkways.

In this canvas of flora we find mixed elements of English and Japanese gardens, a playful and free-spirited array of various plants, pots, statuary, benches, tables and chairs, yet a feeling, too, that great care and thought have gone into the placement of even the smallest ornament or the most insignificant shrub.

The inside of the house matches the tranquility produced by these gardens. Here again nothing is out of place—I was housesitting as I wrote these words, and the other rooms offered a silent rebuke to the mess of my books and papers strewn across the bedroom floor.

In every room, we find objects

connecting their owners to their past. On a wall in the dining room is a painting of Pennsylvania's McConnell Mill, captured on canvas by our father 50 years ago. In the same room, a charming hut with a marble countertop was a wedding gift for Becky and Tom shipped from Germany by Tom's brother. In the living room near the front door there hangs a framed embroidery done in 1851 by Hannah Floor, one of our distant ancestors. A painting of Naples by Tom's mother decorates the wall above the desk on which I wrote these words. And everywhere photographs of grandparents, parents, children, and grandchildren offer loving tribute to the past and present.

Immaculate, uncluttered, with each room artfully arranged for comfort, here is a home that, were it grander or were its owners important figures in the world, would be worthy of an appearance in Southern Living or Architectural Digest.

Which brings me to my point in this celebration of beauty.

When we hear the word "art," most of us think of painters, sculptors, musicians, and writers, men and women who bring some interior vision to life from a palette, a piece of stone, staff paper, or a blank page. Names from the past leap to mind—Dante, Michelangelo, Rubens, Mozart, Shakespeare, Jane Austen—and we rightly honor those names.

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 to follow his blog.

We use "art" in a broader sense as well. Google "the art of" and you'll find hundreds of books, websites, conferences, and movies that begin with those words. The art of war, the art of manliness, the art of the deal: these only scratch the surface.

Yet among us are creators of a different sort, neighbors, friends, and family members, who win little renown in the exercise of their talents and who in fact often don't regard themselves as artisans. That woman whose coq au vin explodes on our taste buds, that man who can cut and glue pieces of wood into a beautiful bookcase, that teacher who can breathe life into poetry,

that homemaker whose touch and gift for grace ensures that those who walk through her front door will find enchantment: all those who bring beauty into the world bring a unique gift to the rest of us.

The canvases of artists like Caravaggio and Botticelli, the music of composers like Bach and Handel, the poetry of Emily Dickinson and William Wordsworth: these are marvelous achievements mingling beauty and truth, and we bend a knee in homage to them.

But we should also respect, honor, and encourage those who brighten the corner where they are, those who with no thought of profit or gain bring charm and grace to the rest of us. Our hearts and souls need these gifts.

Becky and Tom Polonsky bring that beauty to their family and friends by way of their gardens, woodlands, and their home's beautiful interiors.

Like them, we all have the power to create some object of beauty, however great or small.

And when we do so, we make the world a better place.

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Don't forget to pencil in some fun, together-time before your calendar gets filled with other people's priorities.

Fall Is for Family

7 weekend ideas for enjoying the season together

BARBARA DANZA

The transition from summer to fall and beyond has a magical air about it. The back-to-school and back-to-business routines enliven the pace of each day. Nature puts on its fantastical show this time of year in many parts. There's an energy that comes with the crispness in the air, the change in daily routines, the colors, the smells—it's a delight.

Of course, it can also be a hectic time for families. It's easy to get bogged down in activities and obligations quickly this time of year. With that in mind, don't forget to pencil in some fun, together-time before your calendar gets filled with other people's priorities. Here are seven ideas for

enjoying the fall season with your family this year.

Get Festive

Fall is festival season. Check your local websites, Facebook, or your local newspaper to find festivals your family will want to enjoy this year. This is an easy way to enjoy a fall day together.

Go Pumpkin Picking

Pumpkin picking is a must-do this time of year. Pick a fun-filled pumpkin patch with a hayride and other family-friendly activities. After you've chosen the perfect pumpkins, they can be turned into jack-o-lanterns, painted, or (of course) eaten in a number of tasty ways.

Pumpkins aren't the only crops ready to pick this time of year. Here in



the northeast, you can head out to pick your own apples. Brussels sprouts, squash, pears, grapes, and corn.

Get Cooking

Speaking of yummy things, it's time to turn the oven back on, break out the slow cooker, and fill your home with wonderful smells of baked

deliciousness, stews, roasts, and soups.

Go Leaf Peeping

Don't miss the leaves! Head out on an afternoon hike or a weekend getaway to take in the beautiful autumn leaves. While you're soaking in nature, be sure to notice the birds and wildlife you encounter. It's mi-

gration season. The critters are on the move and you may spot a rare find. Don't leave home without your field guide.

Camp Out

Whether in the backyard or a bit further from home, pitch a tent and sleep in the great outdoors. The crisp autumn air is perfect for sleep and the stars and moon this time of year are not to be missed on a clear night. Make s'mores, tell stories, and enjoy your family.

Snap a Family Photo

Fall landscapes can make for beautiful photo conditions. Head out into nature with your own camera or with a professional and take a lovely family portrait. You'll be all set for sending those Christmas cards early this year.

Make Halloween Costumes

Speaking of holidays, Halloween is right around the corner. If you're the crazy type, now's the time to begin creating those one-of-a-kind costumes. Involve the kids and enjoy not being rushed through the process.

Get Away

This whole back-to-school season is a fantastic time of year to take a trip. Prices are commonly lower in what's considered the off-season and crowds are way down in popular destinations. If it won't matter too much to take the kids out of school, consider fall for your family vacation time. The weather in many locations is still enjoyable, if not ideal. (Just remember the whole hurricane season thing.) Bon voyage!

Anda Suman

The Art of the Romanian Blouse

MIHAELA LICA-BUTLER

She has auburn-saffron, wavy hair, and eyes so blue they mirror the hues of a thousand forget-me-nots. A striking beauty, reminiscent of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "La Ghirlandata"—a redhead playing a harp adorned with a garland of roses and honeysuckles while the angels from Heaven are summoned by her enchanting tunes. In a sense, Anda Suman summons angels too, but with a thread and needle. She's an embroiderer.

You wouldn't be able to tell if you saw her all dressed up in black ripped jeans, biker boots, and a Goth T-shirt riding a tricked-out chopper-bike. But then, this is a passion of hers very few people know about. Her Facebook timeline showcases mostly her needlework and her silhouette wearing pristine linen embroidered with gold and the colors of summer.

I've never met Anda in real life, but I imagine her voice sweet and melodious like a Romanian "doina" (ballad)—a folk genre I care for deeply. I also imagine the way she is—with an abundance of joie de vivre with rainbows and summer rains in a field of sunflowers. I imagine her like a fairy tale because she creates fairy tales. She is based in Iasi, a cultural cradle of Romania, and one of the country's most beautiful cities. An abundance of art and culture is perhaps what inspired Anda's work as much as her ancestry.

Needlework is relatively easy once you learn the craft of stitching and you follow a pattern. But Anda goes beyond clichés, taking traditional values to a higher level, one that defies conventionalism, embracing a fascinating intellectual, forward-looking approach to creation and creativity.

"Ia, the traditional Romanian blouse, has been my world since ... forever!" she writes to me, and I feel her joy and passion with such vividly that the world seems brighter all of a sudden.

"It all began in my childhood," she goes on, "when I saw for the very first time silk threads, pointy needles, and the whiteness of linens in my grandma's home. My grandmother was my teacher and my mentor. She introduced me to the art of traditional embroidery, and she planted the seed of love for the simplicity, power, and beauty of the symbols that adorn the traditional Romanian blouse."

Anda talks of the same blouse that inspired Henri Matisse to paint "La Blouse Romaine." A peasant garment from a poor Eastern European country that also inspired Yves Saint Laurent in 1981, Oscar de la Renta in 2000, Carolina Herrera in 2013, and many other fashion designers over the years.

The beautiful, mysterious, and flawlessly mystical Romanian blouse was almost forgotten as communism suffocated most crafts and traditions and because of a prejudice that peasants were an inferior class. But it's making a strong comeback, mainly due to people like Anda Suman who have a strong grasp of traditional values. The Romanian blouse is now a much-coveted fashion item, but it also carries deep-rooted meanings not many people can understand.



Spotting Anda riding a motorcycle, you'd never guess her passion for needlework.



Anda Suman is based in Iasi, Romania, a city known for its cultural heritage.



COURTESY OF ANDA SUMAN

The Romanian blouse used to carry a secret code—known only to local communities, showing someone's age, marital status, occupation, and social status.

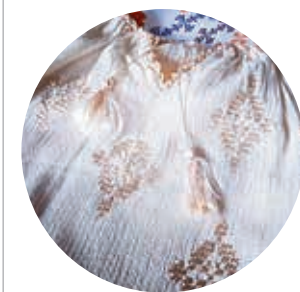


POPA ANDREI

Each creation takes three to ten weeks to complete.

Anda's grandmother introduced her to the art of traditional embroidery.

The details of embroidery work.



Symbols

"All of the symbols, such as the diamond, the cross, the flowers, the flying birds, and the other cosmic elements are inherited from our ancestors," Anda explains. They are believed to have powers.

In fact, the Romanian blouse used to carry a secret code—known only to local communities, showing someone's age, marital status, occupation, and social status. At the same time, the motifs embroidered onto the fabric were also supposed to protect against misfortune and—yes, even evil. For instance, the cross would protect against demons, black magic, bad luck, and hate.

Then, each symbol carries a meaning: the sunflower, the sun, and the diamond are supposed to bring harmony and joy in the heart of the wearer. The tree is a symbol of wisdom, revival, and life itself. Vines, leaves, and grapes may signify a trade from the area. A straight line stands for the right path in life; spirals mean spirituality; hooks attract good luck, and most of the colorful flowers indicate prosperity. Every authentic Romanian blouse carries strong symbolism and energy.

"Out of the many symbols sewed on the Romanian ia [pronounced ee-ah], one that I like dearly is the hora," Anda explains and continues, "it represents a tradition-

al dance where the people from a village gather in a circle and dance like brothers and sisters. It's a dance of life, a dance about the afterlife, about the seasons that come and go—a symphony of feelings in motion to teach us how to understand the Sky and the Earth, the past, the present and the future, and ultimately life and death."

Time-Consuming

Embroidering an ia was, and as Anda reveals it, still is a very time-consuming endeavor.

"Each creation takes about three and up to 10 weeks to complete," she writes, describing the items available in her shop, Caterine.

"The ia I create start from the inspiration I gather from the world around me: a smile, two people holding hands or a flower about to bloom. Then I translate the feelings into traditional designs and onto white linen, my canvases. Our ancestors had a wonderful unspoken language of symbols and colors. I am grateful to say that I have learned their language and I am doing my best to preserve and promote it."

Anda started her business about four years ago to support this life goal of preserving and promoting Romanian traditional values. She already has a team of talented seamstresses, and her work is recognized by fashion experts and magazines all over Romania. My Facebook friend is a fair-eyed, sweet, and kind celebrity of sorts. One who embroiders her soul onto the linen of the ia as much as she likes to revive the tradition held dear by her grandmother.

And finally, the Romanian blouse is a powerful symbol of my ancestry too, but no one says it better than Anda Suman in her letter to me where she concludes:

"Ia is the genetic code of our people, of our unity. Ia is, simply, the Mother."

A former military journalist, Mihaela Lica-Butler is a senior partner at Argophilla Travel News. Besides her work as a PR pro and travel journalist, she spends her time writing children's fairy tales and cookbooks.

Who would you be interested in reading about? Whose life inspires you? Let us know at feedback@epochtimes.com

Gulliver's Benevolence

Unjustly accused of treason for his kind acts, how is Gulliver to react?

ERIC BESS

Throughout our lives, we all come into contact with someone who supports us and pushes us to be our best selves, as well as others who are hostile and want us to fail. What are we to do in a hostile environment?

'Gulliver's Travels'

Gulliver, in "Gulliver's Travels," a book written by Jonathan Swift in 1726, finds himself dealing with all kinds of people with varying attitudes as he travels. The book is divided into four parts, but only the first part will have a purpose for our current discussion.

The first part deals specifically with his voyage to Lilliput—a nation of six-inch-tall and, appropriately, small-minded people.

Gulliver, after his ship wrecks in a violent storm, swims to the nearest shore and sleeps on the grass. He awakens to find himself tied to the ground with Lilliputians climbing on top of him.

Compared to the Lilliputians, Gulliver is huge. However, despite their differences in size and native languages, Gulliver convinces the Lilliputians through body language and submissive demeanor that he is a good and kind person. The Lilliputians accept him into their nation.

The Lilliputians grant Gulliver his freedom because of his benevolence.

But the nation's people also have plans for their new giant friend: They want him to help them defeat the neighboring Blefuscu in battle. The Lilliputians and Blefuscuans have been warring for many moons because they crack eggs differently. The king of Lilliput wants Gulliver to bring the Blefuscuian fleet, currently preparing for battle, to his shores. Gulliver agrees and attaches cables to the Blefuscuian fleet and pulls them to the Lilliputian shore without causing any harm.

The emperor of the Lilliputians is filled with glee; he then wants Gulliver to bring all of the Blefuscuian fleet to his shores so that he can rule them and force them to crack eggs in his preferred way.

Gulliver responds, "I would never be an instrument of bringing a free and brave people into slavery."

He awakens to find himself tied to the ground with Lilliputians climbing on top of him.



In time, the Blefuscuans send ambassadors to Lilliput to negotiate peace and agree to terms that benefit the Lilliputians.

However, the Lilliputian Skyresh Bolgolam, has hated Gulliver since the giant's arrival. He tries to convince everyone that Gulliver is treacherous, and is able to finally impeach Gulliver with crimes after Gulliver "makes water" to put out a palace fire. Skyresh Bolgolam uses all of Gulliver's kind deeds against him, suggesting that Gulliver maliciously "made water" to put out the fire, that he did not destroy the Blefuscuans when he had the chance, and that he planned a voyage to the Blefuscu empire.

It is decided that Gulliver should be blinded as punishment for his treason. Gulliver has a decision to make. He considers destroying the Lilliputian empire, which would be easy considering his size, but he instead decides that it would be better to simply escape to the Blefuscu empire and let the Lilliputians peacefully live their lives.

Artist Jehan-Georges Vibert paints a scene from this story in his work titled "Gulliver

and the Lilliputians." We see Gulliver after his swim to shore, now sleeping. Workers are tying him with rope, the military stands all around him ready to attack, and the king talks to his council.

Vibert uses foreshortening to place Gulliver's body in perspective as he lies on his back, and this helps show the difference in size between the Lilliputians and Gulliver.

Benevolence

Swift wrote "Gulliver's Travels" as a satire on the 18th-century English government. But how might it be relevant for our contemporary culture?

Let's review some key points: First, the Lilliputians tie Gulliver to the ground but release him once they learn that he is kind; second, Gulliver pulls the Blefuscuian fleet to the Lilliputian shore without harming anyone, which results in peace after a long war; and third, despite being accused of and arrested for committing crimes he did not commit, Gulliver decides to escape without harming the Lilliputians.

When he appears to be a threat, Gulliver is tied to the ground by the Lilliputians but is let go when he is seen to be kind. Of course, we find that people are more likely to engage, share ideas and stories, and create new experiences with us when we are kind.

The practice of benevolence literally allows Gulliver to free himself from the ropes used to keep him anchored to the earth. We can transcend our situation when we search out our benevolent natures even in the face of those who wish us harm.

And, our benevolent natures can pull us forth to peace. Gulliver pulls a whole fleet ready for war to the shores of the enemy without hurting a soul, and his actions result in peace between warring nations.

His claim that he "would never be an instrument of bringing a free and brave people into slavery" indicates his benevolence, despite a king who demands otherwise. That is, Gulliver's decision is based on principles found within himself instead of on rules issued by a worldly authority.

It is decided that Gulliver should be blinded as punishment for his treason.

Last, Gulliver's kind acts are used against him. Jealousy causes Skyresh Bolgolam to twist Gulliver's deeds into acts of treason. Gulliver has the potential to easily destroy the whole Lilliput empire, but remembering the kindness of the king, he decides to escape and leave Lilliput untouched.

Is it possible in our divisive times to search within ourselves for our own benevolence toward those who would wish us harm? Is it possible for us to rise above the ideologies that divide us and search for truths that may elevate us beyond our selfishness? Can we be kind, help others, and when attacked, respectfully decline confrontation?

I'm hopeful that, like Gulliver, we can break through to our own benevolence and answer these questions with a resounding yes.

Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist. He is currently a doctoral student at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).

"Gulliver and the Lilliputians," circa 1886 by Jehan-Georges Vibert. Oil on Canvas, 22.25 inches by 43.25 inches.

'Laocoön and His Sons': Suffering Unabated,

ERIC BESS

According to the ancients, our actions have consequences. The whole of the world expresses itself by way of cause and effect. Sometimes, however, actions that we think are good, or at least harmless, turn out to be neither. This brings up a difficult question for us: Is it better to do as little as possible to avoid doing wrong, or should we stand firm and act according to our convictions despite their consequences as long as we consider these convictions good?

Laocoön (pronounced lay-oh-co-won) had a similar question to answer. There are two versions of his story. The first story goes as follows: Laocoön, a Trojan priest, attempts to warn the Trojans not to accept the Trojan Horse from the Greeks.

As you remember, during the Trojan War, the Greeks sent a huge wooden horse as a gift to the Trojans. Of course, the gift is a ruse; the Greeks want to trick the Trojans into taking the horse inside their city walls as Greek soldiers wait patiently inside the horse and plan their attack.

Virgil describes the event in Book II of the "Aeneid":

Then Laocoön rushes down eagerly from the heights of the citadel, to confront them all, a large crowd with him, and shouts from far off: "O unhappy citizens, what madness?"

Do you think the enemy's sailed away? Or do you think any Greek gift's free of treachery? Is that Ulysses' reputation? Either there are Greeks in hiding, concealed by the wood, or it's been built as a machine to use against our walls, or spy on our homes, or fall on the city from above, or it hides some other trick: Trojans, don't trust this horse. Whatever it is, I'm afraid of Greeks even those bearing gifts.

In payment for his loyalty to his own people, Laocoön is punished by the gods for his attempt to prevent the sack of Troy. The goddess Athena shakes the ground around his feet

and blinds him, and Poseidon sends sea serpents to strangle him and his sons.

The Trojans take Laocoön's suffering as a sign that the horse is sacred, and they accept it into the city.

In the second version of this story, Laocoön is a priest of Apollo and fornicates with his wife in front of Apollo's divine image. Apollo takes this act as desecration and sends the serpents to strangle Laocoön and his sons.

Many artists have attempted to communicate the suffering of Laocoön. In the "Aeneid," Virgil describes it as follows:

At the same time he stretched forth to use against our walls, his fillets soaked with saliva and black venom at the same time he lifted to heaven horrendous cries: like the bellowing when a wounded bull has fled from the altar and has shaken the ill-aimed axe from its neck.

But it is "Laocoön and His Sons" that really depicts the pain and suffering of Laocoön—trapped forever in stone. The sculpture depicts Lao-



"Laocoön and His Sons," 40–30 B.C., attributed by Pliny the Elder to Agesander, Athenodoros, and Polydorus. Marble, 6 feet 10 inches high by 5 feet 4 inches wide by 3 feet 8 inches deep. Vatican Museum, Italy.

coön's body writhing in pain. As his body twists and turns, he reaches up to the heavens and attempts to let out a cry that seems to fail to escape his

mouth. The serpents weave in and out of Laocoön and his sons, biting them and pinning them to the earth from which the sufferers came.

Frozen and Forever

This sculpture was discovered in 1506 and is believed to be the piece described by Pliny the Elder as the Greeks' standard of excellence for sculpture.

Neoclassicism and Romanticism
The discovery of this sculpture began a debate about what the Greeks considered beautiful.

What was the aesthetic ideal of the Greeks? Two 18th-century authors in particular, Johann Winckelmann and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, each reacted to this sculpture, and taken together can give us insight into a divide that later morphed into Neoclassicism and Romanticism respectively.

In brief, Winckelmann believed that the aesthetic ideal of the Greeks was a stoic truth depicted by way of an ideal beauty, a quiet simplicity that can stir our souls. Winckelmann's ideas align with the pursuit of Neoclassicism and the depiction of beautiful, stoic images that pursue a truth that can only be relayed by way of art. For instance, in the "History of the Art of Antiquity," Winckelmann states:

The discovery of this sculpture began a debate about what the Greeks considered beautiful.

"Expression is an imitation of the active of suffering states of our minds and our bodies and of passions as well as deeds ... Stillness is the state most proper to beauty, as it is to the sea, and experience shows that the most beautiful things are of a still and well-mannered nature ... Laocoön is a being in the greatest pain, fashioned in the likeness of a man seeking to gather the conscious strength of his mind and spirit against it ... Beneath the brow, the battle between pain and resistance, as if concentrated in this one place, is composed with great wisdom ... Thus, where the greatest pain is expressed, the greatest beauty is also to be found."

For Winckelmann, beauty comes in the ability to imitate the attempt

to quiet the mind during suffering, to stoically use the mind to overcome what causes the pain. Winckelmann sees not only pain in Laocoön's face but wisdom as well.

Lessing, however, suggested that poetry, which he describes as the narration of time, is the more important element in art. In his text "Laocoön," Lessing suggests:

"It is evident that the single moment and the point from which it is viewed cannot be chosen with too great a regard for its effect. But only that which gives free play to the imagination is effective. The more we see, the more we must be able to imagine. And the more we add in our imaginations, the more we must think we see."

For Winckelmann, imitation and representation of a stoic and beautiful truth is the height of art. For Lessing, imitation and representation are important, but the more important thing is the excitement and stimulation that comes from having an engaged imagination. Winckelmann steers toward the intellectual content of "Laocoön," whereas Lessing is more interested

in its emotional content. Lessing's ideas align more with Romanticism in that poetry, pain, and the struggles of life are the height of art.

"Laocoön and His Sons" incorporate both aesthetics: It possesses both beautiful form and painful content. Quite often, beautiful forms are the most fruitful way to express complicated truths, and complicated truths often deal with human suffering. "Laocoön and His Sons" communicates to us a deeper truth that is well-communicated by way of art.

The Consequences of Our Actions

Our actions have consequences despite what we believe to be right and wrong. Laocoön wants to save Troy. He hopes to convince his fellow citizens to deny entry of this so-called gift.

But not only do his actions lead to his own destruction, they even aid the enemy because the citizens of Troy interpret his death as confirmation that the Trojan Horse is sacred. His actions have the opposite of the intended effect.

In the second version of the story,

it is Laocoön's denial of the divine, of the spiritual, and indulgence in physical pleasure that causes his destruction. In both cases, it is not just he who is destroyed, but his family as well.

This one sculpture compels me to ask: How do we respond to our own sufferings? Does attempting to resist suffering at every turn prevent it or exacerbate it?

Is indulging in physical pleasure a form of freedom and free expression, or is it harmful to ourselves and others? What does the propagation of indulgence and victimhood do to our families, our children?

Hopefully, we can prevent the fate of Laocoön and his sons for ourselves if we readily endure our sufferings, restrain ourselves, and consider the effects our actions may have on ourselves and others, beyond the alignment with our own preconceptions of right and wrong.

Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist. He is currently a doctoral student at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).

The Link Between Marijuana and Psychosis

One mother's mission to unravel the false perceptions of marijuana



What we've been told about marijuana is wrong—and this is largely by design.

CATHERINE YANG

Lori Robinson remembers patting her 23-year-old son Shane Robinson on the knee, trying to comfort him. He was hallucinating, out of his mind, and had tried to jump out of the moving car; he seemed and sounded completely unlike himself. She asked, "Did you take any drugs?"

"Mom," he said, "Don't worry, I just smoked some pot. It's a harmless herb." On first read, Shane's story seems almost unbelievable, an amalgamation of worst-case scenarios, but it is painfully true.

He was a charming, outgoing young man who had an infectious smile and zest for life. He'd never used marijuana, despite it being easy to obtain where they lived in California, as it had been legalized for medical purposes by popular vote in 1996. But after Shane sustained a boat injury and responded poorly to his prescribed narcotic painkillers, he turned to marijuana thinking it would help alleviate the pain.

He had not one, but two psychotic breaks following marijuana use, and ended up taking his own life.

"How did my son, growing up with parents that never use, rock-solid citizens, pillars of the community ... believe that this drug was an herb, and not a drug?" Lori said.

Lori herself grew up in the '70s, when marijuana usage was prevalent. Even then, she and her husband didn't partake; it was common knowledge that marijuana was a mind-altering drug. She is also a health care professional who has worked in the field for over 30 years. She was shocked to hear her son refer to marijuana as just an herb—it would be like saying opioids are harmless, because they come from a poppy plant.

Lori was heartbroken to realize that the culture had sold her son a lie and it was too late. Marijuana is today easier to access and more potent than ever, and a higher percentage of people who use are heavy users, compared to people who drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes. Despite the widespread usage, there is little public awareness, and

The National Institute of Health reports that along with a doubling of marijuana use nationwide, related disorders have nearly doubled as well.



Joints in the 1970s had 1–3 mg of THC—the psychoactive component in marijuana—and a near equal amount of CBD—which is touted for its potential in treating seizures. Most joints in Colorado today contain 18–25 mg THC, with much less CBD.

even denial, of the facts and dangers.

"That's why I think the messaging is so important," Lori said.

This gap between insider and outsider knowledge of marijuana's effects was the widest that investigative reporter Alex Berenson had ever seen, prompting him to write "Tell Your Children: The Truth About Marijuana, Mental Illness, and Violence" which was published earlier this year.

The Public Realm: What Do We Think We Know?

Berenson, who covered the prescription drug industry for years, discovered that really most of what we've been told about marijuana is wrong—and this is largely by design.

Politicians and lobbyists say decriminalizing marijuana will reduce crime, when in reality the number of people in jail for possession pre-legalization had never been high. At peak, 1.6 percent of inmates were held for offenses only involving marijuana.

Worse, crime rates have risen in all states that legalized marijuana after legalization took effect. Traffic accidents and DUIs are also on the rise.

Some proponents claim legalization will bring great tax revenue, but the tax revenue in states that have legalized marijuana total less than 1 percent of the state budget. The jobs provided are largely retail or admin positions with minimum wage pay and no benefits, and the industry is far from green with the high carbon footprint of growing marijuana.

Some states have also hypothesized legalization of marijuana will decrease opioid overdoses, because people will choose marijuana over opioids as painkillers. This has also proved untrue, with opioid death rates rising in states with legalized marijuana. In fact, marijuana is not an effective pain reliever for people who have so much pain as to need painkillers.

Perhaps the most vocal criticism is in the realm of medical myths, from health professionals and loved ones who've first hand seen the disastrous effects.

Thrown Into Research

When Lori and her husband found their son in the middle of the night in 2009, having a psychotic breakdown, there was a big red flag waving in the back of her mind. She remembered reading, two years ago, a magazine article where Margaret Trudeau, the mother of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, explained that each time she had been hospitalized for psychosis, it was preceded by marijuana use.

Lori threw herself into research.

In the 10 days her son was in the psych facility, she read as much as she could. A search for papers relating marijuana to psychosis on a medical publication database brought up over 800 reports. Today, there are over 2,000 (some of which are studies attempting to disprove a link). Despite the very low level of public awareness, the link between marijuana and psychosis is common knowledge in the medical community.

Her son had tested positive for THC, the psychoactive component in marijuana, but was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and the drug test was not taken into account. Lori's request that he be sent to rehab was also declined. They told Shane and Lori it was mental illness, and Lori wanted to trust the medical professionals.

But no one in the Robinsons' families has a history of mental illness. It was a confusing and disparate piece of data.

"We have longevity and vitality," Lori said. Her mother, who is now in her 90s, told her, "Mental illness my foot. This is a very healthy young man. He's never had anything like this. Lori, wake up."

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR) at the time had no entry for cannabis-related disorders.

A year after Shane's death, in 2013, the updated fifth edition (DSM-5) came out, with an entire section dedicated to cannabis use disorders.

Medical Myths and Mental Illness

The National Institute of Health reports that along with a doubling of marijuana use nationwide, related disorders have nearly dou-



Lori Robinson and her son Shane on his wedding day.

bled as well. The effects range from anxiety to addiction, from violent vomiting to violent schizophrenia; the risk is higher with younger users, with higher likelihood of becoming lifetime problems.

Along with more people using, they are using a drug stronger than that of a few decades ago.

There are two active components of marijuana that are most discussed. CBD does not get you high, and in fact can inhibit a high. It's touted for its potential in treating seizures, and a purified form of CBD oil is among one of the few FDA-approved cannabis-related treatments. THC is the active component that delivers the high; it is a psychoactive chemical.

Lori met Dr. Karen Randall, an emergency medicine physician and vice president of case management at Southern Colorado Emergency Medicine Associates in Pueblo, Colorado, who also has a degree in cannabis science. Randall has been compiling data from her ER as Colorado has turned into a major marijuana center (her county is advertised as "the Napa Valley of cannabis"). Her ER is now the third busiest in the country.

Randall began her position in Pueblo in 2013, a year before marijuana legalization, and had no opinion on the policy then. Today she gives presentations to a variety of groups to educate the public on the effects.

For example, most people don't understand just how much stronger the drug is. Joints in the 1970s had 1–3 mg of THC and a near equal amount of CBD. Most joints in Colorado today contain 18–25 mg THC, with much less CBD. (Berenson has given a comparison to alcohol: this is the difference between a beer and dry martini.)

But marijuana isn't just smoked in a joint anymore—a variety of processes enable THC to be extracted at 90 percent concentrates, 100–200 mg, and then made into edibles or smoked as a wax or "dab." It is difficult to find CBD with no THC component.

"I personally have placed three patients in the last two years directly from the ER into hospice because the marijuana treatment

plan they chose didn't cure their cancer," Randall said in a talk. She asked: Who can these families hold responsible?

A few years ago Randall and her students wrote a paper on hyperemesis related to cannabis use because the case they encountered was so rare. Today she sees it daily in the ER; people call it "scromiting," or screaming and vomiting. Psychotic patients are also a daily occurrence. Not everyone is thankful for Randall's educational work—some patients even get angry at her when she says their condition is related to their smoking marijuana.

We cannot predict how THC will work in an individual. Some users find their tumors shrinking; others have a bad trip, develop schizophrenia, and commit violent murders during a psychotic outbreak.

Not all people who are mentally ill are violent, but those with psychoses are statistically more likely to be. People with schizophrenia, which has no cure and is severe, are at least five times more likely to commit violent crimes. Healthy people with schizophrenia who take anti-psychotics are very unlikely to become violent, but people with schizophrenia who also use recreational drugs—like marijuana—are at very high risk of causing great harm.

Psychosis data is largely from European studies, because in the United States patients' mental health information is confidential, but the results consistently show marijuana usage, especially for young adults, increases the risk of psychotic symptoms, can trigger the onset of psychosis, or exacerbate psychotic symptoms and aggression.

One hypothesis is that some individuals are unable to metabolize THC, resulting in psychosis. Another hypothesis is that people at higher risk of developing psychoses tend to seek marijuana out—which would not have been the case for Shane Robinson.

That there is no way for predicting who will develop psychosis does not mean we can afford to ignore the issue. Alcohol and tobacco, other intoxicants that are legal, all come with clear health warnings and age limits. We know smoking causes some to develop lung cancer; we know alcohol causes some to become violent. Yet marijuana advocates are adamant that there are no adverse effects.

In the case of marijuana, not only are the users most at risk—adolescents and young adults—unaware, but some turn to it thinking it can actually help curb their anxiety or depression or physical pain, when in fact it could make conditions worse. Parents who used marijuana with 1–3 mg THC back in their day even encourage or look lightly upon it.

People who see the present ills worry we're facing yet another Big Tobacco—it took decades for public awareness to sink in.

"I really actually don't want to be at the forefront of this issue," Berenson said in a book talk after the publication of "Tell Your Children" this January. "But I think this book contains a lot of facts that people need to know ... I do think the science around psychosis and marijuana has been lost in the last few years, which is probably not a coincidence. There's been a lot of work done by advocacy groups, cannabis advocacy groups to make that happen."

Dissenting Voices

After Shane's second psychotic break, he moved to a cabin the family owned to try to get a fresh start and recover. He was done with marijuana and Lori thought this would also mean the end of his psychosis.

Seven months later, Shane took his own life. After Lori found his body, she picked up where she left off in her research, vowed that she would leave no stone unturned. Belatedly she learned that during the six months after the start of marijuana cessation, suicide risk is very high.

"Who would have known that?" Lori said. This time, in all her learning, she also connected with other parents, scientists,

and advocates in hopes that she could affect some change, and bring about public awareness. To her dismay, it has been a "Herculean task."

"How do you go up against an industry that has so much monetary influence?" Lori said. "It's carnage and destruction in the interim."

"We Americans are unfortunately just really blinded by this. The pot industry is powerful and ... I think we're turning into a very pro-drug promoting culture now in America and I find it just simply tragic," she said. "I'm really sad for what's happening in this country."

One of the things Lori has done is team up with another woman with a similar story and start a website where others could share their own stories, on Moms-Strong.org.

"I'm getting so many stories that honestly—honestly, I'm almost losing track." It was heartbreaking to learn what she suffered was far from rare, and only escalating.

"I don't have enough tears to last for the rest of my life for what's going on," Lori said.

Lori works full time, and the research she's doing has evolved into practically another whole job itself. She travels, hikes, and keeps active to balance things out; she and her husband just celebrated their 40th anniversary with a two-week vacation.

On a recent Monday evening, Lori was driving home and listening to the radio. She usually listens to music that keeps her mood up, but this time she'd turned to the news. A psychologist and a psychiatrist were being interviewed about the mass shootings in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, and Lori remembers one of them saying they just didn't know, because they didn't grow up with these horrific events ever occurring.

It wasn't a surprise for Lori to learn this time that the shooter had had psychotic breaks related to marijuana.

"We've never seen anything like this," she said. "This should not be the norm."

Lori points out that while alcohol and cigarettes can kill slowly, marijuana causes a different kind of harm, being disproportionately risky for young people.

"Usually young people learn from their mistakes, and well, my son definitely atoned for his mistakes but it cost him his life," she said.

Information is becoming more accessible, with news like Berenson's book, the NHS in London opening the first cannabis psychosis clinic amid an urgent need, and other comprehensive reports.

"It's just sad that my son had to be one of the first guinea pigs," she said. "I don't think this is fair that they've done this to us and our kids."

By they, she means pro-legalization legislators who make false claims that there are no deaths related, or that this will bring nothing but public benefits.

Lori, a kind, genteel, and public-spirited woman, says the topic makes her thoughts turn bitter. She has always seen the best in people, but she wonders whether it is the industry money or pure ignorance driving these lawmakers to do children harm. She wishes, then, feels guilty for wishing, that these lawmakers and their families would try these THC gummies themselves before forcing this industry onto their communities.

"Honestly I think they need to start understanding what they are advocating for," Lori said.

"You never think you could lose a kid," Lori said. "You go through all the childhood diseases, and all the injuries that kids get, and you just count your lucky stars: they're vibrant, healthy, and you're not going to outlive them. And unfortunately, I'm one of many parents who've now found that's not true."

"When this happened, October 2009, that night's embedded in my brain and my husband's brain for the rest of our lives," Lori said. "I just can't walk away from this—believe me, believe me, I wish I could."

Providing for Our Nation's Troops and Police

ANDREW THOMAS

It was July 2010, and Aaron Negherbon had just sent a 45-pound birthday care package filled with toothpaste, soap, and Gatorade powder packets to his friend who was a company commander in the United States Marine Corps on deployment in Afghanistan.

Shortly afterward his friend sent him an email thanking him, but told

him that he had given all of the items to the approximately 150 men under his command. Negherbon had assumed they had all the supplies they needed, but his friend told him that was not the case.

He informed Negherbon that they needed stethoscopes, gauze, gun lubricant, and other essential supplies for combat.

"It was pretty darn shocking. It was really my call to action to, just ini-

tially, just help him and his guys out," Negherbon said. Word quickly spread in Afghanistan that there was a civilian in the United States who could provide much-needed provisions, and the requests started to trickle in.

As fall and winter approached, troops were asking for warmer gloves, insulated jackets, heavier socks, and basic nutritional and hygiene items. Negherbon had been in

the mortgage lending and property management business for seven years, and was balancing both his job and his military supply project. His father had asked him which he cared about more. Negherbon quit his job in the beginning of 2011, and that's when his project became his non-profit called Troops Direct.

"I believed it was the right thing to do," Negherbon said. The operation is funded

The Operation

Everything Troops Direct does is request-based. Military members who are deployed can contact the organization, and tell them specifically what they need. The organization will then vet the request, and in most cases will source and ship the items within 48 hours.

The packages then arrive seven to 10 days later anywhere on the planet. The operation is funded

by private individuals and foundations and does not accept any taxpayer money. Furthermore, approximately just 1 percent of the donations go toward administrative costs.

Negherbon and Troops Direct have sent tens of thousands of care packages over the last nine years. What's particularly gratifying for Negherbon is when he hears about a unit that he sent



U.S. troops receive a package of much needed supplies from Troops Direct.

supplies to successfully completing a mission, and the lives that are saved as a result of his operation.

In one instance, there was a special operations team that had a generator that failed. This generator was the only power source the unit had for lighting, communications, and electronics. They tried to contact their supply line, but there was a 12-month backorder on the parts they needed to fix the generator.

They sent a request to Troops Direct, and Negherbon and his team were able to send the parts in duplicate to Afghanistan in about 14 days.

In another instance, they received a request for Just for Men hair dye. Normally, Troops Direct only sends supplies essential for nutrition, hygiene, and combat. However, this was a unique request.

Special forces and special operations soldiers often grow beards to blend in with the local population in the Middle East, and the soldiers with blond and red beards were getting shot at more than the soldiers with black and brown beards. Thus, the request for hair dye.

Home and Abroad

Negherbon also created Cops Direct, which is an offshoot of Troops Direct, to help supply local law enforcement with first responder medical supplies.

Cops Direct supplies police departments with tourniquets, CPR masks, and other trauma supplies. The idea is that before paramedics can arrive on the scene, the police are the first to render aid and need the supplies to do so.

One of the items they send is called the Drowned Officer Kit. The kit is

custom-built for the needs of the everyday police officer to treat a wounded officer or civilian.

Soldiers and police officers have reacted with great appreciation and gratitude. Sometimes they ask if there's a catch, but there is none.

"We know that we have saved lives. We know that we have helped accomplish missions both at a police and a military level because they have told us so," Negherbon said.

People can donate to TroopsDirect.org



The Case for Cursive

Why It's About More Than Writing

TATIANA DENNING

My son can't sign his name. At least he couldn't, until a few days ago.

I'd known that Jacob had only received about three weeks of cursive writing instruction in third grade, and that he really hadn't used it since. Today, at the age of 13, any of his schoolwork that is handwritten is done in print, but most school work is done on a computer. I never liked the fact that he wasn't using cursive writing, but didn't give it a lot of thought. That is, until I learned he couldn't sign his name.

Thoughts flashed through my mind of a time when people who weren't educated had to sign their name with an "X." And while my son could print his name, it was unacceptable to me that he couldn't sign his name. How would he sign a check or a document when the time came?

Tutoring

I had already arranged for Jacob to have some general tutoring this summer to brush up on some skills. Mrs. Sherry Flournoy, a retired teacher of 54 years and wife of one of my patients, was kind enough to offer to tutor him. So I asked her if she could also tutor Jacob in cursive writing, to which she replied, "Absolutely. And don't let him practice in the workbook you bought. I have a technique, and he'll be doing it in an hour!" And indeed he was!

That first morning of tutoring, I overheard Sherry say, "You know, writing is great for your memory. You remember 90 percent of what you write, but not of what you type."

That's when it hit me; writing isn't just about putting words on paper. There are other benefits to it as well—important benefits—that are being lost. I set out to discover what some of those benefits are.

My research began with Mrs. Flournoy. She's the type of teacher you always loved to have in school. She teaches so that you actually enjoy learning—and even remember what you learn and know how to apply it. She makes what she's teaching relevant to kids' lives, incorporating life lessons along the way. She was meant to teach.

"I began teaching in 1964. I love teaching! I know people who couldn't wait to retire. When I retired, I cried," she said.

She lights up when she talks about teaching. But Sherry has seen many changes in the educational system over the years, and believes many of them may not be for the better.

"I know they've mostly done away with cursive writing in schools today, and I think it's a shame. With Common Core standards, a lot of things changed."

In 2013, Common Core standards made cursive writing optional for schools. Instead, students are now required to learn typing and printing. Gone are the up and down strokes of "joined-up" writing.

As Common Core was being mandated, an article in The Los Angeles Times promoted the loss of cursive writing as a good thing: "States and schools shouldn't cling to cursive based on the romantic idea that it's a tradition, an

And while my son could print his name, it was unacceptable to me that he couldn't sign his name.

art form or a basic skill whose disappearance would be a cultural tragedy. Of course, everyone needs to be able to write without computers, but longhand printing generally works fine."

But many experts disagree.

Beth Carr, a literacy interventionist in Texas, advocates for children learning cursive writing.

"They remember words better. And can spell better when they're writing that flow," Carr said in an interview with Texas-based KTRT. "You know the pencil's not starting and stopping and picking up. It's a constant flow of text. And it's very similar, if you think about it, with reading. We're blending sounds, so when you're writing and connecting those letters and blend, it just helps that brain flow."

Contrary to what some believe, it's very easy to teach cursive handwriting. Sherry was even asked to instruct other teachers in cursive.

She said, "In the '60s teachers were coming out of college and they didn't know how to connect their cursive letters legibly. I used the same technique to teach them that I used with my kids."

Sherry developed her own technique for teaching cursive, and still gets calls today from former students asking her to help them teach cursive to their own children or grandkids.

"I use three shapes: curves, humps, and around. You also have to know where to start the letters, so they can be connected legibly. If you know these basics, you'll be writing cursive in no time," she explained.

There is an ease to learning cursive. Printing is more difficult due to the frequent stop-and-start motion when forming letters. And letters are easily confused in print, for example with the letters "b" and "d," something my own son struggled with.

"It's so easy to learn cursive; but then it has to be reinforced. Once cursive comes naturally, it's so fast, much faster than printing; you don't even have to think about it," Sherry said.

Before the 1940s all American children were taught cursive in the first grade. Then, in a move to modernize things, children started learning to print before they learned cursive. Today, in another move to modernize, we are doing away with cursive altogether.

Mrs. Flournoy recalled, "I was never taught how to print. I was taught cursive from the beginning."

A Link to History

Sadly, many children today are cursively illiterate in their own language. Some may argue that kids don't need to know how to read the U.S. Constitution or The Declaration of Independence in its original cursive form. But how would kids even know if such important documents had truly been transcribed into print correctly?

Sherry pointed out that this is why the clergy had to study Greek and Hebrew: "They needed to know what the original words were and what those words meant, to determine if they had been translated correctly into English." This assured that what they were

studying, and then teaching, was true and accurate to its original form.

"I used to ask my students how they were going to read the love letters their parents wrote to each other, to which I always got an 'ewww,'" she laughed. "But there is a real loss of connection, not only to other people, but also to the past, with the loss of cursive."

Effect on Neurological Development

The International Dyslexia Association views learning cursive early as a positive thing, stating, "It has been argued (by some who should know better) that learning to write using cursive makes it more difficult for beginning readers. This is simply not the case. Reading and writing, although both tasks involve written language processes, engage different circuits within the brain."

In an article on NaturalSociety.com, Andrea Gordon discusses the impact cursive writing has on neurological development and cites a study by Dr. Jason Barton. His research shows that the left brain decides the meaning of written language, while the right brain helps us identify the writer through their style of writing, similar to how it helps us recognize faces. He says that with written language, the right brain "activates a memory trace ... and fans out, setting off other sensory memories."

Dr. David Sortino cites studies by researchers at Johns Hopkins University who showed that the brain undergoes beneficial changes when using cursive. Sortino says, "They also demonstrated that these changes resulted in an almost immediate improvement in fluency, which led to later development of neural pathways. As a result of practicing these handwriting motor skills, the researchers found that acquired knowledge becomes more stable."

What we learn becomes more ingrained when we write, especially in cursive.

Benefits Similar to Learning Music

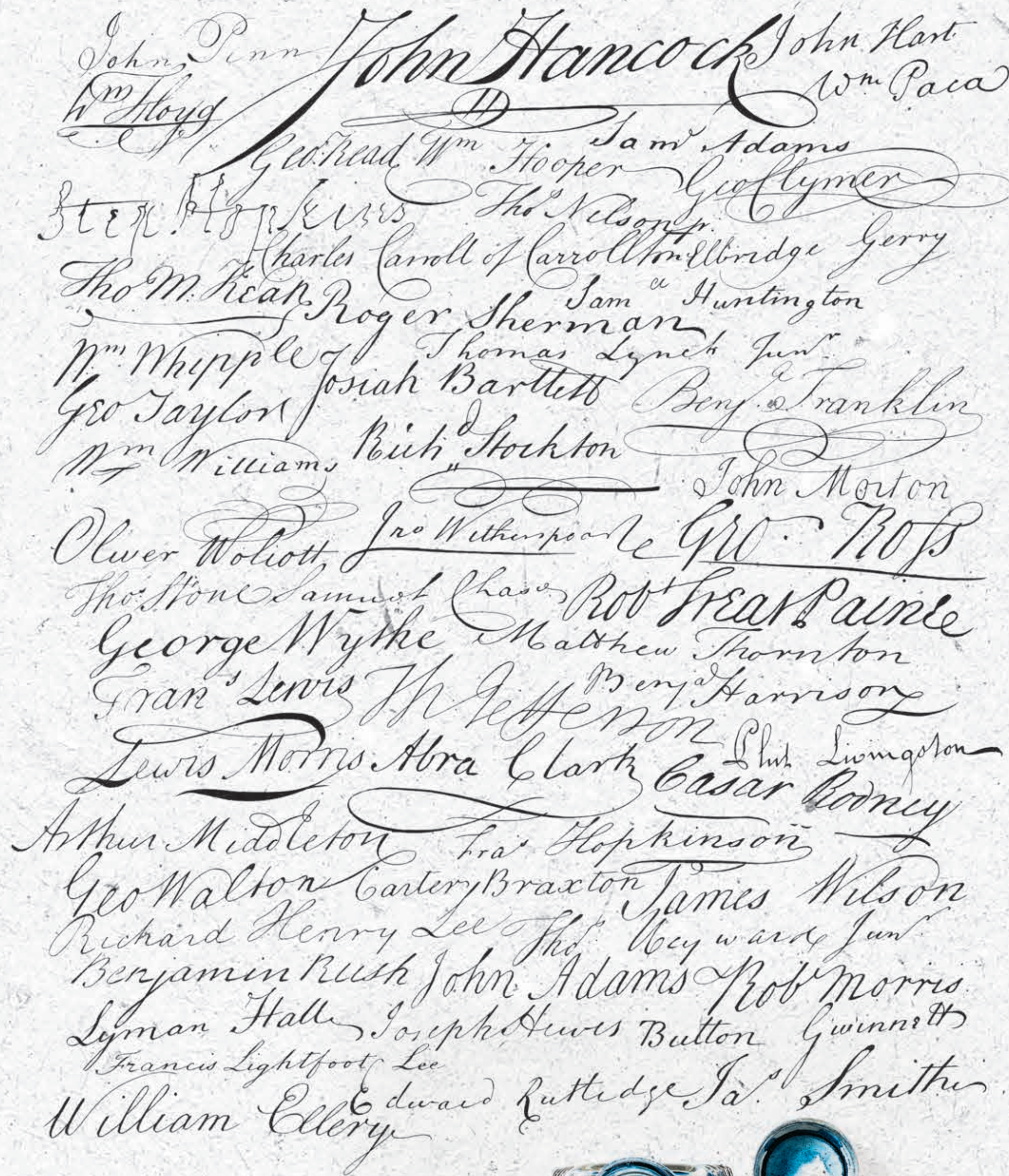
In an article on Psychology Today, William Klemm, author of a number of books on the science of the brain, makes a strong case for schools teaching cursive writing. He discusses research in the field of "haptics," which involves the interaction of the brain, hand movements, and touch.

"Cursive writing helps train the brain to integrate visual and tactile information, and fine motor dexterity," he says.

Cursive writing has a similar effect on brain development as does learning a musical instrument, Klemm says. "Not every body can afford music lessons, but everybody has access to pencil and paper. Not everybody can afford a computer for their kids—maybe such kids are not as deprived as we would think."

In addition, cursive helps children learn to spell correctly, since hand movements help create muscle memory. The hand acquires knowledge of spelling patterns through movements that are used repeatedly in spelling. This is the same phenomenon that occurs when pianists learn patterns of hand movements through continued repetition.

Klemm has concerns about the way children are being educated today: "School systems, driven by ill-informed ideologies and federal mandate, are becoming obsessed with testing knowledge at the expense of training kids to develop better capacity for acquiring knowledge."



Before the 1940s all American children were taught cursive in the first grade. Today, in another move to modernize, we are doing away with cursive altogether.

A Better Understanding

Cindy May, a professor of psychology at the College of Charleston, takes a closer look at a study by Mueller and Oppenheimer. The study found that students who wrote in longhand not only remembered more of what they learned, but also had a better understanding of the material.

"Writing by hand is slower and more cumbersome than typing, and students cannot possibly write down every word in a lecture. Instead, they listen, digest, and summarize so that they can succinctly capture the essence of the information," May says. This provides a cognitive benefit known as "desirable difficulty."

"Thus, taking notes by hand forces the brain to engage in some heavy 'mental lifting,'" and these efforts foster comprehension and retention," May says.

Sherry has also found this to be true. "When the kids type, if you come back and ask them a few minutes later what they typed earlier, they can't tell you. When you write, you can't get it all down, so you have to focus on getting down the key facts, and then come back and fill it in later. You're more focused and process more of what you write."

May sees many benefits to longhand writing, important benefits that impact how a person thinks and reasons. "If we want students to synthesize material, draw inferences, see new connections, evaluate evidence, and apply concepts in novel situations, we need to encourage the deep, effortful cognitive processes that underlie these abilities. When it comes to taking notes, students need fewer gigs, more brainpower."

Creativity

Some advocates tout more than just the cognitive benefits of cursive writing. The beauty, creativity and personal connection cursive affords are also meaningful.

"It's not just a question of writing a letter:



it also involves drawing, acquiring a sense of harmony and balance, with rounded forms," says Roland Jouvent, head of adult psychiatry at Pitié-Salpêtrière hospital in Paris in a Guardian article. "There is an element of dancing when we write, a melody in the message, which adds emotion to the text. After all, that's why emoticons were invented, to restore a little emotion to text messages."

Confidence

"I love writing something out, even at the age of 75, and looking at it," Sherry said. "When I teach a child to write in cursive, they are awfully proud of themselves. It helps build that child's confidence."

Cursive writing boosts self-discipline and self-confidence. And when students write legibly and with confidence, academics as a whole improve.

Jacob recently mailed handwritten cards to his grandparents as part of his cursive writing practice, demonstrating his newfound skills. I asked him what he thinks of his cursive writing.

"I feel really good about it and I like the way it flows so easily across the page," he said. "Right now, I print faster than I write cursive, but I know I'll get faster with practice."

Handwriting is a vital life skill. Cursive writing, in particular, helps teach our children not only how to write, but also how to think and learn.

We have to ask ourselves this question: Do we want future generations to know how to process and analyze information they come across so they can determine what they think about it, or do we want them to spit back out what someone has decided they should know as truth? There is an inherent danger in the latter way of teaching in my view.

Perhaps it's time to re-evaluate the important role cursive plays in educating our children. After all, it's about more than writing.

Old family letters in cursive handwriting.





14 Tips

FOR COLLEGE-BOUND HIGH SCHOOLERS

JEFF MINICK

So you're a rising junior or senior in high school, and you're thinking college is in your future. Here are 14 bits of advice on college preparation and admissions from a guy who for 20 years taught literature, composition, history, and Latin to young people your age.

1 Read Charles Murray's "The Curmudgeon's Guide to Getting Ahead: Dos and Don'ts of Right Behavior, Tough Thinking, Clear Writing, and Living a Good Life" (Crown Business, 2014, 144 pages, \$17.95). Murray's book should be required reading for all high school students, college-bound or not. It's short, witty, and an excellent guide to adulthood.

2 Your junior year is the time to shine. All your grades and extracurricular activities for high school go on your transcript, but the data from your junior year is what college admission officers will peruse most carefully. Are your grades showing improvement? Are you taking tough courses? Are your SAT or ACT scores on the rise? It's too early to catch a case of senioritis. Buckle down and work hard.

3 If you have some academic talent, take Advanced Placement courses. You should take such courses for three reasons: to learn more about a subject that attracts you, to gain college credit, and to enhance your academic record. Bear in mind that the AP scores don't come out until the summer. Consequently, the scores from your junior year will be the last seen by an admissions committee.

4 Don't select a college for its supposed prestige or football team. Look instead for an institution best suited to your

personality and ambitions. Just because your father loved his alma mater doesn't mean that you will. Over the years, most of my students found a good match in the colleges they attended. The ones who didn't dropped out, transferred to another school, or were miserable.

5 Know why you want to go to college. Do you want to spend four years reading history and literature under the tutelage of a professor and exchanging ideas with others? Good. It's an admirable goal. Do you want to go to college to study nursing? Good. Another admirable goal. My point is this: seriously ask yourself why you want to go to college. If you can't come up with a solid reason, then take a gap year. Consider joining the armed services or finding a job for a while. Don't head off to college because "all my friends are going."

6 Don't just visit a campus. Explore it. Take the guided tour, but then speak privately to students and faculty members. Look at the reading lists used in the courses of interest to you. Ask questions. If your religious faith is important to you, for example, ask what on-campus organizations minister to that faith and then speak with the people who work for that ministry.

7 Stay organized during the application process. Fill out the application, have your test scores and transcripts sent, write the essay if required, and send everything to the school long before the deadline. Don't wait until the last day or two before the deadline, as some of my students did, to ask your teacher for a letter of recommendation.

8 If the college requires one or more personal essays from you, do the writing yourself.

You can seek help in editing after you've written the essays, but for heaven's sake, don't hire someone to write your essays. If you can't put together sentences and paragraphs, you are unprepared for higher education.

9 Which brings me to the next point: write, write, write. The major complaint of university professors about entering freshmen is their inability to write reasonably good English. If your high school teachers require little writing—and many of them are guilty as charged—read books on composition or look for instructional materials that can help you become a better writer. Write something every day. Good writers are made, not born.

10 Read, read, read. Many students in high school and college neglect the assigned books for their courses. They look over online summaries and learn enough so they can return to their video games or parties. Don't cheat yourself of an education by leaving your books to gather dust on the shelves.

11 Students frequently complain about some required high school courses. Of Algebra II or Latin or chemistry, they'll say, "I'll never need this in real life." They're right and they're wrong. They may never use quadratic equations, Latin declensions, or the periodic chart, but these three subjects are gymnasiums for the mind. They teach logic and thinking skills that will prove invaluable throughout life. Rise to the challenge of difficult subjects and exercise your brain.

12 In both high school and college, select your friends and extracurricular activities with care. If you spend too much

time goofing off or hanging out with the wrong crowd, you're wasting irreplaceable hours and wads of money. Remember the advice given Little Marie by that great educator Rocky Balboa: "If you hang out with nice people, you get nice friends. Ya understand? If you hang out with smart people, you get smart friends. If you hang out with yo-yo people, you get yo-yo friends." Don't hang out with yo-yo people.

13 Become an autodidact. You can't go around the rest of your life pointing the finger and blaming your teachers, parents, or friends for your failures, academic or otherwise. You're 16, 17, 18 years old, which means it's high time that you took responsibility for your learning. If that U.S. history teacher spends his time in class talking football, then break open Wilfred McClay's "Land of Hope" or listen to online lectures. If you want to learn biology and your teacher is dull as dishwater, head for the library or the internet.

14 Finally, and most importantly, take charge not just of your academic studies, but of yourself. Have fun and enjoy yourself. But study and work with a goal in mind. If you accept responsibility for your thoughts and actions, you are already light-years ahead of many of your contemporaries.

Follow these suggestions, learn from books such as "The Curmudgeon's Guide," and you'll find yourself a winner in the college admissions game and in life.

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 to follow his blog.

Make Back-to-School Fun

5 supplies to add to your list

BARBARA DANZA

Whether you're home-schooling your children or getting ready to send them back to school, you've probably got a shopping list that you're working through this time of year.

As you check off items such as pencils, folders, notebooks, and perhaps a new lunchbox or backpack, consider adding fun items that are not at all required but that will surprise and delight your children as they go back to school.

Stowaway Stuffy

For those who love their stuffed animals, and especially for any little ones who feel some trepidation about going to school, a small stuffed friend to accompany them on their school adventure may be just the extra comfort they need.

When my daughter

was in kindergarten, even though we were told not to bring toys to school outside of show-and-tell, she headed in with a small stuffy stow-away each day. She knew she couldn't take "him" out of her bag, but she delighted in the stories we told about how he was learning right alongside of her or how proud he was of her for kindness she showed her classmates. She'd peek in at him when she got her lunch or snack out of her bag. It was a joy and comfort for her as she navigated her first school experiences.

A choice like an adorable mouse from Aurora would do nicely. Unlike most stuffed animals, many of Aurora's products are made outside of China.

Smile-inducing Notes

In their lunchbox, on the inside of their new folder,



A small stuffed friend to accompany them on their school adventure may be just the extra comfort they need.

in their snack bag, or on any other item they'll be using throughout the school day, leave funny or simply loving notes for your children to discover.

Post-It has some super fun shapes that shake things up and will make your kids smile for sure. Whether you choose their emoji notes or their various die-cut post-it shapes, discovering a note from Mom or Dad at school will let your child

remember they are loved and being thought of.

Novelty Supplies

As you're working through your supply list, you'll want to stick to your budget and get quality items that will last. However, sometimes, the joy that comes from springing for the fruity-smelling markers instead of the regular ones, or the glittery folder instead of the plain one, trumps

practical considerations. Allow your kids to choose one or two novelty items amid the back-to-school supply haul.

Celebratory Eats

As every parent knows, there are a lot of food considerations when it comes to back-to-school. You want to start the day with a healthy breakfast, pack a good lunch, pack a snack, have nice after-school snacks at the ready, and if they have after-school activities, they may need a snack for that, too. Oh, and somewhere along the way, the family will eat dinner. Did we eat this much when we were kids?

Each meal or snack is an opportunity to make it a celebration. Make the first week of school fun by starting off with a pancake breakfast, or having a cake for after school. Not healthy enough? Special treats

like shrimp cocktail, crudites, fancy cheeses, or finishing the week at a restaurant are also fun ways to up the ante on meals and snacks.

New Books

If you ask me, every new season is a reason for books. Choose fall-centered or school-themed picture books to share with your little ones before bed. For older kids, ensure they have great books to enjoy about topics that interest them, or in a fiction genre you know they'll enjoy.

Allow reading books before bed. It will add a pleasant element to the rhythm of the day, help everyone wind down to sleep, and at the same time, let kids practice the most fundamental skill their schoolwork will call for—reading.

Wishing you and your family a joyful school year!

FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES

Song of Life

by Charles Mackay

A traveller on a dusty road
Strewed acorns on the lea;
And one took root and sprouted up,
And grew into a tree.
Love sought its shade at evening-time,
To breathe its early vows;
And Age was pleased, in heights of noon,
To bask beneath its boughs.
The dormouse loved its dangling twigs,
The birds sweet music bore—
It stood a glory in its place,
A blessing evermore.

A little spring had lost its way
Amid the grass and fern;
A passing stranger scooped a well
Where weary men might turn.
He walled it in, and hung with care
A ladle on the brink;
And Age was pleased, in heights of noon,
To bask beneath its boughs.
The dormouse loved its dangling twigs,
The birds sweet music bore—
It stood a glory in its place,
A blessing evermore.

A nameless man, amid the crowd
That thronged the daily mart,
Let fall a word of hope and love,
Unstudied from the heart,
A whisper on the tumult thrown,
A transitory breath,
It raised a brother from the dust,
It saved a soul from death.
O germ! O fount! O word of love!
O thought at random cast!
Ye were but little at the first,
But mighty at the last.

WHY WAS THE WRITER SO CHILLY?



BECAUSE HE WAS SURROUNDED BY DRAFTS

There are no rules of architecture for a castle in the clouds.

G. K. CHESTERTON (1874-1936)

By Aidan Danza, age 13

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: COMMON GULLS OF THE EAST COAST

Whether you're a birthing expert or novice, you can probably identify a seagull when you see one.

However, did you know there are many different species of gulls? Gulls actually present one of the biggest challenges for identification. However, around the East Coast, there are fewer species and are therefore easier to identify.

LAUGHING GULL

Laughing gulls are the easiest gull to identify. In their summer colors, they have dark gray wings, a white chest and belly, and black wingtips and head. The bill is red. In the winter, their wings are lighter, the black on the head is gone, replaced by a trace of gray on the sides of their now white head. The red bill has also disappeared, replaced by a gray one.

Laughing gulls are one of our smaller gulls, from 15-18 inches long. It could be said that laughing gulls in winter look like summer-plumaged birds that have gone bald or are balding. Juveniles are all brown, with feathers outlined with white and a black bill. In their first winter, most of their body is gray, with patchy places where their brown feathers still show through. The head is mostly white, with some patchy brown places, and the bill is still black. Finally, in the second winter they look like an adult, but with some light gray on the chest and belly.

RING-BILLED GULL

Ring-billed gulls are slightly larger or sometimes the same size as the laughing gull, but it is very hard to mistake them. Ring-billed gulls' breeding plumage has light gray wings, a white belly, and a white head with a yellow bill. This yellow bill has a black vertical stripe on it that makes these birds unmistakable.

Close up, breeding birds have a red eye-ring. Shape-wise, ring-billed gulls are short and stocky, with a shorter bill as opposed to the Laughing gull. The only difference between summer and winter plumages is that the red eye ring has turned black and there are now gray flecks on the head. Juveniles are very patchy with only white and brown, plus black wingtips. In the first winter, they have these feathers being replaced by their adult grays and whites, and the bill is pink at the base and brown at the tip. They still look very patchy, however. In the second winter they look almost entirely like an adult but with more brown flecking on the head and chest.

HERRING GULL

Herring gulls are the classic gull. They live worldwide, and sport the assumed gull colors. They have a gray back, with black wingtips with white spots. The rest of them is all white, except for the bill and feet. The bill is bright yellow, with a red spot on the lower tip. The feet and legs are a pinkish gray. In winter, their heads sport a large number of gray-brown flecks, and their bills have turned a much duller yellow. The red spot on the bills is now brown. While laughing

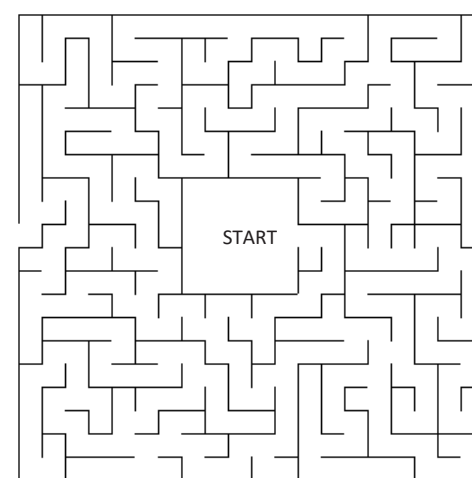
gulls are slim and ring-bills are stocky, the herring gull is somewhere in between. They are not chubby like the ring-bill, but could be described as muscular-looking. Their bill is also longer than the ring-bill's. Birds in their first year are all brown. Each wing feather is outlined with white, and their bills are dark. In their second winter, they still have brown, but there is more white in the neck and wings, and there are gray feathers coming in on the wings. In the third winter, they look like a nonbreeding adult, except for the black ring on the bill, a feature that second-year and third-year birds share.

GREAT-BLACK BACKED GULL

Great black-backed gulls look very much like an enormous herring gull with a black back. These are the largest gulls in the world, and sometimes eat other gulls. They normally only come to the East Coast in winter, but do not have a winter plumage. In their first winter, their head has a brownish tinge to it, while each wing feather is brown, outlined with white. The bill is black. In the second winter, their wings start to acquire some black feathers. By the third winter they are fully adult.

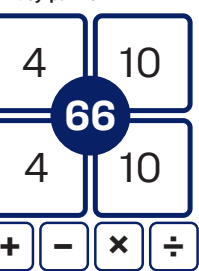


AMAZING ESCAPES!



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

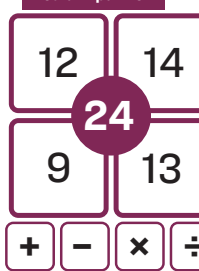
Easy puzzle 1



Solution For Easy 1

01 + 7 x (7 + 01)

Medium puzzle 1



Solution for Medium 1

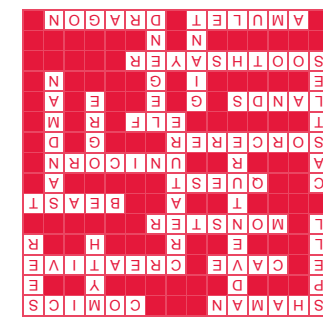
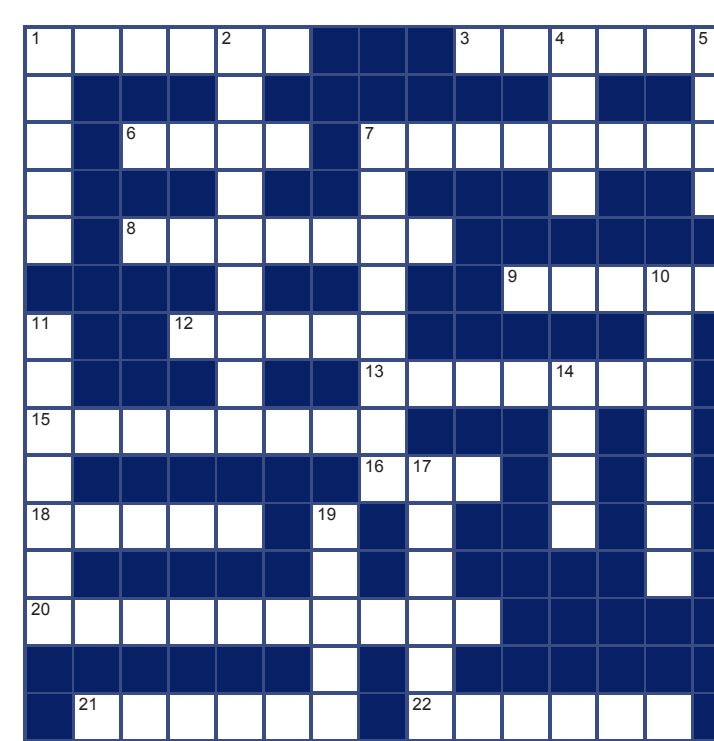
21 - 6 + 24 + 91

Hard puzzle 1



Solution for Hard 1

6 - 9 - 2 + 82



Down

- 1 Hex (5)
- 2 Escapade (9)
- 4 Ancient tale (4)
- 5 Ball gazer (4)
- 7 "Black Lagoon" menace of film (8)

Across

- 1 Medicine man (6)
- 3 Superman, Ironman, Spiderman, etc (6)
- 6 Where dragons live (4)
- 7 Like artists (8)
- 8 Centaur or Minotaur (7)
- 9 Brute (5)
- 12 Adventure (5)
- 13 Symbol of purity (7)
- 15 Wizard (8)
- 16 "The Lord of the Rings" figure (3)
- 18 Domain (5)
- 20 Can see the future (10)
- 21 Lucky charm (6)
- 22 Hagrid's Norberta (6)
- 10 Nighttime visitor (7)
- 11 Beach houses? (7)
- 14 Grimm villain (4)
- 17 "Sleepy Hollow" tale (6)
- 19 Colossal (5)

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Stan Krzyston, pastor



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