

# THE EPOCH TIMES LIFE & TRADITION

Feeling disengaged in your job? It's a common phenomenon. Thomas has some advice to discover joy in work.

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# What the Tiny House Movement and Thomas Jefferson's Monticello Have in Common

GRIFFIN DAUGHTRY

When Thomas Jefferson originally moved into the South Pavilion of his Monticello estate in 1770, it was little more than an incomplete two-bedroom brick building and a cleared mountaintop. Over the course of the next 38 years, the author of the Declaration of Independence would personally design and oversee the construction of his "essay in architecture." The main house at Monticello, as it stands today, is a piece of architectural wonder; its design embodies themes derived from both Classical and Palladian styles of work.

While the Renaissance man himself was never formally trained as an architect, you can hardly tell, as his home consists of numerous unique features including a triangular pediment supported by Doric columns and his famous octagonal dome. Inside, the walls are covered with a variety of objects that highlight the former president's interests and accomplishments. Even today, you can still find one of the last remaining original artifacts from the Lewis & Clark expedition—a pair of elk antlers—in the entrance hall. But just like the great Roman cities that heavily influenced the design of Jefferson's home, Monticello wasn't built in a day.

Despite the fact that Jefferson amassed a great deal of debt by the time of his death, which can largely be attributed to debts he inherited from his father-in-law and his extensive list of hobbies, one can hardly argue that he failed to make sound economic choices with regard to his early years of homeownership. People don't start their adult lives the way early Jefferson did anymore. Today, most young individuals leave college and either become renters, pouring thousands of dollars a year into a property they will never own, or naively "take advantage" of artificially low-interest rates and acquire a mortgage they can barely afford to pay off. There is an alternative path, however, and it is very much akin to the home-owning path Jefferson took at the end of the 18th century.



The Tiny House movement is gaining unprecedented traction in the United States and abroad.

## Tiny Homes

The Tiny House movement, as it is commonly referred to, is gaining unprecedented traction in the United States and abroad. After the 2008 housing crisis, many individuals found themselves questioning the value of their assets and the stability of the global economy. These tiny homes, among others, are in many ways a direct response to the monetary disaster. Amazon actually sells these tiny homes, and they can be purchased for as little as \$24,000.

Whereas there is no concrete definition of what a tiny house must be, there are some similarities among those that exist. Most tiny homes are smaller than 400 square feet, built on wheels (usually trailers), and powered by "off-the-grid" electrical systems. Many of these homes have also been designed to accommodate bizarre and remote locations. Ultimately, these tiny homes were designed by their homeowners to achieve a variety of goals: increase one's financial independence, reduce their ecological footprint, foster a minimalist lifestyle, and maximize their mobility.

## Low Time Preference and Delaying Gratification

Before you stop reading and disregard tiny homes as an absurd fad (after all, who would want to live in such a small space?), let us consider the economic validity of this technological innovation and how it relates to time preference. As Ludwig von Mises explained in "Human Action":

"The value of time, i.e., time preference or the higher valuation of want-satisfaction in nearer periods of the future as against that in remoter periods, is an essential element in human action. It determines every choice and every action. There is no man for whom the difference between sooner and later does not count. The time element is instrumental in the formation of all prices of all commodities and services."

By exercising a low time preference, which means delaying the immediate gratification of having goods now as opposed to later, an individual can save and accumulate capital for the future. Capital saved through the discipline of practicing low time preference spending can then be invested in higher-value goods without the cost of debt. This acknowledgment of time and our decision to trade it like a commodity by human beings, according to Hans-Hermann Hoppe, is how we instituted a "process of civilization."

Investing in a tiny home is just an additional stepping stone in the long process of affording

one's dream home. No longer are individuals forced to make the drastic leap from renter to homeowner. By owning and living in this home for a few years, many of which can be designed for a fraction of the Amazon model mentioned above, you are capable of saving money that would otherwise be wasted on rent or spent on a mortgage. It is also important to remember that not every tiny home has to stay a tiny home. Just like Thomas Jefferson, who moved into a tiny brick building, a tiny homeowner can start out with one of these homes on a plot of land and expand their home as they continue to save more of their wealth.

I'm not saying everyone should go out and buy a tiny home or even suggesting that it is economically feasible for everyone, but it is definitely an option that every individual should consider in the face of a mortgage or renting.

Griffin Daughtry is a freelance writer, former graduate student of history, and a staunch advocate for individual liberty. This article was originally published on FEE.org



Over the course of 38 years, Thomas Jefferson would turn a two-bedroom house into a piece of architectural wonder—Monticello.

## Reflections on Following the Crowd

BARBARA DANZA

Mark Twain once wrote, "Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to reform (or pause and reflect)."

Do you ever ask yourself why you do what you do or think what you think? These are beneficial questions to reflect upon every so often.

When you do, you may find the answer to be, at its core, "because that's what everybody else is doing."

Following the crowd isn't always bad. In the macro, people have followed good traditions for centuries and in so doing society has flourished. Traditions that have stood the test of time last, in large part, by following and respecting those that came before. On a smaller scale, say you're looking for a good restaurant. You spot one with a line running out the door. Odds are pretty good that the food there is great. Given no further information, you may want to follow the crowd and give it a try.

However, it's not always good to follow the crowd. We often advise our children against it. Sometimes it's obvious the crowd has the wrong idea. I mean, if everyone jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge, would you?

It's not always obvious, though, whether the crowd is right or what your own motivations are. In and of itself, "because everyone else is doing it," is an insufficient—at best—basis for many decisions in life.

What's interesting is that the temptation to follow the crowd is often strong. Recognizing when you're just following the



As these devices become more and more ubiquitous in every aspect of our lives, the downsides are becoming more and more apparent.

crowd and not thinking for yourself is a valuable discernment to master—and one to teach your children. Consider some common ways this is reflected in society today.

## Amassing Debt

Credit cards, student loans, car loans, and mortgages seem to many to be inevitable facets of life—necessary evils to living a good life. Doesn't everyone seem to have at least some debt? Is that a reason to allow yourself to take on debt?

In fact, not everyone has debt. Debt enslaves the borrower and hinders one's ability to grow wealth. What's more, it's possible to be avoided.

Decisions that differ from "the crowd," like working your way through college, driving an older car, renting or saving up for a modest home, and paying cash for purchases could have lifelong positive effects on your financial life.

Debt is a big problem for a whole lot of people. It makes you wonder how much

weight has been given to the idea, "everyone else is doing it."

## Eating the Standard American Diet

Do you want fries with that? Of course, doesn't everyone?

Despite vast amounts of information about what constitutes a healthy diet—if the prevalence of fast food on the highway and packaged foods on grocery store shelves are any indication (and they are)—why do so many people eat what's called the "Standard American Diet"?

Just because everyone else's plates are gigantic, just because the drive-through line wraps around the corner, and just because Oreos come in so many different flavors doesn't mean any of these choices are good ones.

## Do you ever ask yourself why you do what you do or think what you think?

Alternatives go against the grain, including cooking at home, buying whole foods, swapping sugary drinks for water, and packing your own lunch. People tend to eat whatever everyone else is eating. Social pressure to conform seems particularly intense around meals. Consider what is driving your food decisions and adjust.

## Spending Hours Staring at Your Phone

If the crowd was always right, then clearly the best thing we should all be doing is staring

endlessly into our phones, right?

As these devices become more and more ubiquitous in every aspect of our lives, the downsides are becoming more and more apparent.

Even today, however, there are alternatives. (They still make flip phones!) Some people even live off the grid. Some people read actual books and printed newspapers. Some people write with pencils and pens. Not everybody is lost in the digital age.

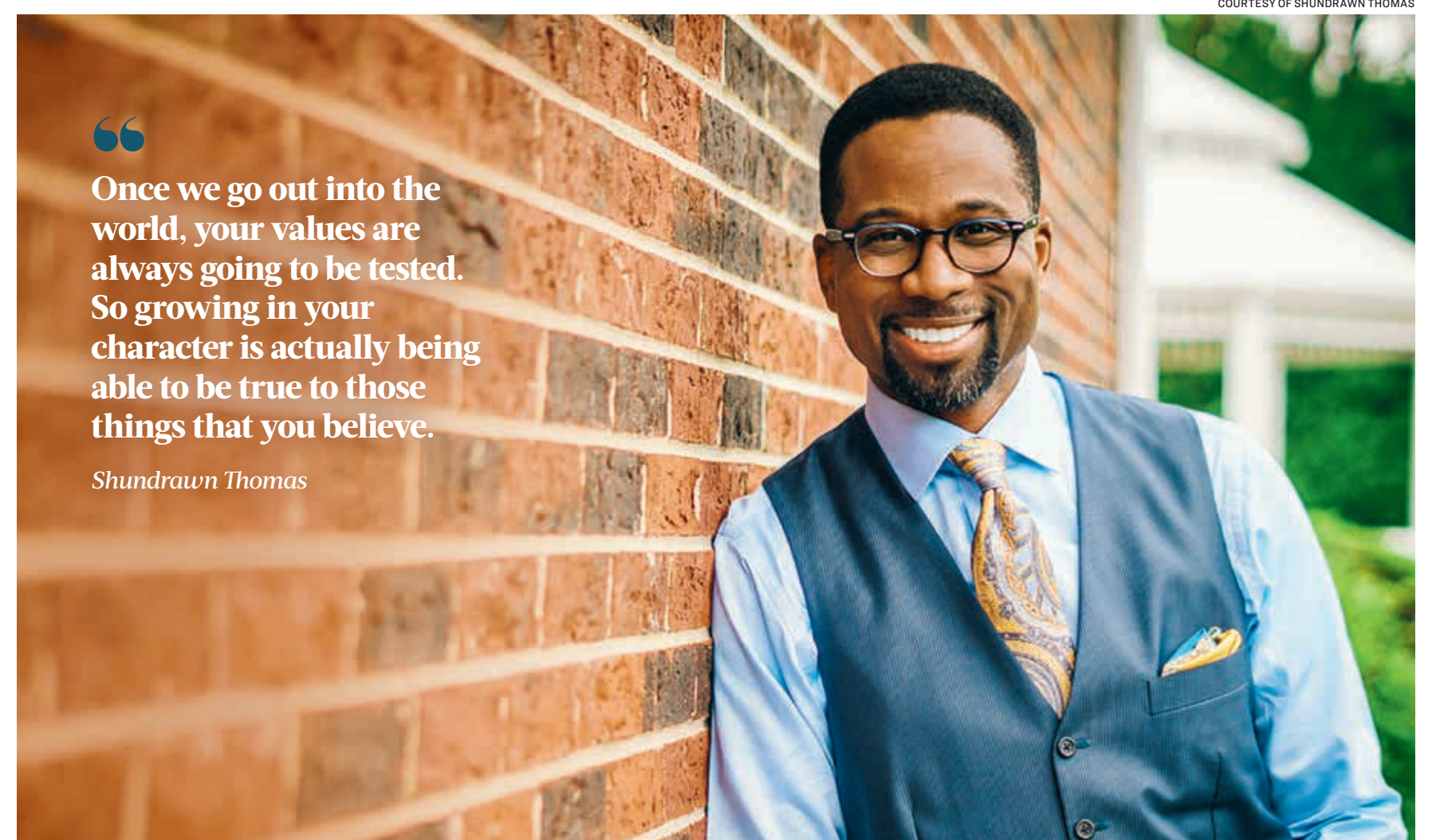
## Challenging the Mainstream

Of course there are many aspects of modern life I could point to. Mainstream media seems to be consumed by the masses, but more and more are waking up to the fact that they're not the best source of information. Doing so is an against-the-grain move.

Having a stay-at-home parent seems like an antiquated notion for many, but is still the very best option, worthy of sacrifice, for many families. Likewise, sending children off to public school is still the norm, but more and more parents are discovering the joys and benefits of homeschooling.

Basic life decisions—how much alcohol to drink, whether you should get married, what music you listen to, whether you should have children, whether you should get a tattoo, and many more—are all ripe for investigating your motivation. Is groupthink part of the equation? Are you thinking for yourself in a clear-headed way or are you being swept away with the tide?

Especially if you find yourself on "the side of the majority," pause. Reflect. Think for yourself. Model that for your children.



“Once we go out into the world, your values are always going to be tested. So growing in your character is actually being able to be true to those things that you believe.”

Shundrawn Thomas

Shundrawn Thomas is the president of a trillion-dollar global investment management business, a motivational speaker, author, father, and minister.

# Shundrawn Thomas

ON LIVING OUT YOUR VALUES TO FIND JOY IN WORK

CATHERINE YANG

Shundrawn Thomas's father worked in the steel mills in the Midwest, and when Thomas was a child, the mills closed down. But his father continued to work. He immediately picked up a job cleaning floors at a hospital, even though the work was so far from his training in mechanical engineering from when he was in the Air Force.

"He taught me very early on that there was dignity in all work, and the importance of not just solely thinking about the role," Thomas said. From age 11 or so, Thomas ran his own little lawn mowing business in the neighborhood, which turned out to be far from profitable because he hadn't figured out how to price things

correctly. Then during the winters, he pivoted the business to shoveling snow. One of his first jobs during high school was selling TV guides via telemarketing.

His parents also taught him the importance of education. His father later went back to school at night and finished his college degree, and his mother

did as well, finishing her bachelor's and pursuing a master's while Thomas was in high school, before beginning her career as a social worker. They were civically minded and steadfast in their faith; early in Thomas's life, they had opened a local church as well, and had always been involved in helping others' spiritual development.

"So my view from their example was, gosh if my parents can work, raise a family, go to school at nights, and they were always very involved in the community, in church, working with people ... if they can do those things, I don't have any excuse. It showed me a very strong example," Thomas said.

Thomas is president of a trillion-dollar global investment management business, a motivational speaker, author, minister at his local church, and among other things, father to two sons he's led actively, the way he feels his

parents did for him.

Good mentors beget good mentors, and Thomas has always been that person, even as a junior employee, to help out newer people even just two years behind him.

And what he has found over the years is a common phenomenon of disengagement.

"I've been in various executive roles, and a big part of that job is working with people on their professional and even personal development," he said. He was surprised to find how many extraordinarily talented people were unmotivated.

"It's surprising to find how many ... weren't committed to their work or really felt positive in their workplace," he said.

Thomas had certainly experienced dissatisfaction in work himself, so during a recent self-assessment, he had the idea to share his lessons.

"People care very much about what they get paid, remuneration, that's natural. People care a lot about being recognized, and praise can be used in constructive ways in the workplace. People want to be respected in their roles. I refer to those three R's," he said. "The challenge is, though ... if you are only driven by those external motivations, you cannot find true fulfillment in your work."

"You're constantly feeling like you're coming up short or there's something missing," Thomas said. "I had realized, for myself, that the inner motivations have to weigh more than those [external motivations]."

## What Is Joy?

Thomas has compiled his experiences, workplace research and studies, and many interviews with people across a variety of disciplines into his latest book, "Discover Joy in Work."

"When I think about joy, that's something that gives you deep pleasure or delight, something more than satisfying. Think about if you're on a team and you guys had a heartfelt victory—this is great, you feel triumphant," Thomas said. But to be clear, he adds, reality dictates no one can be in a permanent state of joy. Disaster may strike, and we cannot stay unaffected.

"But the point is this: There are so many opportunities for us to

find deep meaningfulness, enjoying what we do in our work, and such that that becomes something we understand we can seek, that we understand that we can and should experience, and that it should be a common and frequent experience for us in the workplace."

"And when we learn that, what happens is when we run into those inevitable tough points or setbacks, you learn how to experience joy. So you more readily know how to recover," he said.

## Values and Vocation

Thomas talks about vocation, what is sometimes referred to as a calling.

Early in the book, Thomas writes about a conversation with a friend. He had read an article about teachers quitting in droves, and asked his friend why she became a teacher. This friend, Lisa, recounted an almost miraculous event where she knew in an instant this what she was meant to do.

Most of us will not have these "exceptional moments," or hear a voice with the answer to life's mysteries, but there is nothing to stop you from finding and living with meaning and purpose.

As a mentor, Thomas always starts with helping people discover their values, and then realize how to articulate and live out those values.

"Values are deeply held beliefs," he said. "Once we go out into the world, your values are always going to be tested. So growing in your character is actually being able to be true to those things that you believe."

He will ask and suggest a strengths-finding assessment or a personality matrix as a starting point, because people don't always know how they communicate, how they tend to function in teams, or how they view fear, achievement, impact, and so on.

"It's not about any of these assessments being magical ... one of the biggest gaps is often self-awareness," Thomas said.

The next step in discovering is helping people discover what they're really good at and actually enjoy, because it's just a fact that people feel better about their work when they can do things they're really good at. Lastly, the organi-

zation—what is the mission, what is the culture, and can you get in touch with it, understand and appreciate it?

The book itself is arranged in a way that can guide reflection on the internal factors, from changing your attitude, to assessing your work ethic, and finding value in work itself.

Thomas is very transparent that his perspectives also stem from his Christian faith—faith is at the top of his list of values. It's what guides his approach to relationships and motivates his focus on character growth.

"We really endeavor to love everyone, and really endeavor to see everybody as unique and special," he said. "It's been really important to me in terms of how I develop and invest in relationships with people."

"And as a foundational part of my belief, I believe that grace ... is given to me by God. And I think when I do my work at my very best when I bring all the skills and talents to bear in the best way that I can, when I treat people in the way that people deserve, right, and I show them respect, and even love through our interactions with work, I think ultimately, that effort and that action, brings glory to God, our Creator. And so that's a perspective that I have."

"It is a belief in something bigger than yourself and your present circumstances," Thomas said. This sense was instilled in him from an early age, where throughout the highs and lows, faith sustained the family.

Thomas is not one of those people who had a moment of inspiration and discovered out of the blue where his professional path should lead. He'd developed an interest in personal and micro-finance while taking a high-school economics course and pursued his interest through education, internships, and other opportunities.

The intellectual rigor and dynamic nature of factoring in global events and politics and areas of vast ambiguity, coupled with the opportunity to help people achieve their life goals, is continually fulfilling for Thomas.

"I think what happens when you get really in touch with your values ... you start to feel that calling," Thomas said.

# The Power of Tradition A Case From Eternal Crete



Minas Liapakis and his father-in-law Nikos Merkoulidis cooking out in Tsoutsouras.



PHIL BUTLER



Manolis Liapakis with his granddaughter Olga, at his daughter Agapi's school.



Agapi Liapaki at her father's house in Ano Asites, near Heraklion.



Kallia shielding little Anna from the winter wind in Heraklion.

PHIL BUTLER



Little Anna Maria passing the way her father passed through ancient Ano Asites.

PHIL BUTLER

The joyful sound of children running and laughing is the music that surrounds us as we learn to appreciate on a sunny Sunday in tiny Ano Asites. My dear friend Minas is saying something to me, but my focus is drawn to his wife Kallia as she sets the table and does double duty as a child sentinel. Then sweet little Anna Maria catches my attention as she pets one of the gentle cats that belong to the whole village. I cannot take my eyes off her as she casts gorgeous brown eyes on the animal in a look of innocent wonder. The scene envelops me, and I recognize an essence from my childhood, something worthy of respect, admiration, and even awe. My friend, Kallia Merkoulidi, embodies everything that is pure and good. She is, like her husband Minas, the product of the Cretan land, its traditions, and treasured families. Sometimes I jokingly call her a Minoan princess, but only she knows I am not kidding. Surrounded by an extraordinary ménage, she bonds two Cretan clans like the mysterious Minoans connected civilizations. Living among these people, in this land of the ancients, I am reminded not only of the archaic past but of my youth and of the

bonds that held my own family together, way back when.

Minas and Kallia, they're my human robin egg blue Crayolas in a brilliant crayon box of life. And their colorful grandparents, parents, and siblings are close-knit and side by side in the same way. There's Ioannis the gifted surgeon, loving Agapi the educator, and Kallia's beautiful sister Eva, who carries the latest family addition in her tummy now. They are the archetypal Cretan family, with roots that run as deep as the bedrock beneath this island blessed with so many varieties of trees. We're honored to have sunk our roots here and to have been grafted into the world these little tribes. For some reason, I cannot stop thinking of an old American adage my Mom once told: "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree."

**Like the Old South in the '50s and '60s**  
Now Ioannis Liapakis' wife, Elina, runs past with tiny Maria in her arms as she chases down little Annoula. Kallia joins the chase, and so does Agapi. Minas's sister. This is how it works, the ritual of life here in the land of the mysterious Minoans. The balance is elegant, blissful, and intact regardless of outside forces. Crete is not unlike the Old South way back in the '50s and '60s; it's imbued with the same sense of friendliness and charm, peaked by a good dose of decency, myth, and wonders.

The women here multi-task as they chide over their children endlessly. While the patriarchs of the island talk politics and sport before gazing off into the wilds of Crete and the golden sunset, it's the girls and women like Kallia who cement this culture. Interestingly, the men are the first to admit the mothers and daughters are the treasure of the island. Minas's father, the brilliant and tender-hearted Manolis Liapakis said it best when we chatted just the other day: "I do what I have to do. But without my wife, Anna, nothing good in our lives would be possible."

Manolis is truly a fascinating human being. Retired now, he was once one of Greece's most prominent attorneys. Now, his contentment shows with every gleaming, gentle smile, as he takes up his patriarchal position in the wings of each event. I'm telling you this because of one virtue the Cretons seem to honor above all others—humility. I am pretty sure it's

in the Cretan DNA—something accentuated by this astonishing island spirit.

**Living among these people, in this land of the ancients, I am reminded not only of the archaic past but of my youth and of the bonds that held my own family together, way back when.**

When we first moved to Crete, Minas and Kallia invited us to the family's beach house in remote Tsoutsouras. A sacred place that once held an ancient Minoan harbor, this is where Kallia's father, Nikos Merkoulidis, spent years building a summer retreat. I will never forget the place for many subsequent visits, but the girl I call "Minoan Princess" proved her royal lineage on that day.

After the greetings with Nikos and Kallia's wonderful mom Maria, we all went down to the beach. The day was like many others. The south coast of Crete is right out of a Kazantzakis story. Travelers can expect Antony Quinn or Zorba himself to step right out of a

quaint seaside cottage at any moment.

"I'll always remember when we were ready to leave, Kallia motioned me closer to whisper, "Be careful when you sit in your car, there is something at your feet." When I sat down in my car seat, a magnificent shard of pottery stared up at me big as you please.

Since I am something of a Minoan archaeology aficionado, you can imagine my shock and surprise. I recognized it instantly as a piece of a handle from a pre-Palatial period jug or urn, at least 4,000 years old. Samples of these jars grace Heraklion's Archaeological Museum. Picking it up, it took me a few moments to understand what Kallia had done. Glancing up, I saw that wry smile she gives everyone, and I knew. Kallia, you see, studied archaeology in college, and she'd paid attention to me and Minas discussing those ancient Minoans.

Observant, and considerate almost to a flaw, this is who the Cretons are. Like my aunts and uncles back in the '60s, they respond in kind to all those who show an interest in their heritage.

**Sundays on Crete**

Every Sunday on Crete there's this family ritual. It's like those reunions I remember back when I was a kid. The tradition back then was an indescribable type of spirituality. It's like that here, but it goes beyond mornings at the Orthodox church or cathedral. It's as if they see God in each other.

The Cretons share a kind of love and dedication to one another, that has nothing to do with a progressive value system. Their ethics, ideals, morals, and standards are so concrete and unbreakable that they seem foreign to the modern world we've come to accept.

My last thoughts are with my beloved grandparents and parents who've long since passed away. It is my hope that we can once again find our way back to our roots.

*Phil Butler is a publisher, editor, author, and analyst who is a widely cited expert on subjects from digital and social media to travel technology. He's covered the spectrum of writing assignments for The Epoch Times, Huffington Post, Travel Daily News, HospitalityNet, and many others worldwide.*



Minas Liapakis and Kallia Merkoulidi on their wedding day.

ALL THE OTHER IMAGES BY SHUTTERSTOCK

## From the Bottom Up: One Way to Repair Our Broken Culture

JEFF MINICK

In early September of 2019, Gail Contreras, a reader of The Epoch Times, sent an email to my editor regarding a column I'd written on cursing:

"I really enjoyed the article in the August 22 paper. I, for one do not like cursing. I am a nurse in surgery and sometimes act as the day charge nurse. I have made it a request at work when staff are in the front office they do not cuss. We are educated professionals and I feel it is demeaning and frankly unnecessary when we are talking to each other. We would never talk like this in front of patients, why would we talk to each other this way. The great thing is people are actually complying. So much so that the secretary will say something when staff cuss in the office who may not know my request. It hasn't been that difficult to get people to change their behavior on this topic. I think if someone simply brings it up change can happen."

Intigued, I emailed Mrs. Contreras and asked if she might be willing to speak with me by telephone as a follow-up to her note.

Gail, as she preferred to be addressed, has a pleasant, lively voice and a quick wit. The hospital where she works is near San Francisco—"Be sure to mention

that," she said. "We're not all crazy here in California." She told me she had gotten tired of cursing—"We wouldn't talk that way in front of our children"—and as the nurse in charge of that particular office asked that everyone stop using foul language.

The compliance of her fellow workers surprised her. No one resisted. In fact, her request became a sort of joke among the staff: "When Gail's in charge, we don't cuss." As she wrote in her email, this change in department helped create a more professional environment in the office.

Just before ending our conversation, Gail laughed and said to me, "Talking to you is one of those moments of serendipity I love. I'm a new subscriber to The Epoch Times, and your article on cursing was in the first issue I received. And now here I am, two weeks later, talking to you on the phone."

In this case, the honor was all mine. Gail is a practitioner of an idea I have long advocated, even though I myself often fail to put it into action.

Here is a woman who brought a positive change into the world. A small change, yes, but one that polished up a small corner of the world. Gail made no demands, she issued no orders; she simply asked her coworkers to change their use of language. Given Gail's lovely personality, I can understand why they were happy to comply.

Many of us grouse about our cul-

ture, which is flawed, often crude, often impolite, and in some cases, barbaric. But complaining changes little. If we wish to better that culture, if we wish to return civility to our society, if we wish for a sea change in the sunken values of our civilization, our best course of action is to follow Gail's example. We can quit waiting for "someone" to do something and instead begin transforming ourselves and, when possible, those around us.

Years ago, an anesthesiologist I knew who had first served in the Navy and then in a civilian hospital bought an American flag for his front porch. His third-grade son and some friends were present, and when Eric had secured the flag, he said, "Hey gang, let's recite the Pledge of Allegiance."

Not one of the kids knew the words.

Some of us might shrug off that ignorance. Some might shake their heads and express their dismay, or wonder aloud what kids were learning in school these days.

Not Eric. He approached the school about teaching the Pledge—not just to his son's class, but to all the students. Granted permission to do so, he purchased a number of American flags, found a place for them in

each classroom, explained briefly to the students the importance of the flag and how to treat it, and then taught them the Pledge.

Once again, change from the bottom up.

Most likely, we all know people—or perhaps some readers are those people—who don't wait on some agency or some other person to address a problem and so improve, however minutely, the world at large.

A Scout leader in Asheville, North Carolina, helped many boys, including my youngest son, to attain the rank of Eagle and was revered by the parents for his disciplined approach to scouting. Dissatisfied with both public and many Catholic schools in the United States, a woman I know here in Front Royal, Virginia, Mary Kay, founded a Catholic homeschooling company that has positively affected the lives of thousands of young people.

Another woman of my acquaintance, Jennifer, compiled a list of birthdays of her siblings and their children and grandchildren—we're talking 50 or more people—and sends them a card of celebration on their big day.

Now an example from my own life: In 2004 my wife, who was 52 years old, died from a brain an-

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Most likely, we all know people who don't wait on some other person to address a problem and so improve, however minutely, the world at large.

eurysm, leaving me and our four children bereft with grief. My oldest two children were in college or just graduated, the other two boys were 15 and 9 when their mother died. I felt alone, grief-stricken and stunned, uncertain how I could possibly continue alone.

Then came the ones who know how to make a difference. Family members, friends, and parents of my students rallied round me. They contributed to an education fund set up for my children by my mother-in-law. For almost a year, they brought my family suppers two and three times a week; they entertained and helped educate my youngest son while I worked; they sent notes and emails of encouragement, not just after the funeral, but for many weeks.

Each of these individuals helped me to keep moving forward. Each made a difference.

The first stanza of a hymn published in 1913 by Ina Ogden captures the attitudes of the people whose small deeds bring fire into a darkened world:

"Do not wait until some deed of greatness you may do,  
Do not wait to shed your light afar;  
To the many duties ever near you now be true,  
Brighten the corner where you are."

"Brighten the corner where you are." That pretty much says it all.

*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.*

## How Virtue Leads to Restoration

TIM GOEGLIN & CRAIG OSTEN

In recent years, Americans from across the political spectrum have bemoaned the loss of a virtuous society and the resulting divisions in our nation. For those of us who have grieved this loss, it seems like we have finally come full circle after decades of downplaying or even degrading the role of virtue in a stable and healthy society. But this growing awareness of what we have lost begs the question: "How do we restore virtue in a nation when it has been lost?"

When we set out to write our new book, "American Restoration: How Faith, Family, and Personal Sacrifice Can Heal Our Nation," we looked at the virtues that made America strong and that have been tossed aside over the past several decades. While our nation's founders—like all humankind—were less than perfect, they understood that faith in God was the foundation of a virtuous society. They appealed to God as a transcendent source of virtue and universal values throughout our nation's founding documents. As Benjamin Franklin, who was hardly virtuous in his private life, said, "Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom."

Yet, over the past 60 years, we have found more and more ways to remove these virtues—which are faith-based—from the public square, to appeal to secular sources as our "inspiration," and to mock those who try to live virtuous lives. So, what is a virtuous society? It is a society in which individuals learn to value personal duty and selflessness over entitlement and



It is temperance that allows us to remain focused on the needs of others rather than on our self-perceived needs.

self-indulgence. Unfortunately, as the latter mentality has ascended, this "all about me" or "you do you" mentality has infected our marriages, families, and even our churches, while celebrating the "free expression" of our personal appetites, resulting in broken marriages, fatherless children, and the weakening of those institutions which bring people together.

Secondly, what are the virtues that make up a stable and healthy society? The first is prudence, which allows us to distinguish between right and wrong in situations we encounter daily. Prudence requires individuals to seek the counsel of others, as it is impossible for any one person to have perfect knowledge of every possible moral situation they may face. In many ways, prudence is the opposite of "pride"—a word that gets exalted in many aspects of our culture today—because prudence requires humility.

The second virtue is justice, which Aristotle defined as a "moral disposition which renders men apt to do just things and which causes them to act justly and to what is just." The virtue of justice is not meant for us—it is meant to be for others. It is not justice when we claim that we have received injustice for some real or perceived wrong. Instead, it is justice when we stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves. It was justice, for instance, that led people to march for civil rights of African Americans in the 1950s and 60s because true justice had taken place.

The third virtue is fortitude, which is the strength to choose good even in the face of difficulty and danger. It allows us to overcome our fears and remain steadfast in our principles despite the obstacles we face. It is the backbone that upholds justice and strengthens prudence.

Finally, the fourth virtue is one that we are particularly short of in 2019: temperance. It is the virtue that enables us to moderate our behavior. It is temperance that keeps us from responding in anger when we are wronged or feel we have been attacked. It is temperance that gives us the self-discipline to avoid those things that cause us to make bad personal decisions. It is temperance that allows us to remain focused on the needs of others rather than on our self-perceived needs.

How do these four virtues play out in real life? It is the virtuous husband and father who puts the emotional and physical needs of his wife and children above his own. It is the virtuous member of the community who treats all people the same and stands against injustice. It is the virtuous citizen who chooses to stand for what is right—regardless of

**But this growing awareness of what he has lost begs the question: 'How do we restore virtue in a nation when it has been lost?'**

personal cost—rather than compromise for personal comfort. And it is the virtuous individual who practices restraint, being slow to anger, guarding his or her tongue, and avoiding those areas that may lead to destructive behavior. All of these virtues flow from personal

religious faith which encourages us to have a higher purpose in our lives besides ourselves.

If American restoration is to occur, we must once again become a virtuous society. If each of us practices virtue in our lives, we can be a guiding light to others to follow and ultimately embrace in their lives. That is why we wrote our book—to outline the various areas where restoration needs to happen and how we can get there—through the practice of faith and virtue in our lives. If we can restore virtue in our society, we will see a cultural transformation and an America once again practicing self-sacrifice and respect for others, rather than elevating self over the needs of others—a country that is once again united instead of divided against itself.

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# SOLDIER TO SOLDIER Coping With the Scars of War

ANDREW THOMAS

Our nation's veterans often return from war with both physical and emotional scars, and it can be difficult to talk about them with people who just don't understand. One veteran endured his own struggles, and now he's helping others cope with their own, soldier to soldier.

Tom Spooner is 49 years old and lives in Whispering Pines, North Carolina. When he was 20 years old, he enlisted in the United States Army in 1990. Growing up, all he ever wanted to do was to join the military. Furthermore, his grandfather was a World War II veteran, and his uncle was a Vietnam War veteran.

Spooner excelled in the Army immediately beginning in basic training and enjoyed the camaraderie that came with being in the military.

"I felt like I was a part of something greater than me," Spooner told The Epoch Times.

## Special Forces

For the first five years of his service, Spooner was in the 82nd Airborne Division of the Army. While he was in basic training, the Gulf War began and Spooner found himself in combat within four months of joining the service. Spooner also discovered he was a naturally gifted soldier.

During the Gulf War, Spooner quickly learned to listen to his fellow soldiers who had been in combat before. He also learned about the brutality of war, which made him mature rather quickly.

After his service in the Gulf War, Spooner realized he wanted to see how far he could push himself. In 1995, he went to selection for special forces. After he made it through selection, he went to a qualification course and became a special forces engineer.

Following his qualification, Spooner was assigned to the 7th Special Forces Group, which was responsible for operations in Central and South America. Spooner was deployed to regions to advise and assist local governments during the War on Drugs.

"I loved it. I loved anything and everything about [what] I was doing," Spooner said.

Two weeks after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Spooner went to the selection course for 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta. Spooner never thought he would make it, but he didn't want to have the regret of not trying out. To his surprise, he made the cut.

## Combat and Injury

From 2001 until 2010, Spooner went on 12 combat deployments for a total of 40 months of combat. Spooner was deployed to Afghanistan once, and then Iraq 11 times.

The high points of Spooner's service were capturing or killing the worst of the worst. Spooner also experienced low points, which included three mass casualty events.

The last mass casualty event Spooner was involved in killed and wounded several soldiers in 2006 in Iraq. They endured a mortar attack, and one of the shells landed about 20 yards away from Spooner which left him

with a mild traumatic brain injury (TBI). At the time, he was unaware of his mild TBI.

The event was also tremendously emotional for Spooner. Prior to the attack, Spooner had an entirely professional outlook on his role as a special forces soldier. The attack in 2006 made the experience more emotional for him.

"What became hurtful to me and my humanity was prior to that moment in 2006 it was business. It was professional. It was good guys against bad guys," Spooner explained. "From that moment on it became very personal."

Spooner developed a large amount of rage and hate toward the enemy, which ate away at him over time.

## TBI and PTSD

Spooner had planned on serving in the Army for 25 years but was medically retired as a result of his mild TBI and back injuries in 2011.

Prior to his retirement, Spooner experienced an episode where he had suicidal thoughts in 2010. Unbeknownst to him, he had been struggling with the effects of the mild TBI and PTSD.

Spooner would have large mood swings, experienced significant memory loss, slight hallucinations, headaches, insomnia, and memories of traumatic events from his experience in war. Sometimes he would be driving, and wouldn't know where was.

"I needed to stop what was going on between my ears as far as all the thinking, all the emotions, just the hyper-vigilance, all this that was going on. And all my tools in the toolbox weren't working," Spooner recalled.

Spooner tried praying, meditation, and was part of a support group, but nothing seemed to help. He looked at his pistol, and felt it would turn off what was happening in his mind. Fortunately, he had a moment of clarity and didn't pick up the gun.

Once that episode occurred, Spooner realized he needed help. He reached out to his best friend who was also in special operations who pushed him to get help. Spooner underwent psychological, cognitive, and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing therapy to help address his issues. Fortunately, by seeking help he started to get better.

## Warriors Heart

For work, Spooner started training law enforcement and some military for several years. He got a lot of satisfaction knowing that his training was saving lives. However, Spooner wanted to do more and discover his passion.

After meeting a friend named Josh Lannon, who owned substance abuse recovery



Tom Spooner went on 12 combat rotations for a total of 40 months of combat.

centers for civilians, Spooner discovered his next step in life.

Spooner himself had struggled with alcohol in the past, and had been sober since 1992. He had also been very active in the alcoholic recovery community.

Spooner found his calling after he learned that 22 veterans were committing suicide every day. He also learned that a large proportion of these suicides also had a chemical dependency component.

"That was where really I found my spot outside of the military," Spooner said.

In April 2016, Spooner co-founded Warriors Heart with Lannon and Lannon's wife Lisa to help veterans and first responders who have a substance abuse disorder coupled with mild TBI and/or PTSD. As opposed to a hospital setting, Warriors Heart operates on a 540-acre ranch in Bandera, Texas.

Veterans and first responders who participate at Warriors Heart are in an in-patient treatment facility for a minimum of 42 days.

## The Program

Warriors Heart employs a peer-to-peer model so veterans and first responders are able to empathize with each other's experiences. The organization also uses a training program in military time to structure participants' recovery.

The first activity of the day is breakfast or "chow." After breakfast, there is physical training which features a gym, yoga, and jiu-jitsu. The next step on the schedule is group therapy.

In the afternoons, participants engage in individual substance abuse and trauma counseling three times a week, which is followed by activities. During this time veterans and first responders can go fishing, and can work in the metal shop, wood shop, and art shop.

After dinner, there's a group meeting which is followed by free time. Participants can watch movies, play ping pong, shuffleboard, and there is a large campfire where participants can share stories and experiences with each other.

"That's where the real magic occurs," Spooner said of the campfire discussions.

Civilians can also play an active role in helping out veterans by being involved in their communities. Whether it's making a donation or just reaching out and having a kind conversation with a veteran, civilians can do a lot to help.

"They [veterans and first responders] answer our call when we're in a time of need, so how are we answering them in their hour of need?" Spooner said.

September is National Recovery Month and Suicide Prevention Awareness Month.

“I needed to stop what was going on between my ears as far as all the thinking, all the emotions, just the hyper-vigilance, all this that was going on. And all my tools in the toolbox weren't working.”

Tom Spooner, co-founder, Warriors Heart



Tom Spooner experienced a mild traumatic brain injury while on deployment in Iraq in 2006.



Tom Spooner was in the United States Army for 21 years.

# Traumatized by Abortion: One Woman's Journey of Healing

JOAN DELANEY

It wasn't until Angelina Steenstra lost her second child due to an ectopic pregnancy that she was able to begin recovering from the years of depression, substance abuse, and self-destructive behavior triggered by the abortion of her first child.

Steenstra was just 15 when she went with an older boy to a party and was raped by him. A few months later she learned she was pregnant. She ended up having an abortion, which she says impacted her psychologically on a deep level.

"I suffered from depression. I suffered from self-hatred, shame, guilt. Emotionally, I couldn't see myself. I couldn't look at the girl in the mirror. I hated who I became," she says.

She blamed the ectopic pregnancy, which happened after she had been married for seven years, on the abortion as well.

"The abortion led me down a road of self-destruction. And with that self-destruction, somewhere along the way I contracted a sexually transmitted disease, which is why the fallopian tube was blocked, which is why the next child died," she says.

That was a turning point for Steenstra. As she grieved the loss of her second child, she began to simultaneously grieve for her aborted child as well, finally recovering from the pain and grief.

She went on to start a Canadian chapter of Silent No More Awareness Campaign to help those—both women and men—who have been negatively impacted by the procedure.

With over 300 abortions a day taking place in Canada, not everyone is going to walk away unscathed, she says. "I am only one of millions of women who have suffered from the many after-effects of abortion."

## No Validation

After Steenstra found out she was pregnant, she didn't know what to do. It was the late Sixties, when pregnancy outside marriage was still relatively taboo, and she feared being rejected by her parents, her peers, and her teachers, not to mention how to cope as a single parent.

When abortion was floated as a solution—but not by her parents, she didn't tell them she was pregnant—



Angelina Steenstra on Aug. 7, 2019. Steenstra spiralled into depression and substance abuse after having an abortion at age 15. She went on to start a Canadian chapter of Silent No More Awareness Campaign to help others who are negatively impacted by the procedure.

she opted for it, believing it was "a means of trying to reverse what had happened."

But partway through the procedure, thoughts began to assail her mind, such as if there really was a baby and if so whether it had a soul, and suddenly she had a feeling she had done something terribly wrong. "I felt like I'd crossed a line," she says. "I didn't know how I was going to deal with this, what I was feeling inside."

As a way to cope she set about changing everything about herself—her friends, her job, her living circumstances—and that became her pattern for several years, always trying to escape the inner turmoil she was feeling.

"That disordered reaction began to fill me up with anger, pain, and hatred, all directed to myself. I would use alcohol, sex, drugs, to try and numb that pain," she explains.

"I felt like a crazy person. I'm feeling this but everybody says I should feel differently," she adds. "I once went to a therapist to treat depression. When I said I think it's rooted in the fact that I had an abortion, there was no validation. It wasn't even acknowledged that there could be a link."

She eventually became suicidal. What helped her change course was talking to someone at a call-in Christian TV show and telling her story for the first time and receiving

validation for what she was feeling.

"I had told bits and pieces to people, but nobody had ever asked me the whole story and nobody had ever validated what I felt inside—that what I had done was wrong, would always be wrong. It is the killing of another human and that person was my child. The way the baby was conceived did not justify ending the life of the child."

“I felt like I'd crossed a line. I didn't know how I was going to deal with this, what I was feeling inside.”

Angelina Steenstra

## 'Abortion Robbed Us on Many Levels'

Having finally found some solace and hope, Steenstra was able to get her life back on track. But after she got married, she turned to drinking, smoking, and self-destructive eating patterns, she says, largely because there were many "triggers," including not being able to get pregnant and people she knew asking her why she wasn't having any children.

She finally conceived after being married for seven years, but at around nine weeks she had to be

rushed to emergency because it was an ectopic pregnancy that had ruptured. The fetus died, but her life was saved. She was told she could never have another child because of the scar tissue left by the infection.

"Yes, my life was saved, but we were never able to have more children. Abortion robbed us on many levels. It didn't just rob me, it robbed everybody. My whole family was impacted, but they didn't know. For a long time, they didn't know. Why was Angelina as she was? What was wrong with her?"

While grieving the loss of that child, she realized the same process would work for the aborted child. She knew intuitively that one was a boy and the other a girl, so she named them, which she said was an important part of the healing process.

So was forgiveness, Steenstra notes.

"My only way to make it right was to tell the truth and to accept forgiveness, and to give forgiveness. Because there were many people involved who I needed to forgive, from the government of the country right down to the father of the baby," she says.

"Even though everyone told me [having the abortion] was right, I knew that there is a law inside of myself that I broke."

April Zhu contributed to this report.



"Dream of Pilate's Wife." 19th century, by Gustave Doré (1832-1883), Alphonse François (engraver, 1814-1883). Ponce Art Museum, Puerto Rico.

## ARTS

# Gustave Doré Illuminates a Majestic Revelation

ERIC BESS

Gustave Doré was a French Romantic artist known for illustrating some of the greatest books of known Western literature. These included Dante Alighieri's "The Divine Comedy," John Milton's "Paradise Lost," and the Bible, among others. He provided these most influential

narratives with fascinating imagery.

In the mid-19th century, he illustrated a verse from the Bible. That verse, Matthew 27:19, reads: "While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: 'Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.'"

Doré interpreted this general statement and translated it into a majestic scene.

Pilate's wife, Claudia, is seen on the left side of the image. Her bedchamber can be seen behind her in the background. She is obviously perturbed by the content of her dream, has left her bedchamber, and walks into the night.

An angel sits close to Claudia and appears to whisper to her while pointing to the imagery on the right side. It is as if the angel's gesture provides the content of the dream, as if the angel represents the breakthrough between our worldly plane and a spiritual plane.

On the right side of the image is a secondary focal point: Jesus Christ, shrouded in light. His halo illuminates the darkness around him.

Roman soldiers kneel at Jesus's feet, and four figures stand behind him. These four figures may very well represent the four authors of the gospels: Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. The figure holding keys behind these four figures must be Peter, to whom Jesus gave the "keys of the kingdom," inaugurating him as head of the Church.

Peter does not watch the event in front of him but turns to look for guidance from Mary, as though she already has received her coronation in heaven with the crown on her head and cross in her hands.

To the left of Jesus, figures hold the cross upon which he will be crucified. Roman soldiers are shown in disbelief, in reverence, and in worship. In the background, figures are

shown ascending to heaven, where a cross shines like a star in the sky. It is quite the majestic scene.

In the Bible, Claudia, however, described none of these details. Doré used his imagination to interpret and depict the scene. What can we gather from his depiction about our possible relationship to our dreams and to the divine?

## The Dream as a Revelation

Here, the dream is like a portal to another world. It is not merely pulsating imagery from repressed desire, as Freud would suggest.

Through the dream, the angel reveals divine content to Claudia; the angel ushers her into this other, celestial world. Her dream is so lucid that it is, instead, an actual happening. The dream allows the sleeper transmigrates to another world, only to return to this one upon awakening. It is a revelation, not merely a dream.

Through her revelation, Claudia comes to have faith in Jesus's divinity.

Doré interpreted Claudia's dream as a divine experience. For him, Claudia understood that condemning Jesus was not just harming an innocent man but a divine being. She would, no doubt, wonder what the outcome would be of such an evil act.

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# How SHEN YUN IS REVIVING THE CLASSICAL ARTS

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Artistic group brings beauty, tradition, and innovation on stage

MADALINA HUBERT

The past centuries have shown incredible innovation, bringing technological and scientific progress that people in the early days of our civilization could not even imagine.

In the arts, however, we have seen a steady decline. Much of the body of classical art, including the most beloved works of symphonic music, opera, ballet, and painting, was completed by the 19th century with few acknowledged masterpieces after that.

I had often wondered why these traditional arts, which are respected and honored as some of the greatest achievements of humanity, experienced such a steep decline.

It is not that there was no artistic creation. The 20th century saw plenty of new works and talented companies and artists, but very few of these pieces have had the enduring appeal of their forebears. They've come and gone with trends, often becoming a vehicle for venting despair and the dark side of human nature.

## A Rebirth on Stage

As we entered the 21st century, however, a new phenomenon emerged with the appearance of Shen Yun Performing Arts. Established in 2006, this little-known company, created in New York by overseas Chinese artists, emerged on the world stage and awed audiences with performances of profound beauty and goodness, rooted in the classical arts.

The company's mission was to revive 5,000 years of China's divine culture. It rapidly grew in size, reaching hundreds of cities and millions of audience members around the world. Many of them said they had found inspiration in the artistry and values Shen Yun portrayed on stage.

In interviews, these audience members, including renowned artists, repeated the words "perfection," "beauty," and "divine." Some were surprised at the flawless music, others were amazed at the coordination and athleticism of the dancers, and many were taken by surprise by the otherworldly beauty of the backdrops, which interacted with the artists on stage in perfect synchronicity.

As I watched the performances of Shen Yun Performing Arts and the concert performances of the Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra, I experienced the grandeur of the dance pieces and the virtuosity of the orchestra. I started to realize that the 21st century has actually brought us a revival of the classical arts, a revival that generations of people in the artistic community had been seeking.

In watching the combination of beauty and tradition with cultural and technological innovation, I felt it was almost as if the essence of humanity's achievements had become embodied in Shen Yun's performances. The artistic company was presenting Chinese dance and history, but the language and meaning were universal.

Knowing of the darkness that often manifested in other dance performances, I watched

By blending the distinct sensibilities of Chinese music with the power of a Western orchestra, Shen Yun has achieved a feat of musical harmony.

as divine inspiration was presenting itself on stage with Shen Yun. I was humbled and impressed at the same time.

Below are some of the aspects that make Shen Yun's performances outstanding and innovative.

## Dance

In the West, ballet has long been considered the most elegant and comprehensive dance system, offering performances of unrivaled athletic precision and ethereal grace for the past several hundred years. Few people, however, knew of classical Chinese dance, which had been passed down through thousands of years and had accumulated a rich vocabulary of movements, rhythms, and inner meanings.

Through its performances, Shen Yun brings classical Chinese dance, alongside Chinese ethnic and folk dances, to the forefront. The dancers' precision, athleticism, and synchronicity have impressed multitudes of audience members in many countries. This has allowed classical Chinese dance to take its rightful place alongside ballet as one of the most comprehensive dance systems in the world.

Shen Yun's performances have not only brought us an unknown dance system, but they have also presented dance in its purest form, embodying universal spiritual values such as truth, kindness, and forbearance through the characters and scenes the dancers portray.

## Music

Shen Yun's orchestra, which accompanies the dance pieces, is a combination of tradition, virtuosity, and innovation. By blending the distinct sensibilities of Chinese music with the power of a Western orchestra, Shen Yun has achieved a feat of musical harmony. Not only does a Western orchestra play original compositions—melodies that embody the Chinese spirit—but Shen Yun also incorporates traditional Chinese instruments such as the gong, pipa, and erhu as permanent members of the orchestra.

In listening to the music, we can hear the traditional Chinese instruments enhanced by the strength of the Western instruments. The effect is one that is pleasing to the ear yet also

rich in meaning, history, and values.

By taking a Western symphony orchestra, which is already a complete body, and expanding its potential through the inclusion of Chinese instruments and musical styles, Shen Yun has thus brought about a groundbreaking development that is sure to have a tremendous effect on the development of classical music.

Another outstanding feature, likely to have a significant impact on the vocal arts, is Shen Yun's revival of the authentic *bel canto* technique for singing in the upper register. Originally mastered by artists in ancient Chinese theater and early European opera, the technique has since been lost in both China and the West. However, Shen Yun has rediscovered it and is presenting it on stage today.

The lyrics of the singers' songs are profoundly spiritual, offering reflections on the meaning of life and our place in the world today. These lyrics continue in the tradition of spirituality that has been long present in both Eastern and Western classical music, yet they transcend all spiritual beliefs, speaking to the innermost longings of our hearts.

## Backdrops and Costumes

While presenting traditional culture, Shen Yun makes admirable use of 21st-century technology, having patented a special technique that allows performers to interact with the digital backdrops in perfect timing. A feat of artistry, technology, and choreography, the backdrops take audiences to celestial kingdoms, imperial palaces, and colorful plains. They extend the stage and immerse us in a multisensory experience that even seems to make time travel possible. Presented in classical, realistic style, the images enhance the traditional beauty and grandeur of the dances.

In addition, the colors of the backdrops complement the dancers' costumes, which are in themselves artistic creations based on extensive research and inspiration. According to the Shen Yun website, the costume designers are focused on harmonic balance and contrast, aiming to present both an authentic expression of divinely inspired traditional attire and a consummate stage effect. The result, certainly breathtaking with vibrant color combinations, often leaves the audience in awe.

## A Tradition Continues

Shen Yun's rapid growth in less than 15 years is a testimony to our yearning for beauty, traditions, and divinely inspired values and aesthetics on stage. The pursuit of artistic excellence and divine inspiration by Shen Yun's artists continues in the tradition of the Western classical masters, and brings in the vigor and inspiration from China's 5,000 years of civilization.

In the future, we are certain to look at this time as a special period in our artistic history: the rebirth of a greater awareness of the purpose of the arts to elevate humanity and bring goodness into our lives.

## More on the Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra

This September and October, the Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra (SYSO) returns for its fall tour in Taiwan, the United States, and Canada, bringing back some of the beloved original compositions for Shen Yun's dances and songs, alongside classical favorites by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Bedrich Smetana, and Charles Gounod.

SYSO made its debut at Carnegie Hall in 2012 by popular demand. The public had listened to the beautiful music emanating from Shen Yun's orchestra pit and wanted the musicians to have their own spotlight. Since then, the SYSO tour has rapidly expanded across North America and Asia.

Composed of talented musicians from around the world, SYSO harmonizes the traditions of East and West by incorporating traditional Chinese instruments such as the erhu and the pipa. These two instruments, known for their hauntingly beautiful sounds, add their delicate grace and celestial charm to the Western symphony orchestra.

Among this year's classical favorites, Shen Yun is presenting Tchaikovsky's Valse-Scherzo, Op. 34, an exhilarating favorite of the violin repertoire, alongside Smetana's "Dance of the Comedians" from "The Bartered Bride," one of the greatest Czech operas. It is also featuring Gounod's wedding march from his opera "Roméo et Juliette," a stately and regal piece that is sure to touch audiences.

For more information, visit [ShenYun.com](http://ShenYun.com)

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(Above) "Celebrating the Divine."

(Right) Violinist Fiona Zheng and conductor Milen Nachev with the Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra.

# With Love and Avocados: New Zealand Opera, the Kennaways' Way

The musical legacy of Joan and Rick Kennaway

LORRAINE FERRIER

For the past 23 years, opera—and avocados—have thrived on Rick and Joan Kennaway's "Operacado" orchard at Glenberrie, Whangarei, in the Northland region of New Zealand's North Island. The Kennaways' home is the venue for Opera North's annual event, Opera in the Garden. The couple founded Opera North in 1996.

The Kennaways have had a huge impact on opera in New Zealand and especially in the Northland region, where they have been nurturing local talent for decades. In 2005, both were officially recognized for their community work when they were awarded a Queen's Service Medal, a national honor.

Sadly, on Feb. 3, 2018, Joan passed away, just a month before the 2018 Opera in the Garden that she had been planning, right up until her death, was to open.

On April 4, 2020, Opera in the Garden will be held at Rick Kennaway's home for one last time, before the event moves on to new pastures.

"I'll be 83 this next year. I've decided that at some stage, one has to call it quits," Rick Kennaway said in a phone interview.

## A Life of Song

"Singing has always been a part of my life and Joan's life," he said.

Kennaway's brother Lyle once won New Zealand's national singing competition, the Mobil Song Quest, which is now known as the Lexus Song Quest. Joan was a finalist twice in the competition, and Rick was a semi-finalist once.

Kennaway met Joan in 1959 while singing in competitions in Auckland. There were two main competitors as far as "Joanie" was concerned: "She did just as well as Dame Kiri Te Kanawa and Dame Malvina Major in competitions," Kennaway said. "It used to be one of the three of them that won most of the classes [divisions]."

All three studied under Dame Sister Mary Leo, the internationally renowned singing teacher from St. Mary's College, Epsom, in Auckland. Leo invited Joan to become her student after Joan had won several singing contest divisions in an Auckland's under-17s, that is, for those younger than 17.

Leo taught her own style of lessons, influenced by traditional schools such as Garcia and Marchesi, aiming for the exquisite *bel canto* sound. Leo's students dominated the New Zealand and Australia opera scene in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s.

"Joanie won two scholarships to stay in London as a singer. But she chose to marry me, a farmer, and passed up those scholarships, which was sad in some respects," Kennaway said.

Joan believed it was the "right choice," as she said in a 2017 interview with NZ on Air. She added that she "had the most amazing life" in New Zealand. The couple had two children together, and singing was a constant passion throughout the couple's life.

The Kennaways had a sheep and beef cattle farm in the rural community of Maungaturoto before they moved farther north to Operacado, as they dubbed the place. But the farm work didn't interrupt the Kennaways' singing. "We have done a lot of singing around New Zealand, which made it a lot easier for me as a farmer," he said. Although he notes he's perhaps not at the same level as Joan was. "To sing—it's like a bubble, and it just comes out. You want to sing, and you've got to sing. And it's part of your being, part of your psyche," she said in the interview.

The couple were involved with the Otamatea Repertory Theatre. "The Otamatea Repertory Theatre rehearsed in honor of our involvement in the building of the complex," Kennaway said. "We did lots of very good shows while we were in Maungaturoto, and we used to bring the show up to Whangarei to perform too."

"We did a light musical every year, and over the course of time... we probably did 20 to 25 musicals. For me, acting the part

At the inaugural event, 500 audience members saw 18 singers perform on a stage made out of Huanui Orchard fruit bins.

(Top R) Husband and wife Joel and Maia Aмоса perform a duet from "The Marriage of Figaro" on stage at Opera in the Garden, on March 9.

(Right) The crowd settles before a performance at Opera in the Garden, on March 9, 2019.



of Teyve in "Fiddler on the Roof" was my most memorable," Kennaway said.

## Growing Opera in the Garden

In 1996, the Kennaways decided to retire from sheep and beef cattle farming. Kennaway recalls when they viewed the Glenberrie property: "As soon as Joan saw the garden, she decided this was definitely the place that we needed to hold Opera in the Garden." The layout of the property was ideal for the event. There was even an avocado orchard, "which suited me extremely well," Kennaway said.

The Kennaways formed Opera in the Garden in 1997, just a year after they moved to Operacado.

"That first year, we were dubious about the numbers that we might encourage to be in it and then with the number of audience members it would attract," Kennaway said.

They needn't have worried. At the inaugural event, 500 audience members saw 18 singers perform on a stage made out of Huanui Orchard fruit bins.

Over the years, the performers and audiences have grown. "Each year we had a few more singers come along, and we eventually got to a stage where I had to say that 60 performers were as many as we could capacitate," Kennaway said. Since they opened, the number of singers has tripled and the largest audience has been around 1,100—more than double the first performance. Kennaway puts the success down to teamwork: "It's done in a very cheerful atmosphere. We've got some very talented people taking part in it."

Joan taught many of the budding local performers, national and international talent, who took and continue to take part in Opera in the Garden. An example is the U.S.-based Hayden Tee, who hailed from Maungaturoto. "He's been doing roles right round the world. He's [performed] in a lot of the leading opera houses," Kennaway said, adding that his performance as Javert in "Les Misérables" earned Tee recognition as an outstanding singer.

Baritone Kawiti Waetford is another of Joan's students who have done particularly well overseas, Kennaway said. Waetford performed in this year's event.

## The 2019 Opera in the Garden

At each Opera in the Garden event, the first half consists of operatic songs and the second half is full of light musical songs. Aside from the opera, throughout the 2019 event, culture and tradition featured strongly. Joan was the musical director since the event's inception. In 2019, Clare Henderson took on the role.



Joan and Rick Kennaway at Opera in the Garden, in 2015. The couple's property has been the home of Opera in the Garden since 1997.

Husband and wife singers Joel and Maia Aмоса were this year's guest artists. Both had been taught by Joan. Joel won the 2018 Lexus Song Quest, and Maia was a finalist in the 2018 Dame Malvina Major Foundation NZ Aria competition.

Trumpeters opened the 2019 Opera in the Garden event with the "Triumphal March" from Giuseppe Verdi's "Aida." Then Joel and Maia Aмоса sang arias from "The Marriage of Figaro" by Mozart. Two songs from Greig's "Peer Gynt" were performed to honor Maia's Finnish heritage. Then familiar arias filled the air from Donizetti's "Lucia di Lammermoor" and Mozart's "Don Giovanni," and the sublime "Flower Duet" from Léo Delibes's "Lakmé," as well as Charles Gounod's "Je Veux Vivre" from his version of "Roméo et Juliette."

Kennaway said that the grand piano is usually the main instrument for the event, largely due to the lack of room onstage to accommodate a full orchestra. But this year, besides the trumpeters who opened the event, musicians from the C4-Strings quartet entertained the audience in the intermission.

George Frideric Handel's "Prayer in the Night" opened the second half. The Opera North chorus and guests wore a rainbow's worth of colorful Samoan outfits, reflecting Joel's Samoan heritage. The singers sang family favorites from musicals such as "The Lion King" and "Oklahoma." The soulful gospel song "Deep River" was also performed. Some song choices celebrated the different cultures of the main singers: Finnish, Samoan, and Maori.

There's no doubt that Joan and Rick's opera legacy lives on in New Zealand through the work of Opera North, Joan's pupils, and the love the community has for the couple. Opera in New Zealand seems set to continue to thrive.

To find out more about Opera in the Garden, visit [OperaNorth.co.nz](http://OperaNorth.co.nz)

RELATIONSHIPS

# Solve Your Problems Actively

But first, define your problem carefully

MICHAEL COURTER

For nine weeks, Salvador and I had been working together on reducing anxiety when he came into my office and announced this was our last session. He had decided that he couldn't finish his classes this semester and was going to move back to his hometown to live with his aunt. Besides, he told me, half of his teachers can't stand him and will probably fail him anyway.

Problems eventually arise for all of us. If you pay attention carefully, you will notice that you solve minor problems routinely all day long. "The subway line is closed today, I need to find a different way to work." "I have a meeting at 4:30, who can pick up my cat from the vet?" "Martha called in sick, who is going to contact her clients?" We solve these simple problems without much thought. But some problems have more complicating factors and require an active and thorough process to be handled effectively.

When complex problems arise we often try to use the same abbreviated problem-solving strategies we use for simpler problems. We rush into poor decisions or become passive, allowing other people or circumstances to dictate the outcome while losing opportunities and short-changing our options.

**A Structured Process**

With complicated problems, it is useful to go through a purposeful, structured process. The basic steps of the process are: define your problem, brainstorm solutions, analyze your options and make a plan, implement your plan, evaluate the results, and repeat the steps until the problem is solved. You will be surprised and elated by the options that appear and the doors that open when you are patient, thoughtful, and creative.

Incorrectly defining a problem is the most common mistake in this process. People get started down the wrong road when they don't have a careful and complete understanding of the problem they are trying to solve. Some of the most common mistakes are to define the problem too narrowly, cutting off a wider range of possibilities or trying to eliminate the symptoms of a bigger problem instead of solving it at the root, causing the problems to recur or resurface. Or, we simply misdiagnose what we really want or need out a situation.

**Step by Step**

How can you make sure you are solving the correct problem? Follow these steps.

1. Write down the problem on a piece of paper or a whiteboard. I really like to use a whiteboard to make it easy to take in

different aspects at a glance.

2. Write down a list of all of the relevant facts you know about the problem. Answer the who, what, where, and when that are involved. Make a separate list of assumptions, things that you think you know but are not completely sure of. Label them as assumptions.

3. What information are you missing? Write down the facts that you do not know. Ask yourself if it is possible to solve the problem without all of the facts or if there is research you need to do. Is this information easily accessible? Who would know the answers? Researching often ends up being one of the first steps in your plan to make sure you know all of the relevant facts.

4. Do you have strong emotions compelling you to act in a certain way? Ask yourself: Do you have an internal conflict that is causing you to change your mind frequently? Write down the various sides of it. Are you feeling an urge to decide quickly or impulsively? Are you avoiding something that you need to do because it makes you uncomfortable? These emotions are often happening beneath the level of your awareness and influencing your decisions without your realizing it. By acknowledging and writing down these emotions, your awareness will shed light on their hidden influence. You may want to account for them in your solution or push through them, depending on what serves the needs of your situation.

5. Finally, ask yourself: Are you sure you have the right problem? After going through the steps above, has your view of the problem changed? Rewrite the problem if necessary. Imagine that the problem was solved by some miracle. What exactly would change? Would the problem really be gone at that point? Once you can say yes to that question, you have defined your problem correctly.

**Brainstorming**

Only after you have defined your problem correctly are you ready to move on to the next step, brainstorming possible solutions.

Let's look at Salvador's case as an example. Salvador, normally a good student, had been ill for a week and missed some big assignments. He jumped to the assumption that he was going to fail his classes. His aunt had offered to let him stay with her for a few months without paying rent and that easy out was all he needed to make a hasty decision without taking the time to think about his options.

Since Salvador had already decided that he had failed, he had narrowed down his options to what he was going to do now that

**With complicated problems, it is useful to go through a purposeful, structured process.**

Only after you have defined your problem correctly are you ready to move on to the next step, brainstorming possible solutions.

the semester had been lost. When we dug deeper he realized that he was avoiding the whole problem because he was terrified to talk to his teacher about the missing assignments. He unconsciously assumed that they would chastise him and that he would be humiliated.

Once Salvador realized that he was rushing into a decision because of his anxiety, his problem became how he could manage the anxiety while he reached out and discussed his options with his teachers. This was a very different problem, and I was able to help Salvador write out and rehearse some scripts that he could use to prepare for his conversations with his teachers. The preparation brought his anxiety to a manageable level. As you can guess, the newly confident Salvador was able to work out arrangements with his teachers and get all of his credits for the semester.

Do you think you are working on the wrong problems in your life? Go through the steps above and see if you can shed new light on them.

Michael Courter is a therapist and counselor who believes in the power of personal growth, repairing relationships, and following your dreams. He can be reached at [mcc@CourterCounsel.com](mailto:mcc@CourterCounsel.com). His website is [CourterCounsel.com](http://CourterCounsel.com)



EDUCATION

# 8 Reasons to Get Involved in Your Child's School

BARBARA DANZA

Being in school more often will allow you to be well-informed and communicate more frequently with your child's teacher.

PIREL SHOT/SHUTTERSTOCK

You know that mom who is always at your child's school? She makes all the cupcakes, she's all over the PTA, she's always sending out emails and Facebook notifications about this or that event, she is forever the class parent, she's at pick up, she's at drop-off, she's always there. I mean, didn't she get



enough of school the first time around? That mom may be onto something.

Schools are set up today in a way that distances families from what goes on inside. While notices home often proclaim the importance of being an involved parent, in reality, most schools in practice discourage involvement and operate in a way that offers only the narrowest window into what goes on in there all day. You'll likely be told very little (if anything) about the curriculum that is being taught to your child, testing requirements, and perhaps even issues that relate specifically to your child.

The best way to see the bigger picture, to understand the culture inside the school, and to get a sense of what is being taught to your child, is to be "that" mom. Raise your hand—you'll bring the cupcakes.

Here are eight reasons to get involved in your child's school.

**Understand What Is Being Taught**  
Many parents today are in the dark about what is and is not being taught to their child. The reality can be shocking.

When you're informed in this regard you can supplement where needed, help with homework more effectively, and speak up if you find elements that

do not align with your family's values.

**Become Connected to Your Community**

Being the mom who's always there will allow you to get to know the people in your neighborhood. Being connected to a community is a blessing for sure.

**Encourage Accountability**

A frequent presence at school will increase the accountability of the teachers and administration. It's all too easy for a child to get lost in the shuffle at school.

Being in school more often will allow you to be well-informed and communicate more frequently with your child's teacher.

**Experience the Environment for Yourself**

The environment your child spends upwards of seven hours a day has a major impact on them. Get to know this environment and ensure that it's one you're happy to immerse your child in day after day.

**Make a Positive Impact on the School**

Of course, being a volunteer and getting to work on things that need doing

will lead you to have a positive impact on your child's school. Depending on the extent of your involvement, your contribution may become significant. What a wonderful thing to make the school in your community even better than you found it.

**Be an Informed Advocate for Your Child**

When it's not all roses as school, you'll have well-established relationships with teachers and administrators you can communicate with and advocate for your child's needs.

**Show Your Child Support**

Your child will love seeing you in school (even if the older ones may not admit it). Your presence there shows a high level of support and gives a sense that you're in this together.

**Have Confidence in Your School Choice**

Today's parents have more choices than ever before when it comes to how and where their children are educated. Maintaining a strong presence in your child's school will either reinforce your decision to enroll in that school or inform a different decision. Either way, you'll have greater confidence knowing you're fully informed.



# FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES



## To Autumn

by John Keats

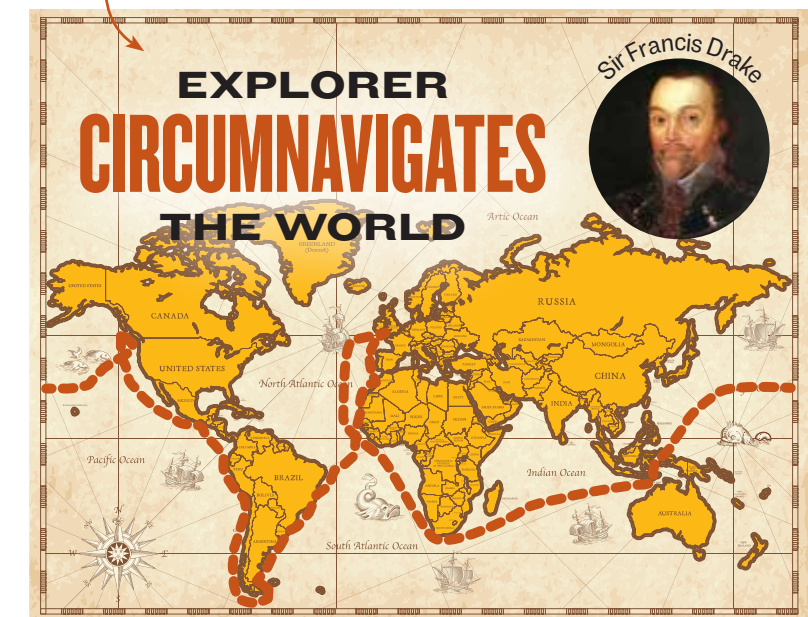
Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;  
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,  
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
Until they think warm days will never cease,  
For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?  
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find  
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,

Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;  
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,  
Drows'd with the wath of poppies, while thy hook  
Sparest the next swath and all its twined flowers:  
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep  
Steady thy laden head across a brook;  
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,  
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—  
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,  
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;  
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
Among the river sallows, borne aloft  
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;  
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;  
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft  
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;  
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

A map of Drake's route around the world.



Sir Francis Drake, an English explorer, captained a fleet of five ships on a mission. They left from England on Nov. 15, 1577, heading westward. During the arduous journey, they discovered the Drake Passage and entered the Pacific through the Strait of Magellan. On Sept. 26, 1580, Sir Francis Drake completed his

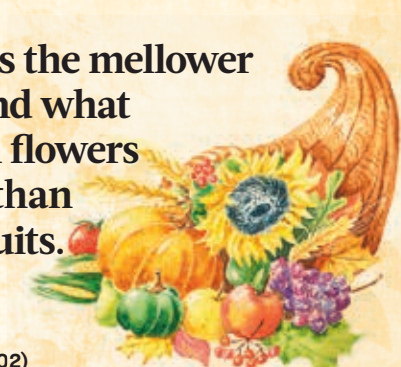
circumnavigation of the world, sailing into Plymouth aboard the Golden Hind. This marked the third ever circumnavigation (travel all the way around) of the world and the first English circumnavigation around the world. Drake became the first captain to lead a circumnavigation for the entirety of the voyage.

## WHY DID HUMPTY DUMPTY HAVE A GREAT FALL?



Autumn is the mellow season, and what we lose in flowers we more than gain in fruits.

SAMUEL BUTLER, WRITER (1835-1902)



PIREL SHOT/SHUTTERSTOCK

By Aidan Danza, age 13

## BEST PLACES TO WATCH THE FALL MIGRATION OF BIRDS

### News Flash:

It's fall! The weather is already changing and some trees are already turning colors. One of the most special aspects of the fall is the migration of birds.

It happens every year around the Northeastern United States, since this area of the country happens to be a superhighway for birds, called the Atlantic Flyway. Birds from the northern parts of the country and Canada use the flyway to get where they need to go.

Along the flyway there are special spots called hot spots that you can see hundreds of birds on the best migration days.

### CAPE MAY, NEW JERSEY

Cape May is the best of the best birding areas of this part of the country. Many birds fly down the northeast coast and are funneled down into Cape May, where most have to turn around and make the trip back to where the Delaware Bay becomes small enough for most birds to fly over.

Most of the best places for bird watching are at the tip of the Cape May peninsula, and they include Cape May Point State Park and South Cape May Meadows; but pretty much anywhere south of the Cape May Canal is really good birdwatching.

Cape May is a really fun place anyway, so it's a good place to take a weekend trip. You can see almost every bird that lives on the East coast here.

### EDWIN B. FORSYTHE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, BRIGANTINE DIVISION, NEW JERSEY

Forsythe NWR is another really good place for bird watching. If you like ducks and little wading shorebirds, this is the place for you. It is really, really good for ducks in the winter, but in October and November, you get a good quantity of ducks along with any lingering little waders.

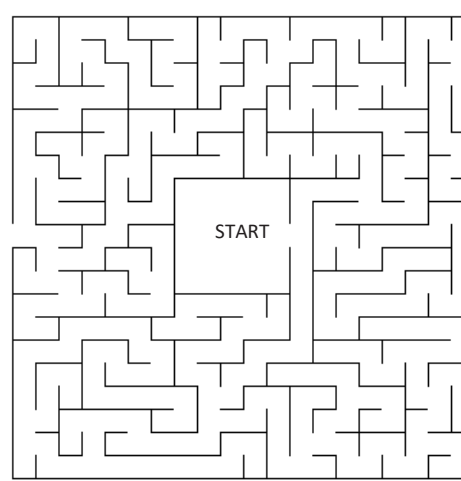
As a bonus, if you look closely in the bushes along the wildlife drive there are little songbirds in there that are hard to spot but always a special thing. This is a good spot to see on the way down to Cape May. The Wildlife Drive is eight miles long, and there are always birds there, so give yourself a lot of time to see all the birds.

### PARKER RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, PLUM ISLAND, MASSACHUSETTS

At Parker River NWR, you can see much of the same crowd as at Forsythe, but you also get a lot more songbirds, and some of the Canadian Species that go south for the winter, including Common Redpoll. As it gets later in the season, more songbirds are seen.

Parker River NWR takes up all of Plum Island. Just south of Plum Island, Crane Beach is also a good place to see birds. Overall, this is a very good place to see songbirds, seabirds, ducks, and waders early in the season.

## 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:  $6 + (7 \times 3) + 1 = 28$  and  $1 + (7 \times 3) + 6 = 28$

Easy puzzle 1

2	7		
86			
1	6		
+	-	x	÷

Solution For Easy 1  
 $2 \times (1 + 9 \times 2)$

Medium puzzle 1

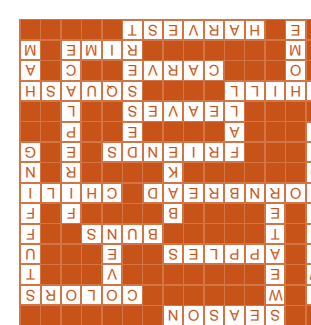
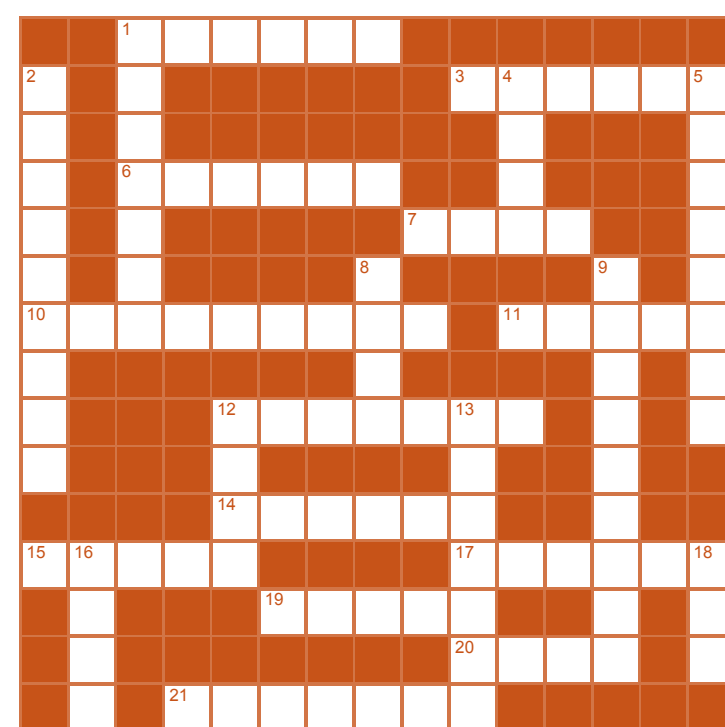
12	20		
39			
1	17		
+	-	x	÷

Solution for Medium 1  
 $(1 - 02) \times (1 + 2)$

Hard puzzle 1

8	28		
10			
2	27		
+	-	x	÷

Solution for Hard 1  
 $(22 - 82) \times (2 + 9)$   
 $82 - 2 \times (8 - 2)$



Across

- 1 Time of the year (6)
- 3 Leaves this time of year (6)
- 6 Let's go to a U-pick! (6)
- 7 Baked in the oven (4)
- 10 Johnnycake (9)
- 11 Some like it hot (5)
- 12 "That's what \_\_\_ are for" (7)
- 14 Nature's Fall decorations (6)
- 15 It's in the air (5)
- 17 One of the Three Sisters (6)
- 19 Get ready to do this to pumpkins and turkey (5)
- 20 Icy coating (4)
- 21 Autumn, typically (7)

Down

- 1 Break them out to stay warm (7)
- 2 A great fall treat (9)
- 4 It keeps a well-fed house warm (4)
- 5 It goes in the bird (8)
- 8 How a pie gets finished (4)
- 9 Hot spot (9)
- 12 The most colorful season? (4)
- 13 A sweet finish (7)
- 16 Where you hang your hat (4)
- 18 A seasonal meat (3)

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*Stan Krzyston, pastor*

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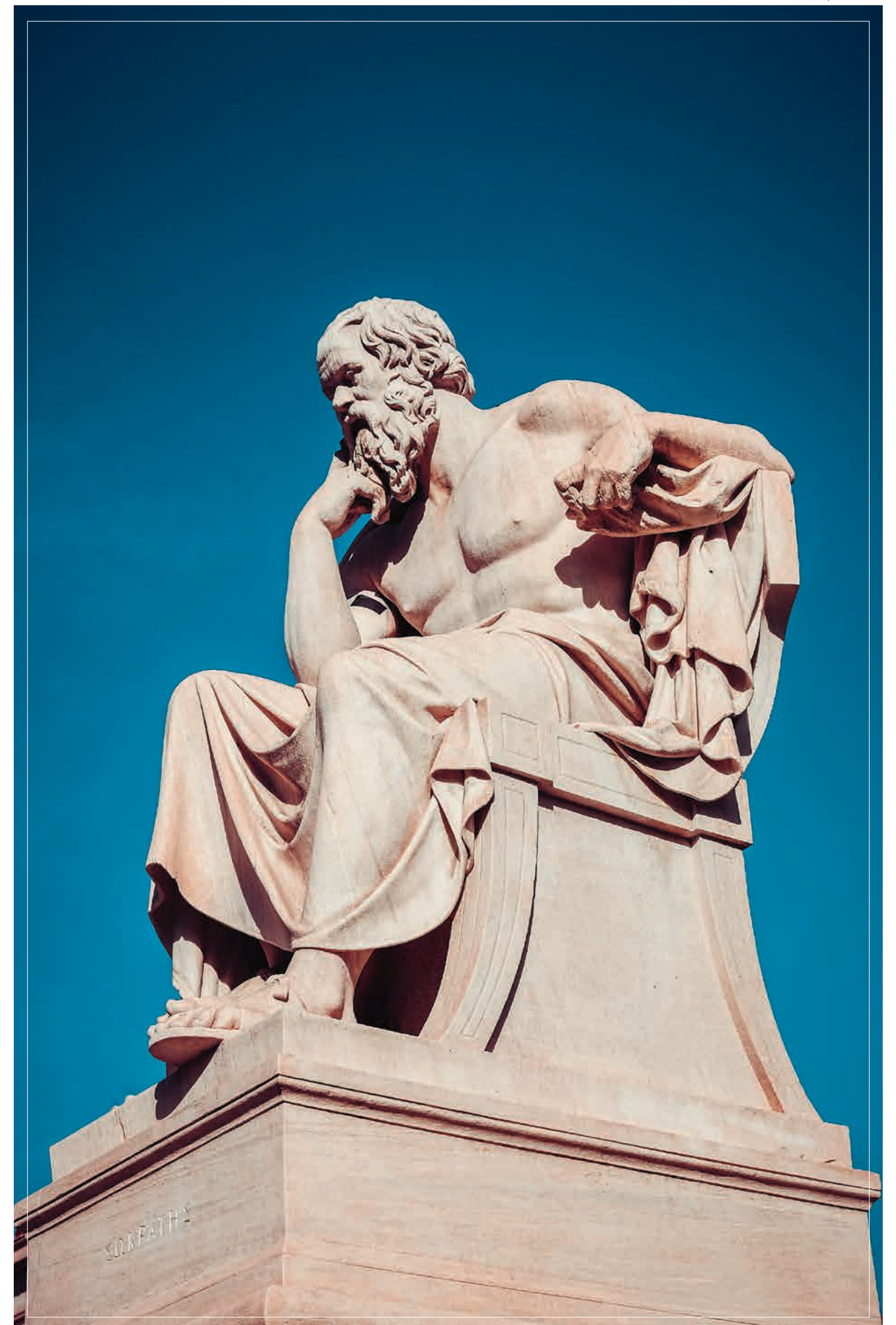
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# THE EPOCH TIMES

TRUTH AND TRADITION

ANCIENT CULTURE

## The Truth Behind Socrates and the Socratic Method



The statue of Socrates in front of the Academy of Athens in Greece.

EVAN MANTYK

Everyone has probably heard of Socrates and will know that he was a great philosopher in ancient Greece. But what exactly did he teach to earn that status?


What he is most remembered for is teaching people to question—what he called “examine”—their assumptions in the search for truth and justice. The most widely circulated Socrates quote is “The unexamined life is not worth living,” as Plato noted in his “Apology.”

Sure enough, he found life wasn’t worth living when he was forced to stop his examining. In 399 B.C., Socrates was put to death and forced to drink poison because he refused to be quiet.

Socrates’s questions, and those of his students, had apparently upset some powerful people in the ancient Greek city of Athens. Indeed, Socrates himself gloried in saying that the role he played in Athens was that of a gadfly—an annoying

insect that constantly pecks at a lazy horse. He implied that he was keeping the lazy horse (the Athenians) aware, active, and safe from wandering off the right path. Not impressed by the metaphor, Athenians voted by a relatively small majority to have him put to death. It’s also likely that some Athenians didn’t like that he claimed to be the wisest man around.

Continued on Page 16



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HISTORY

# Mothers and Sons: ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND TWO MOTHERS

The hand that rocks the cradle

*In our series "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle: Mothers and Sons," we will look at a number of famous men strongly influenced by their mothers. Not all these women were angels, but their love, disposition, and sense of principle left an indelible stamp on their sons.*

JEFF MINICK

Sometimes we are blessed with not one, but two mothers whose care and affection shape our lives.

Abraham Lincoln was 9 years old when his mother, born Nancy Hanks, died either of "milk sickness" or consumption. We know little of Nancy other than that she was an intelligent, kind woman who had lost one child in infancy and who loved both her daughter Sarah and young Abraham.

Though Lincoln left no written words in her memory, in his book "Lincoln," David Herbert Donald includes a portion of a letter Lincoln wrote many years later to a bereaved child: "In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to us all; and to the young, it comes with the bitterest agony, because it takes them unawares ... I have had experience enough to know what I say."

For over a year after Nancy's death, Abraham, his father Thomas, his sister, and a cousin who was living with them, Dennis, lived motherless and wifeless in their tiny cabin in Indiana. Sarah tried to take Nancy's place, cleaning and cooking, but she was only 11 and felt so alone that she often gave way to despair and weeping. A gloom hung over this tiny household, a sadness manifesting itself in chaos, dirt, and sometimes hunger.

The poet and writer Rosemary Benét gives us a picture of the family's condition at this time in "Nancy Hanks," where Nancy is a ghost asking after her son:

Scraping along  
In a little shack,  
With hardly a shirt  
To cover his back,  
And a prairie wind  
To blow him down,  
Or pinching times  
If he went to town.

In a verse written after revisiting this time and place in his life, Lincoln wrote the line "I'm living in the tombs."

**Enter Sarah Bush Johnson**

Sarah was a Kentucky widow, the mother of three young children, whom Thomas Lincoln had known before marrying Nancy. Realizing he needed help with his family and household, Thomas returned to Kentucky 13 months after his wife died and asked Sarah to marry him. As he pointed out, she needed a husband to help care for her children, he a wife for the same reason, and so he returned to Indiana with Sarah and her children in tow.

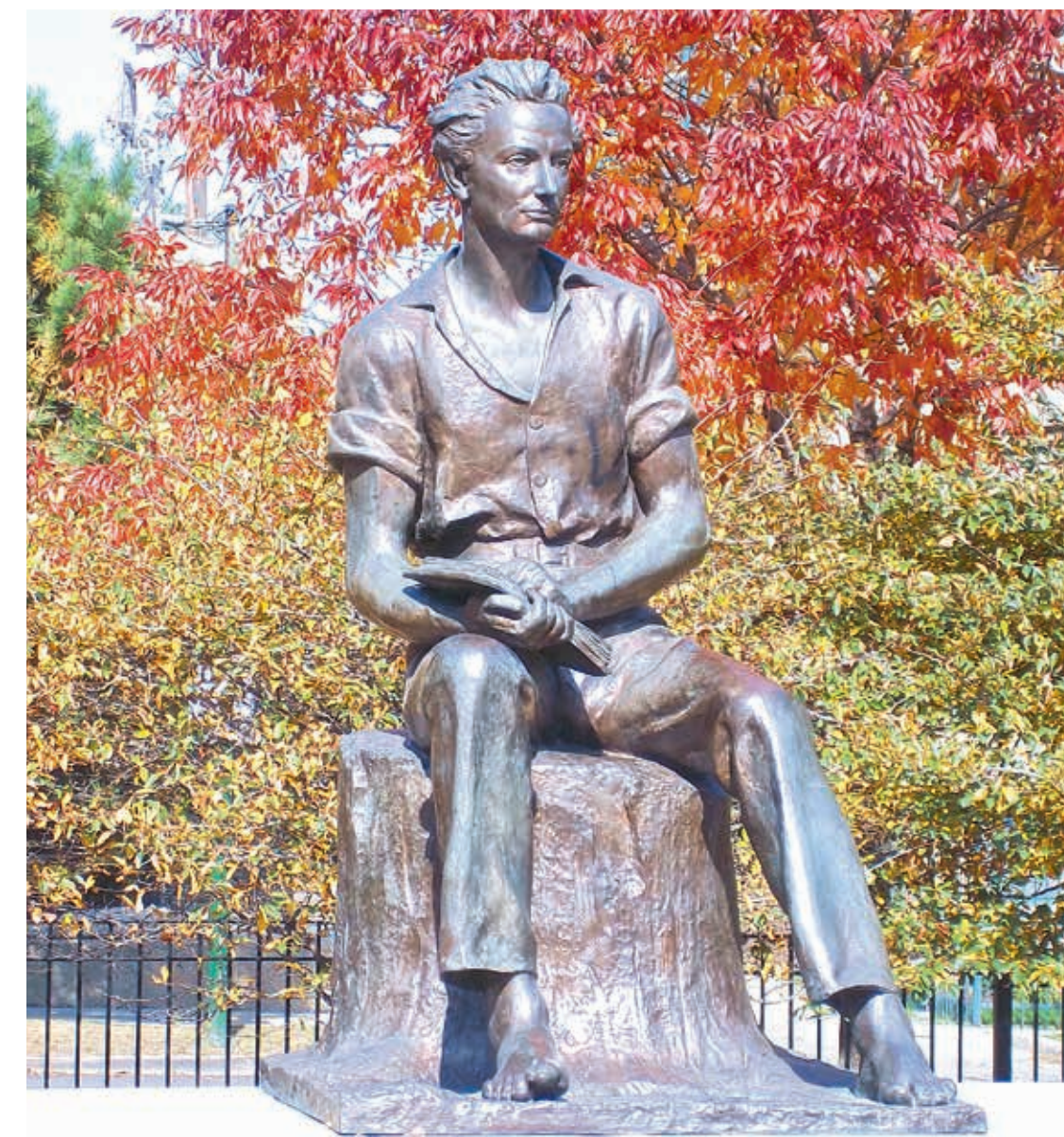
We do not know whether Sarah was shocked by what awaited her in that cabin: a home without a proper door, but with a dirt floor, little furniture, and dirty, disheveled children. What we do know is that she promptly took command of the situation.

According to Dennis, "She Soaped-rubbed and washed the Children—so that they looked pretty neat—well and clean." Without causing undue friction, she prevailed on Thomas to construct a floor and make repairs on the cabin. From Kentucky, Sarah had brought possessions that added a touch of civilization to the Lincoln household—bedding, a bureau, table and chairs, a spinning wheel, and silverware—items that, as David Donald speculates, made the Lincoln children feel as if "they were joining a world of unbelievable luxury."

But the greatest gift Sarah brought to that cabin was Sarah herself. Here was a woman who knew how to love.

**Affection for All**

According to the few accounts we have, Sarah showed no favoritism between her children and her newly acquired stepchildren. On all five young people, she



"Young Lincoln" by Charles Keck in Chicago's Senn Park.

bestowed her affections equally. By this impartiality and by her constant affection, she blended the two families.

Unlike her husband, and though she herself was illiterate, Sarah was also a strong advocate for education. Along with the household furniture, she had brought books—among others, a family Bible, Aesop's Fables, and John Bunyan's "The Pilgrim's Progress"—and she encouraged Abraham to read these and whatever other books and newspapers he could find.

Sarah also introduced Abraham to William Scott's "Lessons in Elocution," from which he gained his first lessons in public speaking as well as his introduction to Shakespeare. His formal school-

ing amounted to less than a year, but by immersing himself in these and other books, Abraham grounded himself in a prose that would echo in later writing and speeches.

In Sarah, Abraham also found the love and inspiration absent in his relationship with his father. Thomas was a stolid man, a hardworking farmer and carpenter who worked his son equally hard. Though Lincoln benefited from this work—he became physically stronger than most of his peers—he knew even as a teenager that he wanted nothing like his father's life.

The brief references Lincoln made later to his father barely conceal the scorn he felt toward him. Thomas embodied the power

of a negative example on one's children.

Sarah, however, enjoyed a close relationship with Abraham for as long as he lived. In "A. Lincoln: A Biography," Ronald C. White writes "... Abraham's stepmother's love and encouragement became critical to his development. Sarah Bush Lincoln believed that what she gave was returned in kind. 'I can say what scarcely one woman—a mother—can say in a thousand and it is this—Abe never gave me a cross word or a look and never refused ... to do anything I requested of him.'"

**The greatest gift Sarah brought to the Lincoln cabin was Sarah herself.**

The two also shared a sense of humor. When Lincoln reached 6 feet 4 inches, Sarah teased him about his height, warning him to keep his hair washed or he'd leave footprints on the ceiling. While she was gone away one day, he took several children, dipped their feet in mud, held them upside down, and had them leave footprints on the ceiling. When Sarah returned, she saw the prints and burst out laughing. Lincoln then whitewashed the ceiling again.

The story may be legend rather than fact, but it points out Sarah's good nature, Lincoln's love of a practical joke, and his bond with this woman whom he always called Mama.

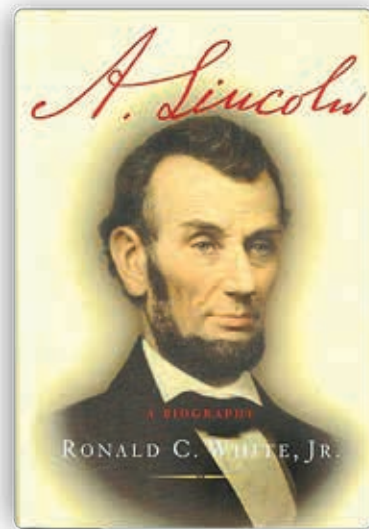
After Thomas's death in 1851, Lincoln financially supported his stepmother until his own death in 1865. Sarah lived on for nearly four years, dying on April 12, 1869, three days shy of the anniversary of her stepson's death by assassination.

Lincoln once stated, "All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother."

Scholars have debated which mother Lincoln had in mind, but it doesn't really matter. The truth is that the positive personal traits for which Lincoln is most famous—his compassion for the afflicted, his humor, his love of family and children—derive from the influence of both these women.



Sarah Bush Lincoln was the second wife of Thomas Lincoln and stepmother of President Abraham Lincoln.



"A. Lincoln" by Ronald C. White Jr.

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.

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TRUTH AND TRADITION




Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial in Indiana is a replica of the home that Sarah Bush Lincoln came to after marrying Thomas Lincoln.

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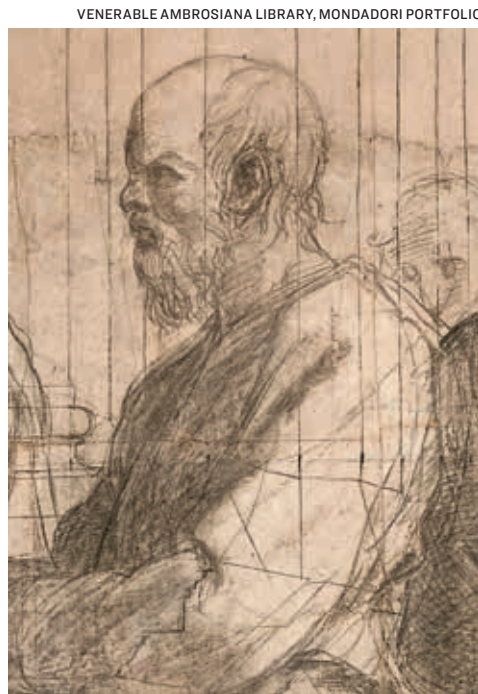
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Detail of Socrates in the "School of Athens," by Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio). Cardboard, charcoal, and white lead.



Detail of "The Death of Socrates," 1787, by Jacques-Louis David. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

**For Socrates, it seems that true happiness is the giving up one's earthly attachments.**



Socrates tried to teach young men known for their extravagance and loose morals, such as Alcibiades, being taught by Socrates," 1776, by François-André Vincent. Musée Fabre.

#### ANCIENT CULTURE

## The Truth Behind Socrates and the Socratic Method

Continued from Page 13

He famously was told by the Oracle of Delphi—who received her wisdom directly from the god Apollo—that he was the wisest man in Greece.

Socrates felt that he did not know much and went out to prove the god wrong by visiting wise men. Unexpectedly, he found the god was right. These men who claimed to have wisdom weren't wise at all.

According to Plato, Socrates said, "Well, although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful and good, I am better off than he is, for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows; I neither know nor think that I know. In this latter particular, then, I seem to have a slight advantage over him."

#### The Socratic Method

Today, Socrates's examining and open-minded style are immortalized through the Socratic Method, a standard tool of discussion and teaching. The method looks at a point of dispute and then seeks to define it and better understand it, often leading to the discovery of con-

traditions and the overturning of one's assumptions.

In the present day, one might, for example, begin a discussion on abortion by defining "human life." What is it? When does it begin?—at conception? when there's a heartbeat? at birth? In actual practice, by the end of such questioning, there is not necessarily a right answer that is reached and accepted. Rather, the idea is that participants can gain a better understanding of their own thinking and of others' thinking, and can at least move closer toward truth in some way.

Socrates's teachings would lay the groundwork for his student Plato and, by extension, Plato's student Aristotle and Aristotle's student Alexander the Great, who would conquer much of the Western world.

In some way, Socrates's ideas conquered much of Western civilization as well. His method of questioning with an open mind and seeking truth and justice seems to be embedded in all of the Western educational system: from questioning one's design imperfections in artistic, literary, and historical disciplines to the constant questioning and testing of the variety of scientific and

technical disciplines. The entire Western academic and educational system seems to owe Socrates a great debt.

#### Beyond the Popular Understanding

The above is the extent of the popular understanding of Socrates and the Socratic Method. However, looking at the actual history of Socrates and what he taught, and the values that formed the basis of his method, we find that this popular understanding is severely lacking. There is generally little or no mention of the morality, the virtue, the belief in the objectively good, or the belief in God or gods that Socrates held and that were central to him and his method.

Quite possibly, this is the fault of his student Plato. Socrates's views are not easy to find since he did not write anything himself. What he said was only recorded by students like Plato. But Plato is usually unreliable for understanding Socrates since he often used the persona of Socrates in his dialogues—like a character in a play—to explain his own ideas rather than to create an accurate historical record of Socrates.

Nonetheless, looking at the writings of another of Socrates's students, Xeno-

phon, reveals what seem to be genuine attempts at a historical recording of what Socrates was really getting at. From these writings, we find the basis of what is perhaps more rightfully called the Socratic Method.

#### A Rejection of Sexual Deviance and Debauchery

Why was Socrates forced to drink poison? Why exactly were some powerful Athenians so upset with him?

A prominent clue comes from the example of Critias, who was one of the 30 rulers of Athens. Xenophon describes him as "a man extremely addicted to debauchery." He was also a former student of Socrates, who once protected Socrates from execution. Critias had formed an inappropriate sexual relationship with a handsome young man.

After Socrates's mild criticisms were ignored by Critias, Socrates rebuked him. Xenophon writes that Socrates "out of an ardent zeal for virtue, broke out in such language, as at once declared his own strong inward sense of decency and order, and the monstrous shamefulness of Critias's passion."

As for drug abuse or drinking too

much, Socrates posed the situation of choosing a general or servant. One would never choose "a man given to wine or women, and who could not bear fatigue and hardships" to defend his country and his life or choose such a man to be his servant.

Why, then, should we expect less of ourselves? He says that such a degenerate person or "debauched man" is worse than a thief, who at least enriches himself while hurting someone else. The degenerate person hurts both himself and others. Socrates explains:

Who, then, can take delight in the company of him who has no other diversion than eating and drinking, and who is better pleased with the conversation of a prostitute than of his friends? Ought we not, then, to practice moderation above all things, seeing it is the foundation of all other virtues; for without it what can we learn that is good, what can we do that is worthy of praise? Is not the state of man who is plunged in sensual pleasure a wretched condition both for the body and soul?

#### Belief in God and the Supernormal

It is now sometimes the case that traditional religious beliefs are viewed as being at odds with academia and science. Yet such atheistic views themselves are at odds with Socrates and the Socratic Method. Looking at the plain history and facts, Socrates's questioning and the Socratic Method were never intended to question the existence of God or gods, the institution of religious belief, and the supernatural.

Socrates gave an intense defense of God's existence when talking to Aristodemus, who was said to never pray to the gods or consult the oracles and laughed at those who did. Socrates began with the classic argument that livings beings, nature, and the universe are so well-ordered as to necessarily require that the great unseen Creator must exist. Socrates said, "How wisely is the ear formed to receive all sorts of sounds, and not to be filled with any to the exclusion of others."

Socrates then took the argument one step further:

Do you then think that there is not elsewhere an intelligent being? Particularly, if you consider that your body is only a little earth taken from that great mass which you behold. The moisture that composes you is only a small drop of that immense heap of water that makes the sea; in a word, your body contains only a small part of all the elements, which are elsewhere in great quantity. There is nothing then but your understanding alone, which, by a wonderful piece of good fortune, must have come to you from I know not whence, if there were none in another place; and can it then be said that all this universe and all these so vast and numerous bodies have been disposed in so much order, without the help of an intelligent Being, and by mere chance?

Socrates's elegant point here was surprisingly ahead of his time. Like the earth and moisture he referred to, we do indeed find all of the chemical ele-

ments and atomic elements that make up humans to be elsewhere in the universe, and because of them, we also find a far greater level of complexity required for life. This makes Socrates's argument for the existence of the Creator even more powerful today. His reference to "mere chance" also seems to foreshadow the rise of evolutionary theory, which depends on almost innumerable random mutations—chance, we might say.

Socrates also appealed to the plain fact that people throughout history (even when he looked back as we look back at him) all believed in divine beings and found belief in them and the supernatural, such as oracles and omens, to be generally useful and good.

He says, "Do you not know that the most ancient and wisest republics and people have been also the most pious, and that man, at the age when his judgment is ripest, has then the greatest bent to the worship of the Deity?"

Today, we may say the very same of Socrates's belief in God and the exquisite arts and culture of the Greek golden age in which he lived.

#### Freedom from Addictions and Attachments

Socrates sincerely valued hardship and breaking free from addictions, and believed that through "constant exercise" one could overcome one's own weaknesses. He boasted of himself, "I ask you, is there anyone else you know of less enslaved than myself to the appetites of the body?"

On a separate occasion, the wealthy Athenian Antiphon made fun of Socrates, saying that Socrates lived a miserable

life with poor food and drink, with the same clothing in summer and winter, and without accepting any money from those he taught. Antiphon joked, "You live at such a rate that no footman would live with a master that treated him in the same manner." He also took a jab at Socrates's students, saying that they were only learning from Socrates how to make their lives miserable.

Instead of being offended, Socrates praised his own Spartan-like simplicity, his ability to bear hardships, and his rejection of sensual pleasures. He said, "I spend my time more delightfully in things whose pleasure ends not in the moment of enjoyment, and that make me hope besides to receive an everlasting reward ... Now, do you think that from anything whatsoever there can proceed a satisfaction equal to the inward consciousness of improving daily in virtue, and acquiring the acquaintance and friendship of the best of men?"

Further, Socrates asked Antiphon if he would rather have someone like himself or someone like Socrates as a soldier defending his life. Antiphon could make no reply. The answer, of course, is that Socrates's ability to endure hardships and his freedom from addictions provided a model for the perfect soldier and citizen. Socrates had the better and stronger view, both literally and figuratively.

Finally, in his dialogue with Antiphon, Socrates differentiated Antiphon's brand of happiness from his own:

One would think, Antiphon, that you believe happiness to consist in good eating and drinking, and in an expensive and splendid way of life. For my part, I am of opinion that to have need of nothing at all is a divine perfection, and that to have need but of little is to approach very near the Deity, and hence it follows that, as there is nothing more excellent than the Deity, whatever approaches nearest to it is likewise most near the supreme excellence.

Thus, for Socrates, it seems that true happiness is the giving up of one's earthly attachments.

It is worth noting too that Socrates valued the ability to give up addictions and attachment but did not go out of his way to find hardship. He did have citizenship (which was a great privilege in ancient Athens), some wealth, land, a wife, and sons, and he enjoyed food and drink as others, but he was not controlled by them.

Xenophon wrote that Socrates had not, like others, "so frequent occasions for sorrow and repentance" because of them. He had served his country in war honorably and was also an appreciator of fine arts, such as painting—of which he said that painting good and honest things gives the most pleasure—and ancient Greek sculptures, which he praised for their "wonderful vivacity."

#### Beyond Philosophy

As can be seen, the teachings of Socrates and what can properly be called the Socratic Method are grounded in morality. Rigorous, impartial questioning alone is not enough. In his time, Socrates was called a philosopher and we call him that today.

In fact, looking from the perspective of the present, this may be entirely the wrong term. It would be more accurate to call him a holy sage, a great master of profound teachings that have been passed down from heaven. He himself insisted, Plato said, that he did what he did out of his duty to God and that "only God is wise." Socrates said, "God orders me to fulfill the philosopher's mission of searching into myself and other men."

Such a searching, grounded in traditional morality and spirituality, far exceeds that academic discipline known today as philosophy and the boundaries of what is today called the Socratic Method. Such a profound mission is crucial to understanding the real Socrates and the real Socratic Method.

*Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from Xenophon's "The Memorable Thoughts of Socrates." Quotes may have been slightly adapted for style by the author.*

*Evan Mantyk is an English teacher in New York and president of the Society of Classical Poets.*

Clara Schumann, circa 1850, in a photograph by Franz Hanfstaeigl.



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## CLASSICAL MUSIC

# A life of *Love, Loss, Marriage,* and Above All, *Music*

Admiring the great pianist Clara Schumann

### LORRAINE FERRIER

September marked the 200th anniversary of the birth of Clara Schumann, a woman well known to musicians, but perhaps less known to most of us.

The 19th-century German pianist Clara Schumann (1819–1896) is foremostly remembered as an exceptional pianoforte performer. In 1830, at the age of 11, she made her concert debut with the famous Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra conducted by Felix Mendelssohn—a great start to an illustrious career that spanned some 60 years. Clara's final public performance was in 1891, when she was in her 70s.

Clara's life was full. Besides being a pianist, she was a celebrated composer, piano teacher, and music editor. Married to composer Robert Schumann, she mothered their eight children, as well as edited, arranged pieces for piano, and then performed her husband's compositions. After

his death, she continued to contribute to his legacy.

Her marriage to Schumann was full of mutual admiration, love, and loss. Four of their children died before she did. One of her sons suffered mental health problems. And all along, Schumann struggled immensely with his own mental health. Clara was resilient throughout her life and seemed destined for musical fame.

### Early Fame

Clara was born on Sept. 13, 1819, in Leipzig, Germany, to Friedrich and Marianne Wieck. Clara's father was a sought-after piano teacher who owned a piano and sheet music store, and her mother was a famous pianist and soprano. Although Clara had two brothers, she was singled out for stardom by her father at an early age.

For the first four years of her life, Clara didn't utter a word; her parents presumed she was deaf. Clara didn't respond to words and seemed completely consumed by her own inner world. Yet music moved



Clara and Robert Schumann in an illustration from "Famous Composers and Their Works," published in 1906.

her. At 5 years old, her father taught her music by ear. She wasn't deaf at all; she responded to music but not speech.

Clara's musical education was exceptional. Her father taught her until she was 19 years old; he employed the best music teachers when he couldn't teach her himself. In addition to learning piano and the foundations of music, Clara learned violin, composition, harmony, and orchestration to name a few subjects, and even how to run a music business. Her father took her to see every important drama, opera, and concert in Leipzig.

## Piano performance was never the same after Clara Schumann.

But her father also had a domineering character and was prone to angry outbursts. Clara reflected on his teaching methods in a letter just two years before she died: "He reprimanded me when I deserved it, and in so doing, prevented me from becoming arrogant from the praise the world showered on me."

At 11 years old, after her successful concert debut with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Clara's father took her on tour to France, Germany, and Austria. After a series of performances in Vienna from December 1837 to April 1838, the 18-year-old Clara was awarded Austria's highest musical honor: the Royal and Imperial Chamber Virtuoso.

### Robert and Clara

Robert Schumann became Friedrich Wieck's live-in pupil when Clara was 11 years old. Musical admiration turned to love after Clara's 16th birthday. From the outset of their romance, Wieck was against their courting, and he went to great lengths to prohibit their marriage, but to no avail.

Schumann and Clara married a day before her 21st birthday. Schumann bought Clara a joint diary for her 21st birthday, where they would each journal about their day. It was a tradition they kept for several years.

Their marriage appears to be one of mutual respect and devotion. As was the tradition of the time, Clara yielded her career to their marriage.

"I will make you forget the artist, because the wife stands even higher than the artist," Schumann wrote to Clara before they married.

Clara's presence can be felt throughout Schumann's work; he inserted many of her musical quotations in his own works, and she arranged many of his pieces. He also secretly published songs he'd encouraged her to compose, and presented them to her on their first anniversary.

Clara was also the first to play each piece of music that Schumann composed, because he was unable to, much to his frustration. "An evil fate has deprived me of the full use of my right hand, so that I am not able to play my compositions as I feel them," he said in a letter to the landowner and music dilettante Simonin de Sire.

Schumann put his disability down to having been overzealous with playing or writing music. He also had syphilis, which would

explain his bouts of melancholic madness.

Schumann's debilitating bouts of depression meant that Clara had to manage the household and also make money. "You are my right hand and you, you must take care of yourself, so that nothing happens to you," Schumann wrote to Clara.

In 1854, he committed himself to an asylum where he died two years later.

Widowed at 37 years old, Clara took to performing concerts around the world, to provide for her children and grandchildren. She never composed professionally after Schumann died but continued to edit and play his music.

"Performing the art is a big part of my life, it is the air that I breathe!" she wrote to Brahms in 1868.

In 1878, Clara was appointed as a piano teacher at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt until 1892. She died in 1896, teaching music right until the end. Her husband's F-sharp major romance was the last music she heard, played by her grandson Ferdinand, at her request.

### Clara's Legacy

Not only did Clara Schumann influence her husband's work, but she also inspired the composer and close friend Johannes Brahms and also the violinist Joseph Joachim, who accompanied her in chamber recitals.

Piano performance was never the same after Clara Schumann. She performed without accompanying musicians, unusual at the time (although Liszt did this too). In her later performances, Clara presented a balanced repertoire of 18th- and 19th-century music including that of J.S. Bach, Domenico Scarlatti, Beethoven, and Schubert, which was at odds with the normally showy compositions and improvisations often performed in the Romantic era.

## Performing the art is a big part of my life, it is the air that I breathe!

Clara Schumann, pianist

She was a core part of the so-called War of the Romantics, a turning point in classical music whereby musicians were divided. Composers such as Liszt and Wagner saw Beethoven as the start of a new kind of music. Clara, along with Brahms, Joachim, and the Leipzig Conservatory believed that Beethoven's music was the pinnacle of classical music perfection.

Clara Schumann, considered one of the greatest pianists of her time, used her talents to serve those she loved. Throughout all the trials and tribulations she endured, she respected her father and his strict classical training, she doted on her husband despite his mental illness, and she supported her children while furthering her husband's legacy. In Robert Schumann, she found not only a husband but also a constant source of inspiration: peer to peer, husband to wife.

Perhaps the two complemented each other perfectly. One wonders what kind of musician either of them would've been without the other.



Phil Connors (Bill Murray), in the romantic comedy "Groundhog Day."

### MARK JACKSON

I've been thinking about prison lately. A lot. About living the same day over and over again. About unimaginable boredom. Why? Have you been following the news about that sex cult NXIVM and its execrable leader, Keith Raniere? Convicted by a jury, in less than five hours, of sex trafficking, child porn, and branding his female "slaves" with his initials? That guy?

That guy was my grade school classmate. He sat next to me all of fifth grade. Now, he's awaiting sentencing and locked up in "The Tombs" in Brooklyn with, as Frank Parlato says on his blog, giant rats, roaches, bedbugs, lice, and ringworm infection as his cellmates. He's getting beaten by Mexican inmates for the statutory rape of Mexican girls: broken toe, cracked ribs. His glasses are stolen repeatedly, and his shoes are used as toilets by other inmates. And when he gets shunted off to a high-security federal prison, sometime in 2020, the horrors that await him will escalate exponentially.

I feel my imagination being morbidly fettered by all this. Like I'm living in prison vicariously. Thanks Keith!

I enjoyed the trick-or-treating Halloween playdate in sixth grade at your house, with you, Peter, and Matt, but I would have preferred you didn't end up in the slammer, so I'm depressed—above and beyond the usual depression about the state of the world today.

### What Do We Call Keith's Situation?

We call Keith's situation "groundhog day." We all know this term in America today, but perhaps millennials aren't familiar with the facts about when and how this term became part of America's cultural lexicon.

The film "Groundhog Day" was released almost 26 years ago, on Feb. 12, 1993. It grew from a somewhat successful Bill Murray comedy to a cultural phenomenon such that when you hear the term, you don't even think about the original folksy Americana legend of Groundhog Day, where the woodchuck comes out of his burrow, sees his shadow, and it means six more weeks of winter.

No. When someone says "Groundhog Day," you think of waking up to the exact same day over, and over, and over, and over, and over again for all eternity.

It's a grand metaphor for the fact that, as Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Are you just surviving? Are you just doing the same routine daily? Running into the same people, the same mindless chitchat? "Groundhog Day" is about breaking out of the routine and becoming "woke."

### Samsara: The Ultimate Time Loop

Bill Murray plays Phil Connors, a surprisingly rude, narcissistic



Mark Jackson grew up in Spring Valley, N.Y., where he attended a Waldorf school. At Williams College, his professors all suggested he write professionally. He acted professionally for 20 years instead. Now he writes professionally about acting. In the movies.

## POPCORN & INSPIRATION: FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL

# Keith Raniere's Life in Prison

Pittsburgh television weatherman, who gets stuck in an endlessly repeating time loop. He's shackled, fairy tale-like, to Groundhog Day. It's also a metaphor for what ancient Indian spiritual culture called "samsara." Which means that humans are doomed to infinitely repeat the earthly cycles of birth, growth, school, marriage, family, illness, and death until such time as they grasp the meaning of spiritual enlightenment and find a method (a spiritual path) of paying down their constantly accruing karmic debt, until they can get out of here.

After the initial shock subsides, Phil tries exploiting the situation—indulging all the things people would often like to get away with if there were no laws, consequences, and karma. Phil seduces women by figuring out what they like on, say, days 264, 265, and 266, and then feigns being incredibly in-tune, present, wise, and sensitive on day 267, to great seductive success.

He memorizes the sequences of events occurring around an open Brinks truck and, with impeccable timing, strolls over when the guards aren't looking and smoothly filches a bag of loot. He stuffs entire cake slices in his mouth, prompting the best sarcastic line in the movie: his producer Rita Hanson (an incredibly adorable Andie MacDowell) saying, "I like to see a man of advancing years throwing caution to the wind. It's freeing, really."

Speaking of Rita, Phil falls hard for her. She's the opposite of him—sweet, kind, and caring. Phil probably spends five months of identical Groundhog Days learning every last detail of Rita's life. Then he

### 'Groundhog Day'

Director  
Harold Ramis

Starring  
Bill Murray, Andie MacDowell, Chris Elliott, Stephen Tobolowsky

Rated  
PG

Running Time  
1 hour, 41 minutes

Release Date  
Feb. 12, 1993 (USA)

★★★★★

(Below) Rita Hanson (Andie MacDowell) is like Beatrice to Phil Connors's Dante.

(Bottom) Phil Connors (Bill Murray) ice-sculpting, one of the many accomplishments he acquires with eternity at his disposal.



plays the lead-up to the seduction over and over again, only each time to eventually get into new territory, inadvertently expose his lowly moral stature, and get slapped in the face: "Whack!" "Pow!" "Slap!"

This leads Phil to a state of hopelessness. He attempts probably a year's worth of daily suicide: He jumps off towers, drives off cliffs, stands in front of trucks, and gets in the bathtub and throws a live toaster in.

To no avail: At precisely 6:00 a.m. the next day, the "oom-pah-pah, oom-pah-pah" tootling oboe of Sonny and Cher's "I Got You Babe" tortures him awake to a brand new Groundhog Day.

Next is a fun sequence where Phil strolls through his daily morning breakfast with Rita at the diner, like a tour guide, expounding on the histories of all the good folks of Punxsutawney residing therein. Phil's latest theory is that he must be a god.

It'd be interesting to know the timeline: How many Groundhog Days did Phil experience? I'm thinking maybe 500 years of Groundhog Days. Because Phil learns how to do many things, expertly.

And so, should ever that chance come, should it finally dawn on you what the true meaning of life is about, you should try to break out of the cycle of samsara by paying off all your karma in one lifetime. If not now, when? If you figure out what enlightenment means, you should pursue it with the fervor of a man whose hair is on fire seeking a pond.

The message here is that stolen money, stolen women, and stolen valor—anything gained with none of the normally required effort—won't bring you happiness. It'll make you want to throw a toaster in your bath.

So try being a better person. If not now, when? Do it before you end up in your own little Groundhog Day hell, like the Metropolitan Correctional Center, where Keith Raniere currently resides.

And herein lies a great lesson. Just what is it that Phil learns? Early on, he preoccupies himself with meaningless pursuits. He fritters away his time, ostensibly because he thinks he's privy to an endless supply of it. And per this premise, he is.

But the real message is—are we? Phil thinks he's got forever to live, so he spends five hours a day, for six months, practicing the correct flick of the wrist required to land a playing card in a hat. Woo-hoo. After Rita's bet let in on his secret—that he's stuck in endless Groundhog Day samsara—her comeback regarding his card party-trick is priceless: "Is this what you do with eternity?"

### Enlightenment: The Lotus Rises Out of the Mud

The key to Phil's breaking the cycle of earthly incarnations is his desire to love, and be loved by, Rita. Rita is thus the Beatrice to Phil's Dante Alighieri. That is, Phil inadvertently sets out on the path of enlightenment by seeking the love of a woman.

Rita has what in Chinese is referred to as a higher "xinxing," or moral standard. She's a good person. Phil is not. If he wants to win Rita, he must become a better man by raising his xinxing standard. And so, as Phil slowly begins to raise the level of his morality, he wholesomely gains favor with Rita. He becomes an accomplished keyboardist and a doctor. He has a daily list of scheduled good deeds: Give the local homeless man all his money, catch a boy falling out of the tree, and purchase the full menu of mega-annoying insurance salesman Ned Ryerson's (Stephen Tobolowsky) insurance policies.

The ancient Indians say the odds of a human being figuring out what the true meaning and ultimate purpose of human life is about, during his or her endless cycle of earthly incarnations, are about the same as that of a singular turtle, swimming through all the world's seven oceans, coming for air, and in so doing, surfacing exactly within the circumference of a 5-foot wooden hoop that floats randomly across all those seven oceans. In other words—the chances are not good.

And so, should ever that chance come, should it finally dawn on you what the true meaning of life is about, you should try to break out of the cycle of samsara by paying off all your karma in one lifetime. If not now, when? If you figure out what enlightenment means, you should pursue it with the fervor of a man whose hair is on fire seeking a pond.

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FILM REVIEW

# A Dark, Taut Science-Fiction Epic

IAN KANE

Back in July of this year, the great men and women of NASA celebrated the 50th anniversary of the historic Apollo 11 moon landing with a live TV broadcast and other events—and the world celebrated along with them. Indeed, that gala celebration has spawned a new interest in space travel, with great films such as the joyous movie “Astronaut” and the excellent biopic piece “Armstrong.” So, I figured that it was only a matter of time before the newly revitalized space travel genre would get even more A-list treatment.

## Pitt is convincing as a cold and methodical man of science.

As a fan of Brad Pitt, as well as of intriguing science-fiction films, I was pretty excited to see the new space opera “Ad Astra,” especially since the film’s director, James Gray, said during an interview at the Toronto International Film Festival that the movie would feature “the most realistic depiction of space travel that’s been put in a movie.” He added that the film would be “very ‘Heart of Darkness.’ It’s sort of like, if you got ‘Apocalypse Now’ and ‘2001’ in a giant mash-up.”

That’s some pretty impressive material to draw from, but would Gray be able to pull off such a monumental task? Yes, but with some very dark implications.

### A Son Seeks His Father

Speaking of astronauts, Brad Pitt plays one in the film, which is

about a son traveling to the edge of our solar system in order to discover whether his father is still alive. Pitt steps into the role of ice-cold astronaut similar to how Ryan Gosling portrayed Neil Armstrong in “First Man.”

Pitt is Major Roy McBride, who is tasked with carrying out a top-secret mission to find his famous astronaut father, H. Clifford McBride (Tommy Lee Jones). Clifford McBride had bid farewell to his wife and teenage son to engage in a similarly epic mission to travel through the depths of known space in order to try to make contact with extraterrestrial life. That mission was called “Project Lima” and was carried out years prior to when the events of the film take place.

During Project Lima, Clifford McBride mysteriously vanished without a trace and was considered by all official accounts deceased. However, now strange power surges seem to be emanating from a location close to where Roy’s father disappeared.

Roy’s superiors, on the Space Commission, seem to believe that his father is still out there somewhere—alive. They also think that Clifford somehow discovered antimatter and may be somehow generating the power surges, which are becoming increasingly dangerous to Earth.

The Space Commission is confident that Roy is the best candidate for the mission to find his father because he is the most cool, calm, and collected astronaut alive. In fact, during the film’s opening scenes, where he falls off an immense space antenna and begins falling toward Earth, it’s rumored that his heart rate never rises above 80 beats per minute. Now that’s a man who is calm under pressure.



ALL PHOTOS BY TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

### ‘Ad Astra’

**Director**  
James Gray  
**Starring**  
Brad Pitt, Tommy Lee Jones, Ruth Negga  
**Running Time**  
2 hours, 3 minutes  
**Rated**  
PG-13  
**Release Date**  
Sept. 20



(Top) Brad Pitt as Major Roy McBride, in “Ad Astra.”

(Bottom) Tommy Lee Jones plays the renegade astronaut H. Clifford McBride.



Pitt is convincing as a cold and methodical man of science. He affects an austere, sometimes impenetrable countenance that sometimes makes you wonder if he has ice running through his veins.

Jones is also well cast as Roy’s equally frigid father, the most phenomenal (and most accomplished) astronaut to have ever lived, and whose long list of accolades and achievements is only matched by his giant ego.

As Roy watches some of the last recordings that his father made, he remarks, “What did he find out there ... in the abyss?”

And when Clifford says in the tapes, “The world awaits our discovery, my son,” you can clearly see what Gray was talking about when he mentioned the “Apocalypse Now” comparison.

Without spoiling key plot points, it bears mentioning that the film does unfortunately ascribe a heart of darkness to the man with the most faith in God, so as to question that belief.

### Remarkable Cinematography

The film’s initial scenes are impressive, and I’d first thought that the

gigantic antenna was a space elevator. However, it turned out to be a device that scientists had hoped would allow them to make contact with alien life.

The space travel scenes were also extremely well crafted, and I found my lower jaw had literally dropped during quite a few of them. Complementing cinematographer Hoyte Van Hoytema’s absolutely stunning camerawork is an epic, sci-fi-oozing musical score by composer Max Richter.

“Ad Astra” is a remarkable science-fiction odyssey about a man in search of his father on the outer fringes of space. Although there are some action scenes here and there, don’t expect this film to be your typical summertime blockbuster such as “Deep Impact.” “Ad Astra” is much more of a nuanced, measured film that draws you into its near-future world and asks you to come along on a solar-system-spanning ride into the darkest reaches of outer space and of man’s soul.

*Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To see more, visit [DreamFlightEnt.com](http://DreamFlightEnt.com)*

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