

THE EPOCH TIMES LIFE & TRADITION

By her own estimation, Maxwell was an unlikely candidate for the pageant title, but she never let it stop her from her goal.

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Notes From a Deli

When labor becomes nourishment for the soul

DEAN ABBOTT

After I lost my position as a college professor in the summer of 2018, I found myself once again on the job market. Finding another position at a school where my talents and perspectives would be a good fit would have meant uprooting our family. We had lived here in this small central Ohio town for most of a decade and had put down some roots. Our youngest daughter had known no other home. Our oldest had lived in this place, in this house, since she was 3. We didn't want to move.

I applied for all sorts of local jobs, looking for work that could sustain our family. Finding something was harder than I would have expected, especially in an up economy. Finally, the first job that materialized was a position slicing meats and cheeses in a nearby market. It would have been easy to think of this change as a fall, a defeat, a humiliation. Fortunately, I was able to see through the surface of the work to something deeper, which spared me from falling into the trap of resentment.

To tell you that, for about three months, I worked slicing meats and cheeses for customers who would come to the counter and point out which goods they desired from the refrigerated display cases would be to tell only a sliver of the story.

The truth is that, during that time, I accomplished something much grander: facilitating and nurturing meaningful moments in the lives of our customers.

What goes for everything in life goes for deli slicing: What is invisible to the eye is, for those able to perceive it, far more engaging than what is visible. I hadn't worked at the deli long before I realized the invisible contribution that I, even as a simple slicer, was making to the lives of our customers and, by extension, our community.

This vision of my work began to sharpen when a woman, somewhere in her 60s or beyond, came in with a little girl. When speaking to the little girl, the older woman referred to herself as "Memaw." She focused on the little girl intently. The little girl never stopped moving. The affection between them was palpable, tinged with a sense of



The sandwich is the quintessential lonely man's cuisine.

Again and again, customers would order 'just half a pound.' Then, with an almost apologetic air, add, 'It's just me at home.'

sadness, as if some unfortunate circumstances put this small child here with Memaw and not with Mommy and Daddy. Together they wandered the store for a while, finally landing at the deli counter. Memaw bought some turkey, maybe some ham.

This simple transaction was, when rightly understood, not a mundane moment, but a window into a relationship. Memaw and her granddaughter were taking home food that would become a lunch. A lunch that little girl, years from now, might recall fondly. Who knows what might happen over that lunch, what memories created, what issues resolved, what love nourished?

Again and again, these situations presented themselves. One reason is that I wasn't working in your average supermarket. In-

stead, I was slicing at the deli of a privately owned bulk foods store. The owners were former Amish and 75 percent of the employees were current Amish. The store was decorated in a warm, rustic style that spoke of safety, home, and hearth. The atmosphere invited interactions that never would have taken place beneath the glare of pop music and the glare of fluorescent lights that set the tone in a typical mega-grocery monstrosity.

The comfortable surroundings with their whispered promise of home and harmony made the loneliness easier to see. Again and again, customers would order "just half a pound." Then, with an almost apologetic air, add, "It's just me at home."

The sandwich is the quintessential lonely man's cuisine. Many silent hours seemed to have led some to develop a kind of expertise in lunchmeat studies. One day, a man strode up to the counter. To look at him, you might guess he worked construction. His beard was unkempt and his clothes were the rugged attire of a workman. He perused our hams. "Which one of these has the lowest moisture content?" he asked. Many times, I received questions about the way the meats and cheeses were processed, their history and qualities, as if the energy and attention that, under other circum-

stances, might have gone into family and community had been diverted into a study of the finer points of commercial charcuterie.

These interactions made clear that through faithfulness in my work, I was doing a small part to ease human difficulty. Our daily meals, even the humble sandwich, are meant to be a momentary respite from the harsh grind of circumstance. Each meal is intended as a pause from our work, whether that is the challenge of manual labor or the pain of deep study. Each meal is meant to be time set aside for nurture and sustenance of body and soul.

This is why so many important things happen around meals. These daily pauses for refreshment are opportunities for more than just bodily renewal. The conversation that accompanies a meal can be formative. Meals can be not just a time to eat, but a time to instruct, to admonish, to remind, to cherish. All these profound human experiences are supported by the work of countless others, including, on occasion, the humble slicer of deli meats.

This understanding transformed my work. Without it, I would have been tempted to resent taking on a job that I could have seen as below me, a step down the ladder of professional and personal status. Instead, knowing I wasn't merely slicing meat but contributing to nourishing experiences, providing comfort to the lonely, and facilitating meals where life-changing conversations might happen, moved the work from menial to meaningful.

This can happen for anyone in any position, of course. Whatever our work of the moment, a willingness to look beyond the task to those whose lives are enhanced by our service can help us locate meaning where it initially might have been difficult to spot. With practice, we can train ourselves to make this way of seeing a habit. Then our labor, whatever it is, might cease to be labor alone and become its own kind of nourishment.

Dean Abbott is a writer living in Ohio with his wife and daughters. His writing focuses on virtue, personal relationships, and quieter living. He no longer works as a deli slicer.

The Gift of Tradition

A conversation with Gary Vaillancourt

BARBARA DANZA

The decorations and special objects that are unique to one's family are a key part of holiday traditions. They come to symbolize the magic and heritage of each family and the meaning of the season.

Vaillancourt Folk Art is a family-owned business producing heirloom-quality holiday collectibles—handmade works of art that celebrate holiday traditions. I spoke to owner Gary Vaillancourt about his company's 35th anniversary and his new book, "It's Hard to Tell When a Tradition Begins: A Vaillancourt Christmas."

THE EPOCH TIMES: Your company, Vaillancourt Folk Art, is celebrating 35 years in business. Con-

gratulations! How did it all begin?

GARY VAILLANCOURT: My wife, Judi, has always been a very serious Christmas person and at an antique show I found three antique chocolate molds of Father Christmas figures. Judi thought they weren't exciting on the shelf so she poured them with chocolate, which the boys promptly ate. Then she poured them with beeswax, which spilled all over the fridge.

She finally poured one with chalkware and hand-painted the resulting figure. In October of that year, she was asked to do a high-end folk art retail show. She built furniture, made Noah's Arks, and took her one piece of painted chalkware. She took so many orders for

“**Our 20 local employees have been with us an average of 16 years and are family.**”

Gary Vaillancourt, owner, Vaillancourt Folk Art

Molds used by the Vaillancourts.



Colorful ornaments.

the Santa that she was off and running.

THE EPOCH TIMES: Vaillancourt Folk Art is now sold around the United States in stores like Bergdorf Goodman and historic locations like Colonial Williamsburg. To what do you owe your success?
MR. VAILLANCOURT: In an environment where low-end Chinese products dominate the Christmas market, we decided to stick with high quality. Even though our prices were significantly higher than Chinese goods, we staked out a niche that has grown over the years and enabled us to survive as one of the only two Santa studios in the States.

THE EPOCH TIMES: Your pieces are still carefully made in Massachusetts. How important is it to you that production remains local?
MR. VAILLANCOURT: We have had many opportunities to go overseas but have no interest. It is important to us to maintain our pro-

duction in the United States in the town of Sutton, Massachusetts. Our 20 local employees have been with us an average of 16 years and are family. We are very involved with the local community. Our grandson is probably the 12th generation in Sutton and we are very proud to continue the local tradition.

THE EPOCH TIMES: What inspired you to write your new book, "It's Hard to Tell When a Tradition Begins: A Vaillancourt Christmas"?
MR. VAILLANCOURT: We use over 3,000 antique chocolate molds to make our figures. These molds are from the late 19th century and early 20th century and capture the story of Christmas through the years.

We have learned so much about Christmas traditions that I felt it was important to tell the story. In addition, so many of our customers have made their purchases as gifts to their loved ones that we have actually become an

integral part of their family traditions.

The fact that traditions are important in this fast-paced, high-tech world is a story worth telling.

THE EPOCH TIMES: What role do you believe traditions play in the lives of today's families?
MR. VAILLANCOURT: With so many high-tech devices, family communication has become less personal. Traditions, where families can get together to actually be a family, are so important to our society.

THE EPOCH TIMES: What are your hopes for the future of Vaillancourt Folk Art?
MR. VAILLANCOURT: Our goal as a company has been to create a product that gets passed down from one generation to the next. If our products become important to a family, then we have been successful. Our son is active in the business, and hopefully he will carry it on. But if not, our legacy will be in homes around America.

Students Work to Put a Stop to Indoctrination in Public Schools

CATHERINE YANG



Dylan O'Neal at a conference.



(L-R) Mason Petska, Dylan O'Neal, Brody Petska, and Max Spurgeon founded SPARK, Students Protecting All Rights for Kids.

Brody Petska, Mason Petska, and Dylan O'Neal were only in third grade in Camden, Missouri, when they first encountered Common Core, and immediately it was clear something had gone off in their education.

"When you're 9 years old, well, we didn't really understand 'political indoctrination' or anything. But they always talked about [how] in the new standards you'd have to do this, we'd get in trouble for doing math our way, or get points deducted for doing any sort of assignment our way if it didn't follow Common Core standards," Brody said. By middle school, Common Core was "in full force" with assignments aimed to get students to think a certain way. But there was a more pressing issue at hand.

There were multiple teachers who would outright make fun of students, calling them names, on a repeated basis. In eighth grade, the three students and their friend Maxwell Spurgeon decided to push back, gathering signatures for a petition and reporting the bullying to the administration. Shortly thereafter, they founded SPARK, or Students Protecting All Rights for Kids.

When they reached high school, Common Core was something they could ignore no longer.

"There was a lot of political bias," Brody said.

Getting Assignments Thrown Out

The students started collecting assignments they felt shouldn't be allowed in public schools, and brought them to the administration to try to get them taken out of the curriculum.

These included an article by David Bender, chief strategy officer and political director of Progressive Voices, in which students read descriptions of what liberals and conservatives stood for, and were asked to highlight what they agreed with and self-identify as either a liberal or conservative. Bender's affiliation aside, the liberals, as he defined them, "generally approach human nature with a great deal of optimism," while conservatives, "not having such an optimistic opinion of people, feel they must often be controlled for their own best interests."

Another assignment they were told was meant to "challenge or change your beliefs" had students look at various paintings through a feminist lens, and a Marxist lens. One of these paintings showed Purgatory. "You have a Catholic student looking at their own religion, trying to change their beliefs about their own religion, with these lenses—that's what you want them to do," Dylan said. "You're trying to change this guy's religion with this assignment ... that was crossing the line. You can't do that in public school."

In 2016, the district stopped using Common Core. But the students still saw many assignments stamped with Common Core standards, so they started collecting those

“**I'd say that's what helped us the most, was that it wasn't just a couple of students voicing their concerns, it was 20, 30 students going up there.**”

Mason Petska, Students Protecting All Rights for Kids

“**The students started collecting assignments they felt shouldn't be allowed in public schools, and brought them to the administration to try to get them taken out of the curriculum.**”

for removal as well.

When they first started to submit assignments for review and removal, the administration pushed back. They were called in one by one to be questioned, or interrogated. It was likely to scare them off the issue, but they said it didn't work.

"It was a scary thing, you know, as a sophomore, junior, in high school. You didn't really know what you were doing, besides knowing this is wrong," Dylan said.

"They even tried to shut our group down numerous times. Camden High School was not fond of SPARK," Mason said. It felt like they'd had a target on their back ever since they'd stood up in eighth grade.

They were sent on a wild goose chase, told to refer to this or that portion of the school policy. Eventually they managed to get the district to form a committee of community members to review assignments they submitted for bias, which was grounds for removal. But even then, they'd each gotten a zero or F on an assignment even after it got dropped. Assignments that they got removed once—like the reading on liberals and conservatives—might get quietly put back in.

So they've been documenting the process, keeping copies of assignments and materials given out in the classroom.

"We have proof of everything happening," Brody said.

Growing Support

Things got easier in some respects. SPARK is a membership organization, and at any given point in time they had up to some 30 students; some would leave under pressure, or graduate, and new students continued to join. The group became well-known not just in school but in the larger community.

"I'd say that's what helped us the most, was that it wasn't just a couple of students voicing their concerns, it was 20, 30 students going up there," Mason said.

"And the students felt better knowing that they had a voice," Dylan said.

They felt they were dealing with a First Amendment rights issue, with freedom of speech and freedom of belief, and they were also calling attention to students' rights—that students attending public school deserved a fair education. They were tackling nonpartisan issues, and the membership reflected that: Students of different ethnicities and with a range of political and religious beliefs participated.

"You can't fight political bias with more political bias," Brody said.

Parents, once made aware of what students were facing, were staunchly supportive.

"They were disgusted, more or less," Dylan said of his own parents learning about the kinds of assignments they were being given in schools. Other parents in the community had similar reactions. "I haven't met one parent who supported the assignments we got kicked out."

In many cases, Dylan added, parents are

completely unaware of the level of indoctrination, and it's not their fault. The kid comes home from eight hours at school, and the parents will ask how it went. They'll say "good," and that's the end of it.

"Any kind of fundamentals, you know, morals that your parents tried to teach you throughout your life, gets kind of stripped away from you when we go into the school system," he said.

"It's become an epidemic across the nation and a lot of people don't even know it's happening," Brody said.

As they gained traction, they heard support from teachers as well—quietly. They would hear from faculty members who agreed the assignments had gone too far, and supported what they were doing.

Despite the administration pushback over the years, the students don't wish their school any ill will. They understand that some of them might be facing pressure, but that still doesn't make it right.

"Really we don't want to harm Camden, we don't want anything bad to happen there. We want it to be a good place to go to school and we want it to be a place where people can learn," Dylan said.

Legislation and Expansion

SPARK has turned into a movement, and though the three students have already graduated high school and have moved on to college, they haven't stopped their efforts to reform their local district.

"What I've seen, I don't want another person to go through the same thing. It's really repulsive," Mason said.

They have met with local, state, and federal officials who have expressed support for their efforts, and radio interviews and news coverage have led to people from other states reaching out to SPARK.

There is currently a bill in the works in the Missouri House of Representatives named the SPARK Bill. It would make indoctrination in public schools illegal, possibly with a penalty that would affect school funding or accreditation.

One of SPARK's goals is to expand nationally. They have already been holding workshops for parents and students of neighboring school districts, so they can set up similar membership groups and start to advocate for bias-free education. People from Virginia, Washington, Oklahoma, and a few other states have contacted them to say they're starting SPARK as well.

"We've been working on getting more people to know about what's happened here, and to let people know they're not alone," Mason said.

"They've been reaching out to us with the same kind of stuff we've been dealing with," Mason said.

"This is not just a Camden problem, this is a nationwide problem," Dylan said. "There's nothing really else out there like this. It's for student and by students. The more people that will see this, I think the more people will join it."



A Passion for Community

For 23-year-old Diamond Gibson, financial literacy and politics are key to lift up people out of poverty



Diamond Gibson in Manhattan's Financial District on Aug. 16, 2019.

CATHERINE YANG

Diamond Gibson is only 23, but she has already long been thinking about legacy—about the future of those in her neighborhood and the well-being of not just her future children, but several generations on.

“Let’s make sure our kids’ kids are great, that they don’t have to go through what we’re going through,” Gibson said.

Gibson, who spent this past summer doing an internship on Capitol Hill, is outspoken about politics and frequently volunteers on campaigns. She’s a Gen Z upstart who gets told all the time she needs to run for Congress. While politics is her main avenue to educate the community she cares about, her primary passion is financial literacy. It’s what led her to politics.

Hope at the End of the Tunnel

Gibson grew up in a financially volatile situation, and she’d remember her friends getting the newest shoes and newest clothes, or getting a Benz or Audi for their 16th birthday, and that grew into pent-up anger.

“I had this backwards mindset. Instead of my saying, ‘Oh, let me work hard and get good grades in school because then one day I can provide for myself, I can have the nicest clothes and keep my hair and stuff done,’ the younger me was like, ‘Let me do bad in school, let me this at school’ basically try to get attention, trying to punish my parents,” Gibson said.

It was her aunt who taught her how counterproductive that was.

“My aunt let me know, that’s not hurting my parents because they’ve already lived a life,” Gibson said.

Because of her rough home life, Gibson had eventually moved in with her aunt.

“I was a troubled, troubled kid,” she said. “And she just wanted me to be encouraged, and for me to know, no matter where you come from, you can come from the poorest of the poor, as long as you apply yourself you can succeed in life.”

“**I really love my community, and I really want them to wake up and not be played as a victim.**”

Diamond Gibson

Her aunt then handed her a book by Ben Carson.

Gibson learned that Carson, the secretary of Housing and Urban Development, had been angry early in his life as well; he dealt with it through jazz and a library card that offered access to book after book.

“That helped me realize that life is going to happen, and this is how you can deal with it and overcome,” Gibson said. She came out focused on a new goal.

“To make sure that I never give up,” she said. “That gave me hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel.”

In high school, while people spent their summers partying, Gibson said she spent her time reading financial literacy books in her driveway.

“The situation we were going through in life before I moved in with my aunt, I was just like, I never want to grow and just be broke and struggling,” Gibson said. “I never want my kids going through being broke and struggling, and worrying about where the next meal’s at.”

She was determined that if she was bringing kids in the world, they would have the opportunity to be kids and grow up, not be crippled by financial worries.

Politics Deep Dive

When the 2016 elections rolled around, there was no question Gibson was supporting Carson. But then the race came down between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, and Gibson realized she had to learn more.

“On social media, because as the young generation that’s where we get our news, I kept seeing bad things about both of them,” Gibson said.

It sent her into a deep dive on what issues each candidate stood for, and she couldn’t support the criminal justice, economic, and abortion stances Clinton took. Then she learned that for decades, the black vote had bolstered the Democratic Party, yet once voted into office, the officials hadn’t actually improved black communities.

All the lessons Gibson was taking in financial literacy were things her family members and neighbors didn’t know either. And the

values of faith, family, and freedom passed on in black communities, essentially conservative values, ran counter to many policies current Democrats ran on.

After that, there was no question of who she was voting for. More importantly, she wanted the people she loved to realize they could do better for themselves and see hope as well. Discussion of politics became her vehicle to help educate others.

“I really love my community, and I really want them to wake up and not be played as a victim,” Gibson said.

“I want them to realize, yes, we lived in these slums, but look at all the people that made it out and we can do it, too. All we have to do is change our mindset,” Gibson said.

Some shied away from the topic, saying politics wasn’t for ordinary people. She helped them see differently.

“That was always me as a younger kid—I’ve just always wanted better. But then I got into politics and I figured out if we vote for the right people, and it doesn’t matter which party, but as long as we vote for the right people that want the right policies in place to help our community, that we can get out of the slums,” Gibson said.

“That’s what keeps me waking up every day and speaking out, is speaking life into my community,” Gibson said. “Self-love programs, financial literacy programs, anything that I can work with to reach out in my community and help them elevate themselves.”

Gibson leverages social media, but also speaks very directly to her community. She walks the neighborhood and has conversations with people on the street. When she lived in Georgia, prior to moving to New York, she’d visit homeless shelters as well to teach people about programs that could help them.

“It might lead off from financial instability—or just life in general—some people feel hopelessness,” Gibson said. She tries to show them how to turn their mindset around and that education and growth are within their grasp. “And then when I come back and visit them they’re like, ‘Oh, have you done this [program]? I’m doing this, I’m telling my



family.’ So there’s this ripple effect—once you tell one person the next person goes on, and on, and on.”

Truth Wins

Gibson said she received some backlash when she first declared she was supporting Trump. Even friends and family called her horrible things, though the ones who really mattered and really knew her wanted to hear her reasoning.

But after what she suffered, growing up with no money, Gibson thought it laughable to let something like name-calling get her down now.

“What I’ve been through in life, it didn’t make me be like, ‘Oh, I need to shut up,’ or be in my room and cry,” she said. “It made

Gibson interned for Rep. Ted Budd (R-N.C.) this past summer.

COURTESY OF DIAMOND GIBSON



me dig in deeper—they just don’t see and one day they will see.”

Many do eventually see the truth for what it is, and often come back to apologize to Gibson.

Now that Gibson is in New York, race is a factor in a way it wasn’t when she was in Georgia. People tell her the South is racist, but she says the racism she might’ve experienced in the South is nothing like what she experiences in liberal New York.

She’ll be out campaigning for any conservative candidate and hear things like, “You guys can’t campaign for him, you’re black, you’re colored people.”

“I get that a lot in New York,” Gibson said. Now that she’s more recognizable, she sometimes gets dirty looks from complete strangers, which baffles her, because she walks by Bernie Sanders supporters every day and manages to respect their right to believe anything they want to believe.

In Washington, her experience has been much more civil. She was on a Vice panel where progressives and conservatives debated feminism, and many staffers recognized her, and regardless of party affiliation said she did a good job expressing her point of view.

“Well, more of America could be like that,” she said.

The hostility, she points out, is really actually a sign of brainwashing.

Gibson gave an example of a time the aggression went beyond dirty looks. She had been holding a Trump 2020 flag when she noticed a man circling her. Gibson’s father was punched in the face by the man while trying to protect her.

“You literally lost your freedom because you’re triggered by a flag,” Gibson said. “Because you couldn’t handle your emotions.”

The assailant might have rent to pay or family waiting at home, but if you let yourself get triggered emotionally by just a flag and get locked up, there’s something wrong.

“You’re being mentally weak,” Gibson said. She tries to teach people not to blindly vote for a party, but to think for themselves and understand their values. “I try to teach them to be mentally strong, because people can just take advantage of you if you’re not mentally strong.”

Gen Z

For Gibson, interning for Rep. Ted Budd (R-N.C.) was a lot of fun, and she hopes to spend another seven weeks interning on Capitol Hill next year if possible.

“I advise every young person to intern on Capitol Hill,” Gibson said. “You think you learned about government, you think that school taught you? No.”

She worked on bills and saw how legislators on both sides have to work together, how things really work versus what’s said in big committee meetings, how media spin plays out, and so on.

“It was an amazing feeling to just be on Capitol Hill and learn about government, and to learn that my ancestors, they helped build that—and now I’m walking around, helping to make laws, you know?” Gibson said. “That was an amazing feeling and I would never take that for granted. I learned a lot about history.”

There is definitely a new movement in conservatism, and Gibson says Gen Z is something to watch. These are young people who are clear about their values and policy ideas from day one, having learned from people like Candace Owens and Brandon Tatum.

“A lot of us were searching in life, growing up, like where do I fit in? And we all came together and realize, we were never meant to fit in, we were meant to stand out and help lead something,” Gibson said.

The entrepreneurial spirit of her peers inspires her. Gibson says the new conservatives aren’t strictly Republican, there’s a mix of conservative Democrats, libertarians, and people who are just curious. Their efforts also aren’t strictly political.

“[Gen Z] have a lot, a lot of things that are going to be out there. We’re starting a lot of our own stuff to try to help out our community.”

“My dream is to have a financial literacy company to reach out to the less fortunate, the urban inner-city communities, and teach them about financial education,” Gibson said. She intends to leave her future children the sort of legacy that will enable them to leave their legacies to the next generation, and the next. “That’s my goal.”

Is Our Culture Driving Our Young People Crazy?

How to help them resist the tide of fear and anxiety

JEFF MINICK

Today’s social media have enhanced human propensity to embrace fear and hysteria. Recent research by Britain’s University of Warwick Department of Psychology reveals a contagion of panic can occur even in the face of balanced, unbiased information. Here the researchers analyzed 154 participants on social media, dividing them into 14 chains, “with the first person in each chain reading balanced, factual news ar-

ticles, and writing a message to the next person about the story, the recipient writing a new message for the next person and so on.”

The result? “In every chain, stories about dreaded topics became increasingly more negative, and biased toward panic and fear as it was passed from person to person—and crucially, this effect was not mitigated when the original unbiased facts were reintroduced.” Yikes!



ANTON DARIUS/JUNSLASH

Depression among young people is increasing.

Current Delusions?

Evidence of possible mass delusion, particularly in the realm of culture and politics, is all around us. A large number of people believe climate change will wreak havoc on

the human race in the next decade. Sixteen-year-old Greta Thunberg, poster child of the climate change movement, has spent most of her life sick with fear that the Earth is in its last days. Does that belief re-

flect reality or is it a form of hysteria? Some accuse President Donald Trump of being a racist and a fascist. Is that viewpoint based on evidence, malice, or delusion? A few parents are encouraging their adolescents and teenagers to undergo gender change procedures. Are their motives sincere or are they caught up in a wave of hysteria?

Fueled by perceptions of personal and political catastrophes, anxiety among Americans has exploded in the last decade. What should strike us as extraordinary about this anxiety epidemic is that the economy is booming, violent crime and murder rates have plummeted, and we are engaged in no major wars. Yet American stress levels are among the highest in the world, with a good portion of that anxiety fueled by politicians, our progressive mainstream media, and so-called “social justice warriors.”

And this anxiety is infecting our young people.

Tough Times?

Suicide rates for teens and young adults have surged and are now at a 20-year high. Depression among young people is also increasing. Experts blame various factors for

“If you’re a parent with a toddler, odds are someone has said to you, ‘The world’s a terrible place. I sure wouldn’t want to raise a kid today.’ But is the world so terrible? And if so, compared to what?”

these sad statistics, from lack of sleep in the case of depression to social media bullying as a cause of suicide.

But what about the effects of our culture at large on our emotional state? Americans once looked with pride to their past and with hope toward the future, yet today’s students hear a drumbeat of negativity, that the past was a swamp of evil and oppression, and that the future promises only trouble and darkness. Even in elementary

school, the optimism of youth is all too often buried by such pessimism. And if you’re a parent with a toddler, odds are someone has said to you, “The world’s a terrible place. I sure wouldn’t want to raise a kid today.”

But is the world so terrible? And if so, compared to what?

Let’s go back a century, when our great-grandparents walked the earth.

A Visit With the Past

In 1919, World War I had just ended, leaving in its wake 17 million dead. In 1918–1919, an influenza epidemic killed another 50 million people worldwide. Death during childbirth and infancy far exceeded the rates of our own time, as did deaths from such treatable conditions as blood poisoning, tuberculosis, diphtheria, and a multitude of other diseases.

In 1919, many Americans were without electricity or indoor plumbing, few owned a refrigerator, and radio and television were nonexistent. A minority of young people attended college. Most worked on farms or labored, often in dangerous conditions, in factories.

Were Americans in the 1920s stressed? Did they live in constant fear? Certainly they had just cause.

But when we read the history of that era, or look at its magazines, or listen to its music, we don’t have a sense these people thought the sky was falling. Soon they would face the Great Depression. World War II, and the ramifications of the atomic bomb, but even in those circumstances they seemed more buoyant with hope than do we.

So how can we keep ourselves and our children from becoming part of what Charles Mackay calls “the herd” in his book “Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds”? How can we teach them to resist the fear and hysteria of our times?

Optimism, Gratitude, Serenity

Here are some suggestions: We can teach our children that most fears are groundless, that only a small percentage come into being, and that we waste time and limit our opportunities when we give way to groundless fear. That monster under the bed is just dust bunnies and a toy.

We can instill in them a sense of optimism. We can show them by

word and by example to see difficulties and problems as challenges to be overcome.

Gratitude. Here is the best weapon against the panic and occasional hysteria that sometimes casts so wide a net in our culture. If we find reasons for gratitude—everything from being alive on this planet to Grandma’s offer to pay for the braces on our teeth—we push despair from the table. Gratitude and despair can’t inhabit the same house, much less the same room.

Finally, we can lead them to this old prayer: “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

If we provide our children with such tools, we strengthen their ability to resist cultural delusions.

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

Betty Maxwell

On Helping People Choose Happiness

CATHERINE YANG

Betty Cantrell Maxwell was only 21 when she was crowned Miss America 2016, and at the time she'd been doing pageants for only barely two years.

"It's one of the only jobs I feel like you go from a completely normal person to a celebrity overnight. And that is not easy," Maxwell said. "It was a lot for me, especially going from basically nobody to celebrity."

In an instant, she was the center of attention, often negative attention, and thus began her year of service. Isolation, cyberbullying, having her words twisted and ridiculed in the media, and nonstop travel and work were suddenly all part of her new life. But with it came being able to put a smile on children's faces every day, using her gift for singing, and spiritual and personal growth no one can take away.

Maxwell's determination to turn a negative into a positive as she was on the road 340 days of the year is something she hopes can now help others.

"It's so easy to have a dark mindset in the world we live in—we live in a fallen world," Maxwell said. "And although there will always be bad people out there, there will always be bullies, there will always be people trying to tear you down, you cannot give in. Because then the darkness of the world wins."

"That's the biggest thing: Happiness is a choice, and you have to choose it every single day."

"You have to keep pushing through, you have to keep going," she said. With vision and courage, Maxwell pursued her childhood dreams of becoming an actress and singer, and found on her journey faith, selflessness, and a lot of grit. She admits she doesn't really have role models, but now that she's become a figure young children look up to, she feels called to be a good model for them, and not just a celebrity or icon—because it's a shame if the only role models young people have to look up to are merely famous, and not good.

"I feel like my head is in the right space. And I am so connected with my faith and standing up for what's right and doing the right thing, and helping people get through their problems."

Miss Unlikely

In her memoir "Miss Unlikely," Maxwell takes readers back through embarrassing childhood moments growing up on a farm in Georgia, vulnerable moments breaking up with ex-boyfriends, and backstage to media gaffes as she was on tour during her tenure as Miss America.

"People are usually embarrassed or terrified to talk about [those moments], so I was really adamant about including all of that in the book in order to be more relatable and to help young people who read my book to be able to feel more confident in themselves, that 'Hey, I go through that, too.'"

"It was a very vulnerable position for me, especially talking about things that I've never really talked about publicly before," Maxwell said. At the same time, writing parts of the book was therapeutic, as she was finally able to share her side of the story.

Maxwell is a classically trained singer, and originally began participating in pageants for the scholarship opportunities. She emphasizes that you don't have to be someone from a wealthy background or trained from childhood for pageants to be able to chase your dreams and make it. Again and again, Maxwell would place second in the pageants she entered, but she always won the talent portion with her opera pieces. Her voice got her noticed, and that's what led her to the Miss America pageant.

"I was a very unlikely contestant to win the title of Miss America, but you know, I never let that stop me from pursuing that as a goal," Maxwell said. "And if you never try, then you'll never know so I really feel like that's the most important thing—at least you have to try. You can't just never do it because that's an automatic failure."

Her message of "follow your dreams" is strongly accented by relentless hard work.

Throughout her journey, Maxwell was told "no" by countless people and sometimes even told to give up by those she expected most to support her. She had to choose how to respond to hard rejection and negativity because that's what it takes if you intend to truly follow your dreams.

"My life is a prime example of that," Maxwell said.

"It really was a challenge but it opened my eyes up to what I really am capable of."

One Step at a Time

Maxwell says that going on her Miss America tour was really the first time she had been independent.

"A lot changed in me during that year," Maxwell said. One of those things was her faith.

Maxwell grew up in a Greek Orthodox family, where faith was very much a part of their life.

"[Greek Orthodox is] very, very traditional, therefore a lot of people don't really stick to it or know about it," Maxwell said. Once on her own, she realized she had to make the decision to embrace her faith for herself. For the first time in her life, faith played a role in her life because she herself wanted it to.

"I began praying a lot more often every single night. God, please give me the strength to finish this day. Please give me the strength to finish this month. Give me the strength to finish this year—because I cannot do it alone," she said.

In addition to rediscovering her faith, Maxwell found inspiration in service. She learned to choose not to look at her situation as grueling travel or a taxing schedule, but how much it could impact others.

"That really got me up and going every



Maxwell performs onstage during the 2017 Miss America Competition at Boardwalk Hall Arena on Sept. 11, 2016, in Atlantic City, N.J.



The classically trained singer says one of the highlights of her year as Miss America was singing for members of the military and their families.



(L-R) Miss Mississippi Hannah Roberts, Miss Colorado Kelley Johnson, Miss America 2016 Betty Maxwell, Miss Louisiana April Nelson, and Miss Alabama Meg McGuffin attend the 2016 Miss America after-party in Atlantic City, N.J., on Sept. 13, 2015.



Maxwell attends the 142nd Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs in Louisville, Ky., on May 7, 2016.



Maxwell at the 2016 Miss America after-party in Atlantic City, N.J., on Sept. 13, 2015.

Throughout her journey, Maxwell was told 'no' by countless people and sometimes even told to give up by those she expected most to support her.

single day—the feeling that you get when you walk into a hospital full of kids and they look at your crown and they can't believe that Miss America is coming to visit them," she said.

As Miss America, she served as the National Goodwill Ambassador for Children's Miracle Network Hospitals.

"You just think about the situation that you're in, versus the situation of the people who you're visiting, and the people you're going to see put a smile on their face. It really does open your eyes that you're so blessed to be in this position right now, that taking one second of it for granted is one second you're going to regret," she said.

One of the highlights of her year was the USO tours, where she sang for military members and their families.

"Getting to sing and use my God-given gifts to help our troops feel a little bit more at home or feel a little bit more loved, that just that made my year so, so complete," she said.

"They give their lives and make the ultimate sacrifice for us, and that was something that

I felt like I could really have an impact on, and do something good and important."

Maxwell transformed the taxing role into one that solidified her faith and inner strength. She took everything she learned, being in a position where everything she did or said was limited and controlled, and is now an ardent motivational speaker. She looks back on all the rejection she endured and is now prepared for any response during her auditions as an actress and singer.

"Being Miss America gave me very thick skin," she said. "I feel like I can really handle anything now. After that any type of rejection I get, I can handle it. I take it in stride, get up the next day try again, God is still good. Even if the answer is no, God is still good. And you know, you just have to get up and keep trying. Every single day is a gift and another chance to try again."

The end of the tour hasn't meant the end of Maxwell's journey or the end of difficult obstacles.

"Every day I have to remind myself of what I've been doing, what I've overcome, and the

"That really got me up and going every single day—the feeling that you get when you walk into a hospital full of kids and they look at your crown and they can't believe that Miss America is coming to visit them."

Betty Maxwell, Miss America 2016

things that people have told me versus what I've actually done in my life," she said. "And when I remind myself of that, it really helps me to keep going if I receive a rejection for a part or an audition. I have to remind myself, OK, it's just one setback, I got to keep going. Got to keep pushing forward, got to look for new and better things. And I really feel like this book is a testament to that, to what I've been through and what I've overcome."

"And I really hope that it inspires and motivates every single person that reads it to be better versions of themselves, and if they're in a dark place in their life, to find the light and find the reason to keep going, to choose happiness."

Miss America 2016 Betty Maxwell attends the 2015 American Music Awards at Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles on Nov. 22, 2015.



JASON MERRITT/GETTY IMAGES



POPcorn AND INSPIRATION: FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL

'Chariots of Fire'

In Celebration of the True Spirit of the Olympics

MARK JACKSON

I never saw 1981's "Chariots of Fire." I knew it became an instant classic and won many Oscars, and I endured the theme song on the radio (in ancient times when popular movie scores were obviously can't age, but the storytelling techniques of directors can. That said, overall, "Chariots of Fire" moves at a more leisurely pace than our current attention span is used to, but it packs a punch in terms of reminding us about what's important in life.

So, playing catch-up, I rented it to see what all the fuss was about. It's stood the test of time (which isn't difficult when the setting is post-World War I). Historical period pieces obviously can't age, but the storytelling techniques of directors can. That said, overall, "Chariots of Fire" moves at a more leisurely pace than our current attention span is used to, but it packs a punch in terms of reminding us about what's important in life.

2 Runners

Ambitious British law student Harold Abrahams (Ben Cross), of Lithuanian-Jewish heritage, is a mega-talented sprinter. He attends Cambridge and, as a freshman, immediately challenges the 700-year-old-and-still-standing school record of racing around the perimeter of the institution's hallowed main courtyard.

He destroys the record and is immediately taken note of by the bigoted, elite faculty, who refer to him as "the Semite."

For Abrahams, running is "a weapon." When asked what that means by his coy,

hard-to-get actress girlfriend Sybil (Alice Krige) (who, in time, turns out to be a true soul mate), Abrahams replies that it's a weapon against being Jewish.

He relates to her that while he is often invited to the trough, he's not allowed to drink. He's well-respected by classmates, though, especially by fellow track teammates.

The other sprinter in this movie about sprinting is China-born Scotsman Eric Liddell (Ian Charleson), the son of Christian missionaries.

He's also blessed with blistering speed. He intends to return to missionary life eventually, but unlike his sister and her protestations about his running, Liddell sees his talent as God-given and therefore his duty to use it to glorify the Lord by attempting to medal in the 1924 Olympics. Liddell is the only man to have beaten Harold Abrahams, thus far, in a footrace.

Theirs is a stark contrast of motives. Abrahams hires a professional coach, Sam Mussabini (Ian Holm), to take chance out of the winning equation, much to the disgust of two of Cambridge's dons (Sir John Gielgud, Lindsay Anderson) who feel he's thereby stooping to "plebeian" status.

They would prefer he take a less serious (and therefore more aristocratic) amateur approach. Which Abrahams finds ridiculous, knowing they're as keen as he is to have the school win.

We've got two world-class rivals competing for diametrically opposed reasons.

Abrahams's motivation is generated primarily by fear of losing. And affirmation of self. It will most likely never be the case, due to his inner conflict, that he'll be able to savor victory.

On the other hand, the warm, extremely likable Liddell, who, ironically, is more of a "mensch" than Abrahams, runs out of a desire to glorify God by putting the physical gifts bestowed upon him to good use. He's got inner peace, but his conflicts are external—the Olympic committee schedules his race on a Sunday, and he flat-out refuses to run on the Sabbath.

And so, we've got two world-class rivals competing for diametrically opposed reasons.

Other Themes

Rounding out the story are secondary narratives of Liddell's conflict with his sister, Abrahams's wooing of his future wife, as well as brief training montages (Abrahams's, that is, since he's the one going above and beyond training-wise).

And then there are the behind-the-scenes attempts by Olympic officials as well as British politicians and royalty to sweet-talk or otherwise manipulate with intent to dissuade Liddell into running his race when they want him to, and not when God wants him to. One of these is the Prince of Wales (David Yelland) functioning in dual capacity as the head of the British Olympic committee.

(Left) Ben Cross (L) and Nigel Havers in "Chariots of Fire."

(Right) Alice Krige and Ben Cross in "Chariots of Fire."



(Left) (L-R) Ian Charleson, Ben Cross, and Brad Davis in "Chariots of Fire."

(Right) Sir John Gielgud (L) and Lindsay Anderson as Cambridge University dons in "Chariots of Fire."

Ian Charleson (C) in "Chariots of Fire."



Apparently, many truths were stretched and enhanced to rev up the drama. The above-mentioned political hand-wringing, wheedling, and cajoling in fact were much more low-key. But then—that's Hollywood. And there's nothing wrong, in storytelling, to heighten the reality in order to stress a point.

3 Things Stood Out

I realized the now long-famous music by Vangelis Papatianassiou was the template for the theme music of 1986's "Top Gun." Not a particularly profound insight.

Next, was the comment by the university don played by Shakespearean theater royalty John Gielgud. When Abrahams is done vociferously stating his case about winning at all costs and takes

'Chariots of Fire'

Director
Hugh Hudson

Starring
Ben Cross, Ian Charleson, Ian Holm, Sir John Gielgud, Nigel Havers, Nicholas Farrell, Alice Krige

Running Time
2 hours, 5 minutes

Rated
PG

Release Date
April 9, 1982 (USA)

★★★★☆

his leave, the don shrugs his shoulders at his colleague and says, "A different god. A different mountaintop." In his case, it stemmed from bigotry and the looking down the nose at a "lesser" religion. But some societies are very much in agreement that there are different gods, different mountaintops, and different paradises.

Thirdly, "Chariots of Fire" flies in the face of modern Olympic competition and doping, lying, cheating, and cheating by lying about doping. Lance Armstrong, anyone? The endless need for drug testing; the scandals that have become ho-hum, because ours is a modern society that supports winning at all costs.

Abrahams's attitude was a harbinger of things to come. His later life was highly influential in regard to sports and the

Olympics. He was an athletics journalist for 40 years, and a sports commentator for BBC radio (which included reporting on the 1936 Berlin Olympics). Later he became president of the Jewish Athletic Association, as well as chairman of the Amateur Athletic Association.

It's therefore refreshing and uplifting to bear witness to the attitude of Liddell's integrity. Of having the moral courage to stay true to his faith and convictions above all else, regardless of the outcome. Don't see much of that these days. So quaint, so old-fashioned. And yet moving when you see it.

Granted, Abrahams's conviction in the face of pressure by the university to change his ways is also admirable. And yet, Liddell, after a lifetime of service, was mourned by all of Scotland at his death.

FINE ARTS

Michelangelo's 'Dream of Human Life'

LONDON, COURTAULD GALLERY, PRINCE GATE REQUEST



"Il Sogno (The Dream, usually called "The Dream of Human Life")," circa 1533, by Michelangelo Buonarroti. Drawing, black chalk, sheet: 15 5/16 inches by 10 15/16 inches.

ERIC BESS

Around 1533, the Italian Renaissance artist Michelangelo produced a series of drawings that he gave to his close friends. At the time, drawings were typically produced as sketches for larger works. These drawings, however, were produced as finished products to be given as gifts.

In her article "Michelangelo's Dream," Maria Ruvoldt suggests that this is one of the first times in history that a drawing was completed for its own sake. Drawings that served as sketches for larger works were usually completed at the behest of patrons, like the Medici family

or the pope, who were interested in specific representations of humanist or religious subject matter.

Ruvoldt suggests, however, that the "ostensible privacy and intimacy of this new form allowed for a unique degree of freedom of invention and interpretation," and this allowed Michelangelo to produce an image "to be meditated upon, a work whose pleasure derives from its endless unfolding of meaning, affording the viewer delight in returning to it again and again."

In other words, Michelangelo had the freedom to produce drawings from his imagination, and "The Dream of Human Life" is a result of this freedom. But

what does the unfolding meaning of "The Dream of Human Life" tell us today?

Michelangelo produced an interesting and creative scene. A male, nude figure sits on a box that contains masks of different facial expressions. He leans on a sphere, turns his head away from his body, and looks up toward a winged spirit who, mid-flight, blows a trumpet toward the figure's head.

But how is Michelangelo responding to these sins? Does he present a simple renunciation of vice, or is something else steeped in his intention?

The winged spirit appears to come straight down from the sky with its trumpet aimed right at the area of the forehead above the brow. Why does the winged spirit aim its trumpet

fleeing. Floating heads abound, and a pair of hands appear to hold a money pouch.

The Courtauld Institute of Art website suggests that this drawing "shows a youth being roused by a winged spirit from the vices that surround him."

The philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas helped influence the Italian Renaissance understanding of cardinal vices. The seven vices or sins are pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth. The depicted figures surrounding the central figure do display some elements of these sins.

But how is Michelangelo responding to these sins? Does he present a simple renunciation of vice, or is something else steeped in his intention?

The winged spirit appears to come straight down from the sky with its trumpet aimed right at the area of the forehead above the brow. Why does the winged spirit aim its trumpet

here of all places? Is it aiming at the mind, soul, or body? What is important about this specific place?

The winged spirit appears to come straight down from the sky with its trumpet aimed right at the area of the forehead above the brow.

Let us consider Marsilio Ficino. Marsilio Ficino was a neoplatonic philosopher who was head of the Platonic Academy at the Medici villa during the Italian Renaissance. Michelangelo attended this academy as a young teenager and was influenced by Ficino's neoplatonism.

Ficino suggested that the soul served as an intermediary between heaven and earth, possessing aspects of both the heavens above and the earth below. For example, the soul moved in time and space but reflected on eternal and incorporeal ideas and ideals.

It was possible, however, for the soul to be overwhelmed by the body through which it communicated. Being overwhelmed, the soul would forget its divine connection to heaven.

Let's return to the drawing at hand. Is the winged figure aiming its trumpet at the intermediary between heaven and earth—the soul?

What about the box with the masks underneath it? These masks have different expressions on them and are ready to be, but are not being used. Must we put away the masks we wear in day-to-day life in order to get closer to the truths of our own souls? Or, if we are to hear the

sounds of heaven, must we remain unbothered by the sentiments and opinions that would contort our faces?

What about the blank globe on which the figure leans? Does it represent the earth on which we live? Is it a blank earth waiting for us to imbue it with the heavenly images and sounds produced by the soul? Or does it represent empty temptations and earthly pleasures that we must turn away from in order to remember the divine part of ourselves?

The halo of figures engaging in vices doesn't seem to actually be present. The figures seem to exist ephemerally, as if at any moment they will disappear into the mistiness of the background. Yet they are there and are presented like nagging thoughts that refuse to disintegrate.

Are these earthly vices what the soul must leave behind if it wishes to regain its role as

intermediary between heaven and earth, or is the dissipation of these vices dependent on heavenly intervention? In other words, does heaven's trumpet scare the vices away, or must the soul choose to divorce itself from vice in order to hear the trumpet?

These are big questions packed into this small drawing. Most of them do not have an absolute answer, irrespective of whether they are asked in relation to the drawing or not.

I think this is what Ruvoldt means when she says that "The Dream of Human Life" is a work "to be meditated upon, a work whose pleasure derives from its endless unfolding of meaning, affording the viewer delight in returning to it again and again."

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

ALL PHOTOS BY 20TH CENTURY FOX



ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

6 Tips for Parenting in the Present

BARBARA DANZA

My family and I were recently enjoying some old videos from our early days, back when our children were toddling around and their parents were still figuring out what on earth they were doing. (Update: They're still trying to figure that out.)

What struck me as we watched was how much I missed of the moments that were caught on-screen—my daughter's face as she was surprised by something, my son's attempts to get our attention about something else, their expressions, and what they were focused on.

I was there and so was my husband. We were all joyfully together. And yet, there were elements of those simple moments in time that I had missed as I was tidying up, or helping someone with something, or doing other parent-ish things, and that the camera picked up. It made me think about how many moments I might have missed along the way.

From the time we become parents, we begin to receive this piece of advice in various ways: Enjoy their childhood while you can, even though the day-to-day can be challenging, for it goes by so fast.

"The days are long but the years are short," as they say.

While not the easiest thing to hear sometimes, especially when your infant is up crying all night or your teenager is speaking to you in a way you that makes you question

your ability to parent at all—the truth of the sentiment becomes clearer as you advance through your parenthood journey.

While it's impossible to notice everything, it's also increasingly possible to miss far too much, as our attention falls prey to distractions and hustle culture. What we don't want is to look back with regret for having worked too much or, worse, having being distracted by our phones, and thus missing opportunities to truly be there for our children in all the ways they need us.

A goal I think no parent would regret is to improve the quality of attention you give your children. Here are some ideas about how to do that.

Make Time for Yourself

Perhaps a counterintuitive first step, but one way to not be thoroughly distracted when interacting with your children is to allow yourself time to tackle the things that distract you. Waking up before anyone else in your home is a great way to do just that.

Whether you want time to read, quietly enjoy a cup of coffee, take a long shower, or get work done, schedule time for yourself to free your mind later.

Step Away from Your Phone

These addictive devices are hard for most people to ignore. Think of the message you're sending to your kids when, in their presence, you're giving all of your attention to a tiny, glowing rectangle. If you were a fly on

▲ Make time to move your body for increased energy and reduced stress. A great way to get this done is to play an active game with your children.

It will take work, but simplifying your life makes room for the essential.

the wall watching the scene unfold, you'd feel sorry.

Make a rule to ignore your phone in your children's presence. Plug it in far away from arm's reach and know that you'll check it when they go to bed or some other time. You don't want this, of all things, to get in the way of being the best parent you can be.

Exercise

Make time to move your body for increased energy and reduced stress. A great way to get this done is to play an active game with your children. They will love it!

Meditate

Meditation, over time, can help you to calm your mind and slow down, providing much more room for you to be present in any given moment. Give it a try.

Let Go

Perhaps you're overcommitted in areas of your life that are a lower priority than your family is. Perhaps you have too much stuff in your home that is taking time to maintain. Perhaps you're overcome with negative emotions or stress about one thing or another.

In either case, it will take work, but simplifying your life makes room for the essential.

Become Curious

When's the last time you looked upon your children with curiosity? These little individuals, with their unique character traits, temperaments, and personalities have as much to teach you as you have to teach them.

Don't lose sight of what a miraculous thing this journey is and these people are. Look upon them with wide-eyed wonder, appreciate them for who they are, and you'll find it difficult to miss the precious moments of their childhood.

Parents, Your Kids Are More Flexible Than You Are

EMMA FREIRE

"I really want to do it. But I think will be so hard!"

I said this to a fellow mother a few years ago. We were discussing my desire to move my son's crib out of my bedroom and into the same room as his older sister. Her reply surprised me.

"Maybe it will be easy," she said. "Sometimes parents get very worried about things that aren't such a big deal for children."

I confess that I didn't take her advice. I was too fearful to change our sleeping arrangements until we subsequently moved to a new house. But I've thought back on the

conversation quite a few times since then. That mother was on to something. Time after time, I've gotten all worked up about imposing a change on my children that then turned out to go over very easily.

Here are some examples: I recently realized—to my shame—that my daughter had fallen into some unhealthy eating patterns. I started making elaborate plans to improve her nutritional intake. However, it quickly became clear to me that even a few small changes made a big impact.

I became more steadfast about refusing requests for unhealthy snacks, and I insisted that she take at least a few bites of the healthy

meals I cooked. At some point along the way, I'd labeled my daughter a "difficult eater." The truth is, with just a bit more nudging on my part, she's quite amenable to healthy food.

When my son was a baby, he adored his pacifier. I began to dread the battle I imagined we would face when it finally came time to wean him from it. I made several attempts to limit his pacifier use exclusively to his crib. But whenever there was a disruption to our routine, that rule would get tossed out the window.

Then, one day, when he was about 18 months old, my son lost his only pacifier on an outing. I decided that

was a sign he should go cold turkey. And you know what happened? Nothing! He barely noticed it was gone, and he's been pacifier-free ever since.

Parents know in theory that children are very flexible and can adapt to pretty much anything. So why do we get so mentally worked up about making changes?

Maybe the reason is that these changes will be hard on us. It is the parents who are the inflexible ones, not the kids. I'd fallen into a routine of giving my daughter certain foods. That was easy for me. It was convenient to hand my son his pacifier to get him to stop crying. I was resisting change because it

required more effort on my part. To be clear, I'm not suggesting children always easily adapt to any change their parents have to impose on them. There will, of course, be struggles, for changes often mean tears and tantrums. However, as parents we need to acknowledge that many times it is we who are the problem, not our children.

Emma Freire is a writer living in Sao Paulo, Brazil. She has also been published in *The Federalist* and *The American Conservative*. This article was originally published on *Intellectual Takeout*.

FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES

Funny Food Poetry

Courtesy of The Society of Classical Poets

Wobbly Reflections

by Sally Cook

What does the jello think
As it wobbles in the bowl?
It dreads the sucking sink,
But has no stated goal.

A crystal dish will suit
Its personality.
It snuggles up to fruit,
Is clinging as can be.

Aggressive; passive too,
It has one simple dream,
And jiggles through and through
At thoughts of plump whipped cream.

You Can Keep the Cilantro

by Father Richard Libby

I'm glad to be a Texan; we feast on hearty food,
Smoked brisket and potatoes and slaw are mighty good,
And pinto beans, well seasoned, augment our cooking's fame;
But if you add cilantro, I'll pass, thanks just the same.

Old Mexico's influence can be perceived with ease;
We love our breakfast tacos, with meats and eggs and cheese!
A tangy, spicy salsa is always kept nearby;
But if it has cilantro, I'll eat my tacos dry.

Give me sage and lavender, and rosemary, dill, and thyme;
Parsley has a pungent taste, and basil is sublime.
Chives make a dish more tangy, and mint makes food more sweet;
But you can keep cilantro, that's one herb I won't eat!

DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE ALL-CASHEW DIET?

INDIAN FOOD IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK

“If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world.”

J.R.R. TOLKIEN (1892–1973)

ANNA TOCHENIKOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK

By Aidan Danza, age 13

PESKY ANIMALS OF THE BACKYARD

WESTERN GRAY SQUIRREL

When you set out a bird feeder, often the first animal you see is not the sparrow, wren, blue jay, or mockingbird you were expecting, but a large, grey rodent. It has the largest appetite of the backyard animals, aside from the well-known, uncommon raccoon, and is known as the eastern gray squirrel. After you see your first squirrel, you might see other mammals in the backyard. These animals can be pesky but they're always lovable.

RACCOON

Raccoons are also very well-known species. They are extremely adaptable—all they need is easy access to water and they can live in a habitat. They will live in dens in trees, but will also use deserted buildings, barns, abandoned burrows, and attics. Their face is extremely well known, with that black burglar mask, gray, stocky body, and black-barred tail. Males are larger than females, and they normally live for around five years. They are very solitary animals, and they climb and swim well, adding to their adaptability. Raccoons will eat literally anything, much more so than squirrels. Much of this diet is enabled by their forepaws, which act like hands to pry open prey. They will often use their forepaws to pick up food and put it in their mouth, just like we humans eat a sandwich.

AMAZING ESCAPES!

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Down

- Baltimore seafood treat (8)
- Chicago-style dipper with Italian sweet peppers (11)
- Big lunch? (7)
- Sandwich often cut into quarters (4)
- Philly cheese _____ (5)
- Caribbean ham and swiss (5)
- Leftover Thanksgiving turkey (7)
- Sandwich in a tortilla (4)

Easy puzzle 1

3	9
1	5

20

÷ × − +

Solution For Easy 1
(6 - 5) = (1 + 6)

Medium puzzle 1

5	14
1	11

41

÷ × − +

Solution for Medium 1
1 × (91 - 5 × 11)

Hard puzzle 1

26	31
23	28

15

÷ × − +

Solution for Hard 1
62 × 16 = 92 × 82
16 - 62 × (92 - 82)

Across

- KFC offering, say (15)
- City home to the world's oldest university (founded 1088) (7)
- Australian sandwich with a hamburger and a frankfurter inside (8)
- Deli order (3)
- Every kid's favorite! (3)
- Sandwich with sauerkraut (6)
- New Orleans' Italian sandwich (10)
- Big Easy lunch (5)
- Hero's other name (9)
- Croissan'wich alternative (11)

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The Barberini Vase, circa A.D. 1-25, is made of dark cobalt blue and opaque white cameo glass. The blue is very noticeable when light comes through it.



The original Portland Vase by Josiah Wedgwood. Jasperware. The vase is an attempt to copy the Barberini Vase and is the result of four years' work to perfect the manufacturing process.

CRAFTSMANSHIP

Josiah Wedgwood's Portland Vase

The Pinnacle of Classical Perfection

A faithful copy of the antique Barberini Vase

LORRAINE FERRIER

Josiah Wedgwood spent his life perfecting the art of pottery, establishing 260 years ago the company that bears his family name. His near-perfect works were and still are the choice for monarchs, heads of

state, and purveyors of good taste worldwide.

Wedgwood came from a family of well-established potters in Staffordshire, England. His father, brother, and cousins all worked in the craft. But it was Wedgwood (1730-1795) who became known as the "Father of English Potters."

He created new ceramics such as Queen's Ware (1762), Black Basalt (1768), and Jasper (1774). And he pioneered a novel approach to selling, which we now know as marketing. Wedgwood knew his customers, enjoyed experimenting, and had a deep appreciation of beauty and the art of the ancients.

Aspiring to Ancient Perfection: The Barberini Vase
Wedgwood's most acclaimed piece of pottery is his Portland Vase, a reproduction of the exquisite ancient Roman Barberini Vase made around A.D. 1-25.

Continued on Page 16

What Our Readers Say:

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LITERATURE

Stone Walls, Iron Bars, Paper and Pens

A look at writers and prisons

JEFF MINICK

For two years in the early 1990s, I taught adult basic education twice a week in a prison in Hazelwood, North Carolina. My students and I met for classes in a trailer, where, depending on their capabilities, they worked on everything from learning to read to preparing for the GED. Most of them were serving time for selling or possessing drugs, though two were murderers, and one, a young man missing teeth who should have received help in a mental institution, was a child molester.

Prisons have long served as incubators for literature.

Some of these men shared their aspirations with me: welder, carpenter, and long-distance truck driver. One guy, who often spent some class time drawing impressive pictures of cars, expressed an interest in art.

None of them, however, evinced any interest in writing other than the occasional letter home. Looking back at my 40-year-old self, I wonder whether I failed them as a teacher in that department. Writing can provide a means of therapy, and had I asked those who could construct sentences and paragraphs to keep journals or compose essays, perhaps that small spark might have ignited a flame.

After all, prisons have long served as incubators for literature.

The Iron Bars of Inspiration

St. Paul wrote four of his epistles while under house arrest by the Romans. An imprisoned Marco Polo related his adventures to a fellow inmate, Rustichello da Pisa, who shaped them into “The Travels of Marco Polo.” In the late 15th century, Sir Thomas Malory began his Arthurian romances while incarcerated for a variety of crimes. In the Tower of London, Sir Walter Raleigh wrote Volume I of his “History of the World”; his decapitation ended his dreams of a subsequent four volumes.

In more recent times, historical figures as dissimilar as Adolf Hitler and Mahatma Gandhi have composed autobiographies in jail cells. In April 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote his classic “Letter From Birmingham Jail,” which did more than any other document of his time to inspire the Civil Rights movement.

Let’s look in more detail at four authors whose imprisonment spurred their writing.

2 Men of Faith

Accused of treason, the sixth-century

theologian and philosopher Boethius wrote “The Consolation of Philosophy” in prison while awaiting his execution. Over a thousand years later, Samuel Johnson made the remark, “Depend on it, sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.”

In the case of Boethius, Johnson’s words are right on target. For a millennium, “The Consolation of Philosophy” was the most widely read book in the West after the Bible. It acted as a bridge between antiquity and the Middle Ages, and heavily influenced early Renaissance writers like Dante.

John Bunyan was a minister who held fast to his faith. After the English Restoration in 1660, the king and parliament banned nonconformist Protestantism. Refusing to give up his preaching, Bunyan was arrested, sentenced, and in part for refusing to compromise, eventually spent 12 years in prison. His young wife, stepmother to Bunyan’s four children, survived only from the kindness of former members of Bunyan’s congregation and from the pittance received from the shoelaces Bunyan made in prison.

But Bunyan made more than shoelaces in that cell. He wrote “Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners” and began what became a Christian classic, “The Pilgrim’s Progress,” a work that would influence authors like C.S. Lewis, Herman Melville, and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Today, Bunyan’s tale of Christian and the trials he endures while journeying to The Celestial City has been adapted into “Dangerous Journey: The Story of Pilgrim’s Progress,” a book and a film for children that remain popular.

The Embezzler

Under indictment for embezzlement at the bank where he worked, William Sydney Porter fled to Honduras to escape the police, returning to the United States only when he learned of his wife’s serious illness. After her death, he served three years in an Ohio prison, where he began his rise to fame writing short stories under the pen name O. Henry. Once freed, he spent most of his life in Manhattan, the setting for many of his stories.

The influence of prison and what he learned there can be found in several of his stories. In “The Cop and the Anthem,” for instance, we meet Soapy, a homeless man who tries his best to get arrested so that he might spend the winter in jail. He orders an expensive meal in a restaurant that he can’t afford, accosts a young woman, pretends to be drunk, and steals an umbrella. But again and again, circumstances prevent the police from arresting him. Finally, after hearing an organ playing inside of a church, Soapy decides to turn his life around and walk the straight path, only to be arrested for loitering.



Like so many of O. Henry’s stories, including his most famous, “The Gift of the Magi,” this one ends with a twist and a note of irony.

The influence of prison and what he learned there can be found in several of O. Henry’s stories.

The Freedom Fighter

For one writer, his stint in prison and exile not only influenced his own work and won him a Nobel Prize, but also helped bring about the downfall of the Soviet Union.

A captain of artillery during World

War II, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was arrested near the end of the war for making negative comments about the Soviet Union and Stalin in a letter to a friend. During the eight years he endured in prison and labor camps, Solzhenitsyn exchanged his belief in communism for Eastern Orthodoxy and Russian tradition. After his release, he was ordered into internal exile in Russia.

These experiences formed in him the ideas for books like “The Gulag Archipelago” and “One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.” Lesser known are the poems he composed and memorized while incarcerated, carrying the words in his head until he could put them on paper.

After years of battling Soviet authorities about the publication of his work, in 1974 Solzhenitsyn was banished from his beloved Russia and spent the next 20 years in exile, mostly in the United States, until the Soviet Union

collapsed.

Here is one of those rich ironies of history. The man whom the Soviets jailed, harassed, and banished for his attacks on communism was one of those responsible for its collapse. His writing stands as a mighty tribute to the power of literature to change the world.

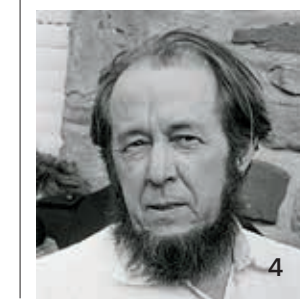
In “The Gulag Archipelago,” Solzhenitsyn offers this benediction for his imprisonment:

“Bless you prison, bless you for being in my life. For there, lying upon the rotting prison straw, I came to realize that the object of life is not prosperity as we are made to believe, but the maturity of the human soul.”

Another imprisoned writer, poet Richard Lovelace, wrote long ago, “Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage.” Boethius, Bunyan, O. Henry, Solzhenitsyn—these writers testify to that truth.



Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of home-schooling students in Asheville, N.C. Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.



1. St. Paul is believed to have written his epistles from a prison cell in Rome. “Saint Paul Writing His Epistles,” circa 1618–1620, attributed to Jean Valentin.

2. A portrait of John Bunyan, 1684, by Thomas Sadler. National Portrait Gallery, London.

3. Writer William Sydney Porter, better known as O. Henry, in 1909.

4. The Nobel Prize-winning author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, in 1974.

5. Boethius teaching his students, in a 1385 Italian manuscript of “The Consolation of Philosophy,” MS Hunter 374 (V.1.11), Glasgow University Library.

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Josiah Wedgwood and his craftsmen undertook many trials to reproduce the Barberini Vase. Many can be seen at the Wedgwood Museum.

CRAFTSMANSHIP

Josiah Wedgwood's Portland Vase

The Pinnacle of Classical Perfection

A faithful copy of the antique Barberini Vase

Continued from Page 13

"Except the Apollo Belvedere, the Niobes, and two or three others of the first-class marbles, I do not believe that there are any monuments of antiquity existing that were executed by so great an artist," wrote Sir William Hamilton on July 24, 1786, about the Barberini Vase. Hamilton, the British ambassador to the kingdom of Naples, was also an avid antiquarian.

Today, the Barberini Vase, held at The British Museum in London, is still thought of as the foremost example of ancient cameo glass. At first glance, the vase appears black, but a closer look reveals translucent dark cobalt blue and opaque white cameo glass. The vase was probably part of a funeral monument and is thought to have been an amphora, but the amphora's pointed base had been damaged and repaired to a flat but uneven base.



The Royal Mint's commemorative coin features Wedgwood's Portland Vase, to celebrate Wedgwood's 260th anniversary. The coin's edge is inscribed with "Everything gives way to experiment," which is based on Josiah Wedgwood's motto.

The Barberini Vase Comes to England
The Barberini Vase came to England in 1783 with a number of items Hamilton brought with him from Italy that he intended to sell. The Dowager Duchess of Portland bought the vase from him for her private museum collection, and thereafter it became known as the Portland Vase. For simplicity, in this article the name "Barberini Vase" will refer to the original and "Portland Vase" to Wedgwood's copy.

Sculptor John Flaxman wrote to Wedgwood on Feb. 5, 1784, telling him about the Barberini Vase that had just arrived in England to much acclaim. Flaxman thought it to be the "grandest & most perfect Greek Sculpture."

"It is the finest production of Art that has been brought to England and seems to be the very apex of perfection to which you are endeavoring to bring your bisque & jasper," he wrote in the same letter, mentioning the unglazed ceramics Wedg-

wood used, with Jasper being Wedgwood's own innovation. Having worked with Wedgwood on numerous occasions, Flaxman would've known what Wedgwood aspired to in his artwork.

Flaxman's assumptions were correct, but it wasn't until June 10, 1786, that Wedgwood secured a loan of the Barberini Vase just three days after it was sold to the third Duke of Portland at the estate sale of his mother, the Duchess of Portland.

Reproducing the Barberini Vase

Wedgwood was already reproducing ancient classical vases, catering to the growing interest in classical works at the time. During the time that Wedgwood made his Portland Vase, he had been producing black basalt vases, which had Greek and Roman scenes copied from Hamilton's collection of ancient ware, the Wedgwood Museum archivist Lucy Lead said in a phone interview.



(Above) A Jasperware portrait medallion of Josiah Wedgwood.

(Left) On the base of Wedgwood's Portland Vase is a figure thought to be the Greek named Paris.

(Below L and R) Wedgwood's wax molds that were used to make a cast for manufacturing the reliefs on the Portland Vase.

Wedgwood chose to reproduce the Barberini Vase in Jasperware, a stoneware of his own innovation.

The 18th century was a time of increased interest in all things antique due to archaeological excavations in Rome, and the advent of the commonplace gentlemen's grand tour visiting these great ancient sites.

"People were starting to move toward neoclassicism, ... and these [classical] pieces were deemed to have reached the pinnacle of good style and taste in ancient times. When people like Wedgwood are reproducing and manufacturing them again, they are tapping into the general vogue of the period," Lead said.

Wedgwood chose to reproduce the Barberini Vase in Jasperware, a stoneware of his own innovation. He spent about four years trying to perfect Jasperware, Lead said. "Nobody had ever seen anything like this previously anywhere within the ceramic world, so Jasper really is a unique invention," Lead said.

Jasperware is a stoneware ceramic, which means that after firing, it doesn't need to be glazed. What makes it so special is that it's white stoneware that can be colored by adding various metallic oxides of black, blue, pink, yellow, red, or whatever color is required.

Making a Barberini Vase in clay doesn't produce an exact replica. Clay doesn't have the translucent qualities of the blue-black glass of the Barberini Vase, and although Flaxman made delicate and exacting copies of the bas-reliefs, his Jasper reliefs could never match the opaque cameo glass of the original.

Although Wedgwood was skilled in copying antiques, reproducing the Barberini Vase proved no easy feat. He'd seen an illustration of the vase in one of 15 volumes of French archaeologist Bernard de Montfaucon's "Antiquity Explained and Represented in Diagrams."

It seems that in seeing the vase in

person, rather than on paper, Wedgwood came to understand why Hamilton compared its workmanship to that of the finest of ancient marbles. "I proceeded with spirit, on sufficient assurance that I should be able to equal, or excel, if permitted, that copy of the vase; but now that I can indulge myself with full and repeated examinations of the original work itself, my crest is much fallen," he wrote to Hamilton.

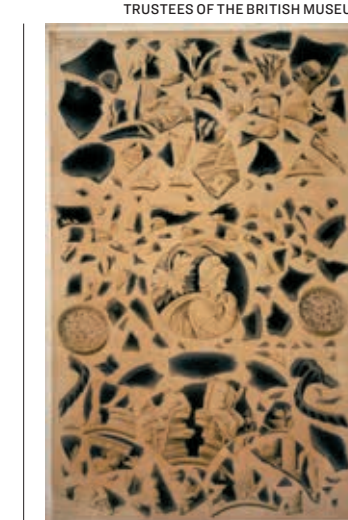
But Wedgwood persevered. Wedgwood, his son Josiah Wedgwood II, and his craftsmen, including Flaxman, took four years to perfect the manufacturing of the Portland Vase. He kept detailed accounts of the processes for all his work in his own book, a record of his firings. Along with the book, The Wedgwood Museum has two examples of trial pieces made on his way to perfecting the Portland Vase. One vase shows fractured reliefs that had fallen off, and the other shows where the ceramic body bubbled in the kiln. Trials of the various enamel work can also be seen, where Wedgwood experimented with the color, tones, and shading.

Wedgwood's diligence paid off. On June 15, 1790, Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was the president of the Royal Academy of Art, deemed Wedgwood's Portland Vase a "correct and faithful imitation both in regard to general effect, and the most minute detail of the parts."

Making the Portland Vase

Wedgwood's original Portland Vase was made in black or very dark blue Jasperware. This reinforced "how special Jasper is, how exclusive it is. And then, that it has this capability of being as fine as an ancient cameo glass vase," Lead said.

Wedgwood's Portland Vase is "still deemed as being one of the most difficult pieces that we make because you have



RECONSTRUCTING THE BROKEN BARBERINI VASE

In 1845, the Barberini Vase was smashed to smithereens by a drunkard—who by his own admission, "had been indulging in intemperance the week before." The vase became a nightmare of a jigsaw puzzle to reconstruct.

The British Museum used Wedgwood's Portland Vase to repair the Barberini Vase from the 200 fragments. The vase was quickly mended, yet it wasn't until years later that most of the remaining 37 shards of glass were reunited with the vase.

To find out more about Josiah Wedgwood's pottery, visit www.WedgwoodMuseum.org.uk

to be quite physically strong to make it. There's a lot of clay that needs to be handled," Lead said. That's 14 pounds of Jasper clay mixture to be exact, and that takes a Wedgwood thrower and turner nearly two hours to shape.

But physical strength is not enough, technical skills and artistry are also needed to authentically reproduce the vase. Decorating it, which includes the figure-making and ornamenting, takes nearly two days. All imperfections have to be copied perfectly, such as the Barberini Vase's handles that are not quite level. "That requires quite a bit of skill to get them exactly as they ought to be," Lead said.

The method for making the vase hasn't changed since Wedgwood's day. The first time any art piece is reproduced, a copy of the bas-relief is made using wax on a slate base, which is then cast in plaster. Clay is then pressed onto the plaster cast and this clay impression is fired and then is used and reused to make each ceramic decoration.

To make a bas-relief, Jasper clay mixture is pressed into the clay mold. A special tool is then used to carefully lift out the relief, which is then applied to the body of the unfired Jasper vase with a little bit of water.

Then the vase is dried and fired for 30 hours at 2,147 degrees Fahrenheit. Since the creation of the first Wedgwood Portland Vase, the company has issued the vase in an entire array of colors, a multitude of sizes, and as reliefs on other objects. "It's one of our iconic pieces," Lead said.

First editions of Wedgwood's Portland Vase can be seen at the Fogg Art Museum in Boston and the Museum of Art in Birmingham, Ala.

Fragments of the Barberini Vase in an illustration, annotated with "Destroyed February 7th, 1845. Restored September 10th, 1845. John Doubleday."



The father of a murdered Parkland, Fla., high school teen, Andrew Pollack, now a school safety activist, speaking in Las Vegas on April 6, 2019.

BOOK REVIEW

How PC Education Policies Fail Children

LINDA WIEGENFELD

On Feb. 14, 2018, a gunman opened fire with a semi-automatic rifle at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, killing 17 people and injuring 17 others. Witnesses identified Nikolas Cruz, an expelled, 19-year-old student, as the assailant.

In respect for the victims, I will refer to the assailant here only as the shooter.

In the weeks after the shooting, the nation wondered why it happened and how it could have been prevented. There was a push for more gun control, with some Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School students becoming the face of the movement. There was an emphasis on mental health. There was talk about how the impact of violent television programs and video games was largely underestimated.

People questioned if the police had grossly mishandled this case. Questions about the FBI came up. There were even discussions about the fire alarm, metal detectors, and the arming of teachers. These were all valid inquiries and certainly worth looking into. School shootings are a multifaceted problem, and to prevent them in the future, we need to examine all causes.

There is a new book called "Why Meadow Died: The People and Policies That Created the Parkland Shooter and Endanger America's Students" by Andrew Pollack, father of one of the murdered students, and Max Eden, an education expert at a New York City-based think tank. The stated goal of the book is to take an objective look at the tragedy.

Certainly, the authors were not looking for easy answers. They didn't just blame an inanimate object, the gun, for example. Their explanation for this approach was simple. When the shooter bought his guns, he had a totally clean record. How did a youth have a clean record despite 45 police visits to his home? The police relied on a politically correct policy to reduce juvenile arrests, which allowed the shooter to keep his record clean, and also allowed him to buy a gun.

In 4 Parts

The first part of the book tells the stories of Pollack's new friends as they coped with the tragedy and helped him in his mission to expose everything that contributed to the disaster. They included a teacher;

another parent, who came to the United States from Venezuela to keep his children safe (only for his son to be shot five times in school and, incredibly, survive); a student journalist; and Pollack's co-author, who worked with education policy.

As I read, I felt like these were characters in a Shakespearean tragedy. The term "catharsis" popped into my head because their stories were so raw and gritty. Too often, people undergoing tragedies grow numb to their feelings so that they don't experience vulnerability. But not here.

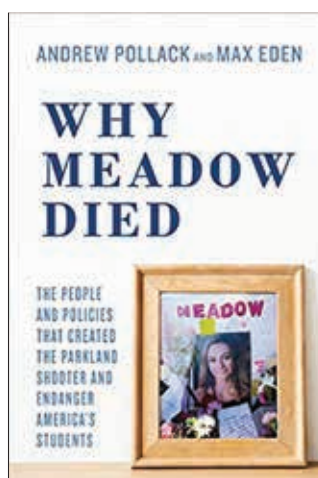
The second part of the book informs readers about the shooter's life, starting from his birth to the actual crime. His life resembled that of the Joker in the currently popular movie. The Joker has been described as living in a world which was "a cartoonishly dark and uncaring place, an almost comically vile carnival where the protagonist can't find a hint of comfort or relief."

Pollack says that mental health authorities refused to institutionalize the shooter three different times—when he was suicidal, threatening to kill, and obsessed with buying a gun—in the name of civil liberty.

Pollack labels the system that enabled the shooter as even sicker than the shooter was.

The third part of the book focuses on the Broward schools. In the 2011–2012 period, Broward County had the highest number of student arrests in Florida. Robert Runcie, the superintendent, stated that this was because of institutional racism. He started a program called Preventing Recidivism through Opportunities, Mentoring, Intervention, Support, and Education (PROMISE) to break the pipeline from school to prison, and, as a consequence, police were prevented from getting involved in incidents that they previously handled.

Soon after the PROMISE program began, the Obama administration



'Why Meadow Died: The People and Policies That Created the Parkland Shooter and Endanger America's Students'

Andrew Pollack and Max Eden
Post Hill Press
336 pages, hardcover.

Julie Phillips Pollack and Andrew Pollack sitting alongside President Donald Trump in a meeting about school safety at the White House on March 1, 2018.



got involved. A "Dear Colleague Letter" was sent out advising school superintendents nationwide that racial disparities in suspension rates would be grounds for finding school districts in violation of federal anti-discrimination law, and therefore at risk of losing federal funding.

As a result, discipline was curtailed. In order to discipline a student, tons of documentation were required, plus teachers were told directly or were subtly pressured to avoid sending students for punishment so that the school's image would be untarnished. Arrests plummeted, but the behavior did not change. Instead, a culture of leniency took hold.

The fourth part of the book is about the "Fight to #FixIt." Pollack and his group fought hard to get their school board candidate elected. They believed that he was the perfect choice to change the Broward schools, and they explained to voters how the school district had failed, covered up its failure, and was not taking school safety seriously.

Even in the wake of the murders, the Broward residents did not vote those responsible out of office. The complacency of the Broward officials was only overshadowed by the apathy of the broader community that refused to hold these officials accountable.

Pollack made his point: The sacrifices of the murdered and injured victims were ignored and the current student population would now more likely be exposed to further, preventable risk. A dangerous precedent had been set.

Pollack's friend Ann Miller said, "We hear about school shootings and external threats, but as horrific as they are, if you take the cumulative effect, I think that it pales in comparison to the daily instances of bullying, assaults, and violence that occur in every school across the country."

Readers, beware. What happened in Broward County could happen elsewhere. Those victimized in the Parkland shooting acted as canaries in the coal mine. Laura Ingraham, an American conservative who is currently a television host on Fox News, expressed it well when saying, "By turning Broward schools and those across the nation into these social justice petri dishes, they may have facilitated a lunatic." It well, saying that many schools across the nation have already been turned into social justice petri dishes. Constant vigilance is needed to stop the politically correct policies from ruining the school near you.

Don't Let Our Children Down

As a retired teacher of 45 years, I can attest that schools are changing. I am utterly disheartened by the simplistic thinking of faceless bureaucrats who embrace detrimental policies or who are more concerned with reputation than children's lives. When, for example, did discipline become a form of abuse? Effective discipline helps children learn to control their behavior.

The PROMISE program has proven itself to be ineffectual because it hasn't been used in addition to punishment but usually as a substitute. Remember that school punishments—that is, suspensions and expulsions—are only authorized for serious matters such as alcohol-related incidents, assault, using threat, drugs, bullying, and so on. These serious issues should not be ignored or covered up.

Yet teachers, who next to parents care most about their pupils, are being called racist when they write referrals on students outside their race—a complete betrayal of common sense!

True nondiscriminatory policies would treat all children equally. What about having a standard that all children can live up to, rather than saying that all black children are victims and can't rise above their circumstances? A policy that treats students of one race one way and others differently is a policy that promotes rather than diminishes the racial divide.

What about Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream that this nation would judge people not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character? Have we completely abandoned this worthy goal?

This book needs to be read. Will it? Because the authors do not blame guns, because the authors look at the bureaucratic illnesses that allow a damaged child to hurt other children, because the authors take issue with a policy that hides discrimination behind a mask of justice, this book isn't getting the kind of coverage it deserves.

Nonetheless, this book needs to be read.

Linda Wiegenfeld suggests the following nonpolitical website to learn more about children's safety. It is called *Americans for Children's Lives and School Safety*. www.AmericansForClass.org/

She can be reached for comments or suggestions at LWiegenfeld@aol.com



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.

'Last Christmas': A Rom-Com Whitewashing of Organ Transplantation

The CCP Tries Pulling a Fast One

MARK JACKSON

Here's a film review of "Last Christmas." I'll jump right to it. I'm not playing around today. This is a bad movie. I'm giving it a negative star. Why so vociferous, you ask? Because "Last Christmas" is a whitewashing attempt by the Chinese Communist Party to sneak their vast, illegal live organ harvesting trade into our collective subconsciousness via the Trojan Horse vehicle of an innocuous-looking Christmas Rom-Com, using two popular Asian movie stars.

Here's the deal: As you may know, the United States is already well into World War III with China. Yes, it's cyberwarfare—for now—but it's World War III, alright. Trust me—this is what the Epoch Times does better than anybody, because nobody else dares to address this issue.

China is attempting, covertly, to take over the world, and part of that plan includes taking over Hollywood. You've seen it already; you've

'Last Christmas'

Director
Paul Feig

Starring
Emilia Clarke,
Emma Thompson,
Henry Golding,
Michelle Yeoh,
Patti LuPone

Rated
PG-13

Running Time
1 hour, 42 minutes

Release Date
Nov. 8

Rated
-1 star out of 5



(Left) Kate (Emilia Clarke) works in a Christmas store.



(Middle) Michelle Yeoh amid a sea of Asian faces, in a British Christmas decorations store, in "Last Christmas." Is that not perhaps a bit odd?



(Below) Emilia Clarke (L) and Emma Thompson play mother and daughter.

Universal Pictures presents Emilia Clarke and Henry Golding in the romantic comedy "Last Christmas."



Kate (Emilia Clarke) puts on a Christmas show for a homeless shelter.

seen the Chinese symbols of Chinese production company names glowing onscreen, in your local movie multiplex. Yeah, so what?

So this: China is also covering up the worst atrocity in the history of humans—live organ harvesting from peaceful prisoners of conscience: hiding them in black jails, strapping them down, sawing open their chests in unmarked vans—while they're still alive—and pulling out live, beating hearts. And making giant, megatons of cold cash. Megamillions.

Here's the Deal With 'Last Christmas'

Well, dear readership of The Epoch Times, you know the deal by now; you know what we stand for, and stand up to. Anytime our staff runs across a situation involving China trying to get away with making giant piles of money off live organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience, we blow the whistle on it.

So what have we got here? A movie blatantly about organ transplantation masquerading as a cute Christmas romance, funded by a Chinese production company.

"At the start of 2016, Perfect World announced a long term co-financing deal with Universal Pictures, which represents the first time a Chinese company has directly invested in a multi-year slate deal with a major U.S. studio," according to UniversalFanon.Fandom.

A sweet little Christmas romance: cute, cozy, progressive, and politically correct (lesbian side narrative!). It puts a big smiley-face on organ transplantation. Makes it so nice and warm and fuzzy! Spiritual, even!

Right. Shame on Hollywood. Writer and star Emma Thompson can perhaps be given the benefit of the doubt for not being aware of China's communist agenda, with its concept of the "Long march through the institutions," in this case American, in order to rot our traditions and morals from the inside out. She can perhaps be forgiven for letting China get its paws on her script.

However, the script plagiarizes a famous 11th-hour plot switcheroo from a 1990s movie that put that particular plot concept on the map. This is a bit lazy.

Guess I Better Do My Film Review Job

The film's heroine, Kate (Emilia Clarke), is a carbon copy of the bull-in-China-shop, semi-alcoholic that Anna Kendrick played a couple of years ago in "Happy Christmas"—couch-surfing and alienating friends by drunkenly sitting on their meticulously crafted matchstick galleons, and such.

Kate's a wannabe actress whose day job is being a green-clad sales elf in a quaint, all-season Christmas shop, which is run by Santa (it's more of a job description, re-

ally), her imperious-and-snarky-but-with-a-heart-of-gold boss (Michelle Yeoh).

Yeoh is normally a cinematic kung fu master, but is lately demonstrating a growing knack for comedy.

Kate gets unceremoniously dumped in the street by the arriving-home-early-from-a-trip fiancée of a cheater-dude Kate just had extramarital relations with (nice Christmas touch; 'tis the season to commit adultery, fa-la-la, etc.). Kate then runs into a very, very handsome Asian man named Tom (Golding).

She spies him looking at a peregrine falcon perched in some rafters. The bird immediately poops in Kate's eye, and he tells her she's lucky. He's a whimsical, lighthearted, glass-half-full kinda guy, a sort of toned-down Asian version of Dick Van Dyke's character in the original "Mary Poppins." He likes to twirl when he walks because, you know, joyousness.

A movie blatantly about organ transplantation masquerades as a cute Christmas romance.

Are You a George Michael Fan?

You better be a George Michael fan because every song in this movie is a George Michael song. The only song I ever liked of his was that duet he did with Elton John, and even that I didn't like.

Anyway, Kate ends up homeless and has to crawl home to her Yugoslavian mom (Emma Thompson) and former-lawyer dad Ivan (Boris Isakovic), who now drives an Uber, and lesbian sister (Lydia Leonard).

Sister Marta resents Kate's prodigal sister status. Emma Thompson doing a Yugoslavian accent could be potentially hysterical, but this isn't that movie. This is where it starts getting alluded to that Kate had some strange illness that landed her in the hospital for a while. All the while, Kate keeps running into the handsome Asian man and going on cute dates with him.

Emilia Clarke is very adorable. In "Game of Thrones" she was very naked. Here, she's a very fetching, charismatic, cute green elf who sings well. Can't fault her, one can easily see why her currently very famous "Game of Thrones" co-star Jason Momoa—Aquaman himself—cherishes knowing her.

Michelle Yeoh is also a little bit adorable. Even Mr. Golding is adorable.

Anyway, where was I? Oh yes. Kate ends up volunteering at a homeless shelter, where they eventually ... wait for it ... put on a Christmas show.

Isn't that nice? Isn't that just a nice, cute movie for your Christmas entertainment?

And wouldn't it be an absolute crying shame that, were it not for an organ transplant, the two leads couldn't be together? What am I talking about? To fully explain it, it's going to require a spoiler, so consider yourself herewith spoiler-alerted.

And here it is: Are you familiar with the line "I see dead people"? Viva organ transplantation! Viva guardian angels!

And it's so nice that China provides the world with so incredibly, unprecedentedly, many organs! Get this—if you have five bazillion dollars, you can send China your stats, like blood type and such, and get a perfect match from a freshly slaughtered Tibetan, or Uyghur, or Falun Gong practitioner, who's been held in a pen like cattle, and slaughtered. Just for you.

And here's the kicker: You can get that set of lungs or heart or kidneys or cornea—by next week! No wait time! Normally, the average national wait time for a kidney in the United States (although it varies by state and by organ) is three to five years! Isn't that unbelievable?

Maybe the title "Last Christmas" doesn't have anything to do with the George Michael song. Maybe it's a happy, happy message, like, you never have to worry about having a last Christmas anymore, due to a failing liver or lung cancer. Thanks to China.

World War III, people. This is how it starts.

FILM REVIEW

4 Firemen Find Babysitting 3 Kids Challenging

MARK JACKSON

Four macho firemen—excuse me, smoke-jumpers (smoke-jumpers hate it when you confuse them with their citified brethren)—get saddled with three kids for a weekend and have to do parenting. Can they handle it? Of course not. And this is your broad-strokes, over-the-top comedy “Playing With Fire,” starring the popular World Wrestling Entertainment wrestler and bodybuilder John Cena.

Any good? Good for kids, yup. Good for parents? If you like kids enough to have had kids, yes, you’ll like it too. If you’re a wizened film critic with perennial bed-head who only leaves the apartment to go to film screenings, you won’t like it much.

There’s a Fire!

A giant wildfire tears through Northern California! Roads are backed up with vehicles, smoldering tree limbs are crashing down, smoke is everywhere! “Uptown Funk” by Bruno Mars is on the soundtrack. Wait, what?! Cognitive dissonance! Shhh—it’s meant to let you know this will not be a tragedy. This will be a comedy!

What can three young kids do in a tight jumper-station, staffed with uptight warrior types?

Jake Carson (Cena) is a straight-laced, drill-sergeant type of smoke-jumper superintendent, who likes to run a tight ship—or whatever the smoke-jumping equivalent of a ship is. When there’s a big forest fire somewhere, he leads his men to go jump in it.

Who are the men? They are the giant, bald, bearded, mute, ax-carrying fellow named Axe (Tyler Mane, also a wrestler); the neurotic Mark (Keegan-Michael Key); and the emotional blabbermouth Rodrigo (John Leguizamo).

Soon, there’s a cabin fire out in them thar woods, and big Jake, big Axe, and the smaller jumpers go jump in it. Jake finds two sisters



John Cena and Christian Convery, who convincingly plays a troublemaking brat, in “Playing With Fire.”

and a brother trapped in the cabin: the oldest, teen sister Brynn (Brianna Hildebrand); classic, annoying little brother Will (Christian Convery); and probably the prettiest, most devastatingly cute, wee girl-child actress to hit the big screen in a long time—Finley Rose Slater, who plays Zoey. I could actually go see the movie again just to yearn for this child: I’ll take that one, please, but could I order her without the screaming and the poopy diapers? No? Sigh.

Back they all go to the firehouse, which, as I mentioned is a tight ship, er, jumper-station. What can three young kids do in a tight jumper-station, staffed with uptight warrior types in need of a womanly touch? Create extreme chaos. And poop.

Naturally, the boy child creates the most havoc. Like his starting a domino effect of escalating damage, which he tries to clean up, but only makes increasingly worse, resulting in a firehouse garage full of soapsuds six feet high. Imagine playing hide-and-seek in that! Better hide the detergent and the garden hose when you get home.

Where Are Their Parents?

All the while, Jake’s naturally trying to locate their parents. He’s gotta get these kids the heck

outta there, because he’s got a possible promotion coming up. The head honcho smoke-jumper boss (Dennis Haysbert) is coming for inspection, very soon, and Jake needs to rectify all this kid chaos with alacrity.

Think he can do it all by himself? Or rather, with three other lunkheads who know nothing but burning trees, jumping out of planes, and showering the landscape with that pink stuff they pour out of those planes?

Hold on a second—what is that pink stuff they drop on fires? Google Search Results: “What is that red powder that is dropped on fires? Air tankers are often used to drop thousands of gallons of water and retardant onto fires. The red stuff that you often see being dropped from planes and helicopters is a chemical retardant that contains phosphate fertilizer, which helps to slow and cool down the fire.”

Ah. This is why I love my job.

So, can four lunkheads do this job, or do they maybe need a woman? Like, say, Dr. Amy Hicks (Judy Greer), the only woman scientist studying frogs in the vast Californian outback? Did she and Jake perhaps have a date and decide they couldn’t stand each other, except they’re both too awkward and inexperienced in matters of the heart to recognize the chemistry? Hmm. Here’s another puzzling question? Will Jake eventually transform into super-dad?

Overall

Cena, like Dwayne Johnson before him, and Arnold before that, has biceps the size of watermelons, which means he has to take his body very seriously. But also like Johnson and A-hh-nuld, he doesn’t take himself seriously at all, which is why his rise in the action-comedy genre has been quick. He’s also clearly a good guy and a fun guy.

As an adult person, the child-targeted slapstick will make you yawn, but the key to having fun is to listen to the kids in the audience. They’re thinking this is just grand. Smiley-face.

Moms will also probably find the watermelon biceps very interesting to look at. For dads, let’s just say you will enjoy this adorable Zoey girl-child renaming Jake’s big firehouse dog Masher “Sparkle Pony,” and when she makes tea for big, bad Axe, and they sit there sipping tea together—you will cry.

‘Playing With Fire’**Director**

Andy Fickman

Starring

John Cena, Judy Greer, Keegan-Michael Key, John Leguizamo, Dennis Haysbert, Brianna Hildebrand, Tyler Mane

Running Time

1 hour, 36 minutes

Rated

PG

Release Date

Nov. 8

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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