

THE EPOCH TIMES LIFE & TRADITION

Life lessons
through the eyes
of her beloved dog,
13-year-old Grace,
reach kids and
adults alike.

**CARPE
DIEM:**
EMBRACING
THE PRESENT
IN THE NEW
YEAR

Page 2

**MELANIA
TRUMP**
NEW BOOK
HIGHLIGHTS
HER ELEGANCE
AND STYLE

Page 5

**ASA
JAMES SWAN**
ON HELPING
PEOPLE BECOME
BETTER LEADERS

Page 7

Katy McQuaid

on the Power of
Simple Acts of Kindness

Page 6

Carpe Diem

Embracing the Present in the New Year

JEFF MINICK

Forever is composed of nows.
—Emily Dickinson

In “When Life Gives You Pears: The Healing Power of Family, Faith, and Funny People,” Jeannie Gaffigan, wife and writing partner of comedian Jim Gaffigan, and mother of five, tells the story of her battle with a life-threatening brain tumor described by one doctor as the “size of a pear.” Shot through with humor, her memoir takes us through her long ordeal and is an insightful guidebook for anyone facing major surgery. It is also a thank-you note to family, friends, priests and nuns, and medical personnel who helped her through her ordeal.

In addition, Jeannie shares the transformation of values brought about by her illness. Forced to lie in bed or sit in a chair week after week, this woman who lived by frenetic schedules and deadlines faced the frustration of idleness and infirmity. Others took over her housekeeping chores. For a long time, she couldn’t work. Worst of all, she had to give her children into the care of family members and sitters until she could recover.

Near the end of “When Life Gives You Pears,” Jeannie writes: “I’m grateful for the tumor ... It’s a strange concept to express gratitude for something that really messed everything up for a while, but had it not been for this catastrophe, I never would have had the opportunity to see what my marriage could survive. I wouldn’t have experienced the same kind of painful separation from my children, which was necessary for me to realize exactly how I could love them without being a drill sergeant.”

Hard Times

Like Jeannie Gaffigan, all of us, at one time or another, face terrible calamities: illness, bankruptcy, divorce, the death of a spouse or child. Recently, for example, a gas leak caused a home near my town to explode and burn to the ground. No one died, but everything the family owned—clothing, favorite books, antiques from grandparents, photograph albums, letters exchanged 50 years ago—disappeared in those flames. All tangible evidence of their past went up in smoke.

Some of you reading these words may even now feel torn apart by some ugly conflict. Perhaps you have no control over the cause of your troubles. The company where you worked downsized, and you were shown the door. The police found your teenage son in possession of drugs and arrested him. Your beloved mother is



FILIP MROZ/UNSPASH

As the Stoic and Emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote in “Meditations,” “When you arise in the morning, think of what a special privilege it is to be alive—to breathe, to think, to enjoy, to love.”

dying from cancer.

Or perhaps you yourself are the cause of your distress. You became enraged with your brother’s politics and now refuse to speak to him. You left your spouse for another. You ran up credit card debt trying to pay for a house you could no longer afford. You gossiped about a fellow employee and are now shunned by half your coworkers.

Hope in the Future

So what are we to do when catastrophe strikes?

New Year’s Day is fast approaching, that advance into another calendar year when so many of us hope to change ourselves. Some of us will compile resolutions—to lose weight, give up smoking, exercise more, show our spouse more love and appreciation. Others look to New Year’s wishing for a change in circumstances outside their realm of control: earning more money, advancing in a job, finding a companion. Those suffering some illness of the body or soul hope the New Year will alleviate their agony.

This anticipation of the future and

desire for change can act for the good in our lives, especially when we are in dire circumstances. To survive the travails of the present, we must have hope in the future.

Yet if we are always looking to the future for our salvation, we risk committing another great wrong: failing to live in the present.

But Live in the Now

The great philosophers and teachers constantly remind their disciples to embrace the day and to forego fears of the future. The Stoics, Jesus, Buddha, and others all stress the importance of embracing the here and now.

The concept is simple, but the execution is much more difficult. When some great crisis or disaster comes crashing down on our heads, we are forced to face the immediate. We have no other choice. We must deal with the crisis at hand.

But what of ordinary time?

Let’s imagine a stay-at-home mom of four children. From 4 a.m., when the 2-year-old wakens from a bad dream, to 11 p.m., when she and her husband finally crash into bed, this

woman faces endless obligations: the details of childrearing, paying bills, cleaning, cooking meals. The storm of demands rarely offers a free moment.

She seems to be living very much in the present, as was the pre-tumorous Jeannie Gaffigan. Or is she?

Eyes Wide Open

The wise ones of religion and philosophy would say no, not unless she reminds herself every day that whatever she is doing—folding laundry, wiping up Billy’s spilled milk, making sandwiches for her husband’s lunch, running the vacuum—has a higher purpose. To live fully, she has to push aside the clouds of that storm of responsibilities and allow the sunshine to remind her of the honor and worth hidden in her day-to-day duties.

She must unwrap and look at the present, meaning the gift, she finds in the present.

As G.K. Chesterton once wrote, “The things we see every day are the things we never see at all.”

To be fully alive, we must force ourselves to see.

As we approach New Year’s hoping for good things in our future, brighter and better times, it behooves us to keep our feet solidly in the present as well. As the Stoic and Emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote in “Meditations,” “When you arise in the morning, think of what a special privilege it is to be alive—to breathe, to think, to enjoy, to love.”

There was a man who appreciated the moment.

Near the end of “When Life Gives You Pears,” Jeannie Gaffigan writes: “I often hear the question, ‘When will you get back to normal?’

“I respond, ‘I’ll never be back to normal.’ You don’t just move on from something like this; it becomes a part of you. You change and grow. You may change into a bitter person and grow in self-pity, or you may use the memory of your suffering as an opportunity to transform your life into something more beautiful and meaningful than you could have ever imagined.”

In deepening her appreciation and love for her work, her family, her husband, and especially her children, Jeanne learned the joy of living in the moment.

She learned to see.

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.



Living historian Paul Thompson, posing as Gen. Walter Congreve VC, as he reads the general’s letter from the trenches describing the Christmas Day Truce of 1914, in Staffordshire, England, on Dec. 4, 2014.

HISTORY

The Real Meaning of Christmas During the Great War in 1914

ALAN WAKIM

As Christmas Eve began in 1914, the soldiers sitting in the frost-covered trenches were miserably cold, homesick, and tired of war. The politicians and generals, who were somewhere resting cozily at home or sipping alcoholic beverages in a heated room, had told them that the war would be over “before the leaves fall.”

Five months earlier, their leaders had announced they must go to war to save themselves, their families, and their country. Citizens cheered as they flocked to the streets and town squares. After all, they were the good guys, their enemies were bad, and 1914 was a glorious time to be alive!

This Night Is Different

For five months, the good guys killed the bad guys. A week before Christmas Eve, attacking Allied soldiers were cut down mercilessly by machine gun fire from the German line. This night, however, was different. Christmas trees suddenly began appearing on top of the parapets all along the same German line. The very men who fired the deadly weapons that butchered their friends were now singing “Stille Nacht” and yelling Christmas greetings to them across No Man’s Land.

Allied soldiers sang their own carols and responded with their yuletide greetings.



A depiction of the 1914 Christmas truce by Frederic Villiers, published on the front page of the Illustrated London News on Jan. 9, 1915.

Soon, soldiers began to show themselves. Slowly and cautiously, they began climbing out of their trenches to meet their enemy and arrange a truce. They shook hands, exchanged Christmas greetings, and agreed to assist each other in the recovery and burial of the dead. Opposing sides carried the dead together. Others exchanged gifts such as chocolate, food, tobacco, and beverages, as well as stories. In other parts of the front, men sat on parapets and sang to their enemies, followed by applause and cheers. Before long, they played soccer matches. They ate, drank, and prayed together. A Brit received a haircut from a German barber. The one thing clearly missing from these legendary scenes was hatred among the enemy soldiers as they behaved like old chums from school.

A Miracle

For the next 24 hours, an unexpected miracle took place along the killing fields of Belgium and France all because the men shared the same faith and wanted to celebrate the birth of their Lord and Savior in peace. These scenes were not limited to the Western Front, as similar gestures of goodwill occurred on the Eastern Front as well. Pope Benedict XV had been pleading to both the Central and Allied Powers for such an armistice over the holidays, but even he would have shed a tear at the sights unfolding all along the frontlines.

Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox had waged war on each other for centuries due to differing Christian ideologies, but when it came down to it, they did after all still worship the same deity. That bound all the nations of Europe together, save for the Jewish diaspora spread throughout the continent and the Muslims of Albania, Turkey, and the Bosnian provinces of Austria-Hungary. Hilaire Belloc famously stated that “the faith is Europe and Europe is the faith.” Though he was referring to the Catholic faith, it applies to all Christian faiths.

For a large majority of the Europeans, Jesus Christ was their Lord and Savior, and the occasion of his birth brought forth

peace and harmony for a moment in this cataclysmic war. It was something their political leaders could not or would not even attempt to accomplish until they brought their enemies to their knees.

After Christmas

Once Christmas Day 1914 ended, the soldiers were reluctant to resume the conflict because they liked and enjoyed their time with the poor chaps on the other side of the field. In fact, there were instances of soldiers firing above their so-called enemy’s heads after the truce to prevent killing them. They were nothing like what they had been told for so long. Had circumstances been different, they would most likely be getting along just fine. Perhaps even celebrating this night together in a lodge or in each other’s homes or churches. Such harmony existed on that evening that there were even discussions amongst the troops of a New Year’s truce.

Military leaders stationed comfortably away from the front lines, however, were livid upon hearing of the Christmas truce and were not only determined to punish those responsible but planned to prevent such unacceptable fraternization in the future. This peace and love would undermine the fighting spirit of their soldiers.

How could an army expect to maintain a war if soldiers felt amity, as opposed to hatred, with their enemies? Sir John French, the commander in chief of the British Expeditionary Force, recalled in his diary:

“When this was reported to me, I issued immediate orders to prevent any recurrence of such conduct, and called the local commanders to strict account, which resulted in a good deal of trouble.”

For the next 12 months, the brutality against humanity continued as the war spread to new theaters of operations with the addition of new participants in the war. This ensured that no such goodwill would exist the following Christmas or any other holiday thereafter, as the war and barbarity continued until Nov. 11, 1918.

Today, teens and young adults from the former Western Front nations of Germany, France, Britain, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Ireland, as well as other European nations can be seen peacefully together in restaurants, coffee shops, nightclubs, beaches, clothing stores, and concerts. Ironically and unfortunately, church attendance among Europeans has plummeted and those living on that continent may no longer feel the need to celebrate the true meaning of Christmas: the birth of Jesus Christ. In 1914, it miraculously brought about peace and goodwill in the most unlikely of places. One hundred and five years later, we would all do well to remember those soldiers, the day, and its true meaning.

Alan Wakim is the co-founder of The Sons of History, a YouTube series and weekly podcast. He travels to interview and document historical figures and sites for his video series. He holds a business degree from Texas A&M University.

Grumpy Cat, Lovelorn Whale Are Stars of 2019’s Top Animal Stories

NEW YORK—A lovelorn singing whale, a world-famous feline sourpuss, and ravenous goats credited with thwarting a dangerous California wildfire were among animals whose escapades across the United States made news in 2019.

Animal antics drawing attention this year included:

World’s First Airport Therapy Pig Hogs California Limelight

Anxious airline passengers who may have tried to calm nerves with a cocktail or sleep aides were introduced to a new remedy in November at San Francisco International Airport: a therapy pig. LiLou, a 5-year-old Juliana pig, is now a member of the airport’s “Wag Brigade,” which otherwise consists mainly of therapy dogs meant to help ease passenger travel anxieties. Dressed in a pilot’s cap and with toenails painted bright red, LiLou uses her hooves and snout to bash out tunes on her toy piano before



she signs off duty and returns to her owner’s downtown San Francisco apartment.

Goats Help Save California Reagan Library From Wildfire

A voracious goat herd may burp and bow after being credited with helping save the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library from a California wildfire in October by eating 13 acres of flammable scrub and creating an impenetrable fire break. The 500 hired goats, with names including Vincent Van Goat and Selena Goatmez, like to eat noxious weeds and other invasive species that fuel wildfires, said herd owner Scott Morris. By acing their all-you-can-eat assignment, the goats aided in sparing such library treasures as a piece of the Berlin Wall. The Easy Fire raged less than 50 feet from the site’s hangar housing the Air Force One jet used by the late Republican president, who is buried at the library along with his wife, Nancy.

Grasshoppers Take Vegas by Swarm, Upend Weather Radar

A plague of grasshoppers descended on Las Vegas in July, with so many swarming around the bright lights of America’s Sin City that the National Weather Service detected them on its radar. The grasshopper migration was triggered by a wetter-than-normal winter. It sparked fear and loathing on social media, and prompted some hotels in the tourist district known as the Strip to shut off lights and operate in darkness in an effort to foil the insect invasion.

Lovelorn Right Whale Song Recorded Off Alaska

The crooning of a rare North Pacific right whale was recorded for the first time ever in June, and scientists said it sounded like the elusive aquatic mammal was looking for love. The likely mating call of the right whale was documented by researchers in the Bering Sea off Alaska’s coast. Scientists



said they were traveling in such thick fog they could not see the animal, and assumed its serenade was a whale’s version of a dating profile. Possibly something like, “If romantic dinners feasting on krill near the ocean floor with a 70-ton companion are for you, I’m the one.”

Grumpy Cat, Whose Scowl Drove a Million Memes, Dies at Age 7

Life sucks, then you die. The feline who embodied that philosophy became known to millions of online fans as Grumpy Cat, her permanent frown catapulting her to internet stardom. The scowling kitty, whose real name was Tardar Sauce, appeared on magazine covers, television advertisements, and even starred in her own movie “Grumpy Cat’s Worst Christmas Ever.” She died in May at age 7 after a urinary tract infection.

By Barbara Goldberg From Reuters



COURTESY OF MONIQUE OGDEN

Savannah Maddison (C) is the founder of Savannah’s Soldiers. The organization sends letters to deployed military members.

Kids Across the US Sending Letters to Our Troops

“You’re never too young to make a difference,” says Savannah Maddison, who started a letter-writing campaign in fifth grade

really know what that meant,” she said. “I just knew that she was sad about it, and it made me sad to know that things like that were going on that I didn’t know about.”

Savannah went home that day, and her mother explained to her what deployment meant. “It was very shocking to me as a fifth grader to know that there was a war going on, or that we needed to deploy parents,” she said.

Savannah knew she wanted to do something to help her best friend. She wrote a song for her and then realized that while it was a kind gesture, she could make a larger difference. That’s when she decided to send letters to the father’s entire battalion of 700 men and women. Savannah sent a letter to every troop each month, and got her school and community involved in the effort.

The idea grew into Savannah’s Soldiers, a nonprofit organization that gathers letters from children across the country and sends them to our deployed troops. So far, more than 350,000 letters have been sent to our de-

ployed men and women. Savannah, now 18 and the organization’s CEO, hopes to get more schools and children involved and eventually send 1 million letters.

During this holiday season, the goal is to reach the halfway point of 500,000 letters.

In addition to the letter-writing campaign, Savannah’s Soldiers has a school curriculum and Savannah speaks to young students across the country about the importance of supporting our deployed men and women.

Savannah has written a book entitled “Sincerely, YOU: Letter-Writing to Change the World,” which is the foundation of the curriculum. She also wrote a book, some of which covers character traits such as kindness and bravery, and encourages kids to start their own service projects.

“The biggest message that I feel like I’ve been able to spread is you’re never too young to make a difference,” she said.

Recently, Savannah’s Soldiers started another program connecting kids from the Fort Campbell military base with kids in civilian schools who have

written letters for the organization. The initiative is a pen pal program in which the children write letters to each other during the holiday season to support each other.

Gratitude

Service members have reacted to the letters with gratitude and appreciation. During the holiday season of 2015, Savannah’s Soldiers received a letter back from a unit in Afghanistan describing how they had decorated the walls of their base with the letters that the kids had sent them.

Savannah later met with a soldier from that particular unit.

“It was so incredible. Whenever I get to meet the military members that we have impacted they are so thankful and they always explain to me the power of a letter, and that just motivates me more to show kids the power of service,” Savannah said. “It’s important to show that ordinary people can do extraordinary things. The other aspect is that we need to appreciate our [military members]. We need to remember them and their families and all that they do for us.”



President Donald Trump and Melania Trump after signing the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2020 at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland on Dec. 20, 2019.

Some Revelations: Melania Trump, Her Achievements, and Our Degraded Culture

JEFF MINICK

Let's start with some basics. Born in 1970 in Slovenia, Melania Knavs, known today as Melania Trump, spent much of her childhood in Sevnica, a town of less than 5,000 inhabitants. Her father was a member of the Communist Party, but had his daughter secretly baptized by a Catholic priest. From the age of 5, Melania worked as a model, first in Slovenia, and then in Milan and Paris, before moving to New York. There she eventually met Donald Trump, a businessman and celebrity 24 years her senior. They married in 2005, and together they had one son, Baron William Trump. Before becoming first lady, Melania founded successful jewelry and skincare companies.

A Closer Examination

Now let's look at some details. Melania speaks six languages: Slovenian, Serbo-Croatian, English, French, Italian, and German. She was a highly

successful model.

She is a good mother. After her husband's inauguration in 2017, Melania kept her son in school in Manhattan for the remainder of the academic year rather than placing him in a new school in Washington.

Here we have a first lady who is beautiful and intelligent, a caring mother and loving wife, and a patriot proud of her adopted country.

Despite various reports and speculations in the press, the Trumps appear to be happily married.

She can be tough. When Britain's "Daily Mail" reported that she had worked for an escort service during

her modeling days, Melania sued the paper, the "Daily Mail" admitted its false charges, and the court settled the case in favor of Trump.

In public, the first lady always appears decked out like the fashion model she once was. Judging from what we know of the state dinner she arranged for French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte, Melania's taste in entertaining is as exquisite as her taste in clothing.

Many diplomats and foreign leaders have complimented her for her poise and civility.

As first lady, Trump prefers the shadows to the spotlight. She seems most comfortable when visiting children in schools or hospitals. She initiated the Be Best campaign, advocating against cyber-bullying and illegal drug use by young people.

So here we have a first lady who is beautiful and intelligent, a caring mother and loving wife, and a patriot proud of her adopted country.

Bushwhacked

So why, for the last four years, have some in the press so reviled her? Why attack a woman who brings so many positive attributes to the White House?

Some of them have viciously criticized her Christmas decorations, her accent, her religious faith—she was once assailed for reciting the Lord's Prayer in public. Some regard her as a Trump showpiece, "a visual adornment," ignoring her obvious intelligence and her behind-the-scenes participation in White House matters. This deluge of denigration is what undoubtedly led her to remark, during an October 2018 interview with ABC News, "I could say I am the most bullied person in the world."

By now, any objective observer knows that our mainstream press as a whole despises Donald Trump. For nearly his entire presidency, the major television news stations, with the exception of Fox News, have given Trump 90 percent negative news coverage. During the re-

cent impeachment hearings, that negative coverage rose to 96 percent. That same objective observer might surmise the press was trying to destroy Trump. But why go after his wife?

Possibilities

Is it because they hate her? That seems unlikely. Melania fits the model of a successful woman. What's to hate in her unless you dislike her choice of husband?

Could some of these critics be jealous of her? Again, that option should strike us as improbable. Those in the press and in the population at large whose wild and savage hatred of the president has introduced a new illness to our culture, Trump Derangement Syndrome, would hardly be likely to envy his wife.

Or do they pound away on the first lady because they fear her?

Here we come to firmer ground.

We live in a crude age. More and more, our culture often seems rotted through, our traditions cast aside, our standards tattered. For the most part, we have removed any mention of our deities from the public square and have replaced them with Kipling's "Gods of the Market Place."

We place less and less emphasis on the well-being of the family; some climate change advocates now regard children not as a resource to be loved and treasured but as a carbon footprint on the planet. We promote sexual practices that would have appalled our ancestors. We raise athletes and movie stars to the status of demigods, we live to be entertained, we put rights above responsibilities, and we fail to teach our young people the classic virtues.

On and on runs the list of coarse vulgarities. As C.S. Lewis noted in "The Abolition of Man," "We make men without chests and expect from them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst."

Melania Trump stands as a living rebuke to this dark side of our culture. Oriented toward her family, a believer in God, a woman with class who pulled herself out of tiny Slovenia and into fame and prominence, mostly by guts, desire, and street smarts, she is strong in the face of adversity and seemingly happy with her life.

An Exemplar

Suppose young women began to take such a woman as their role model? Suppose 12-year-old Annie looks at Trump and wants to be a family wife and mother like her? Suppose her older sister reads about Trump or watches her on television, finds her a composed, self-confident woman who overcame all sorts of obstacles in life, and decides to emulate her kindness and grace?

Instead of bringing out the big guns and taking aim at Trump, we should be applauding her.

Those who keep bombarding the first lady reveal much more about themselves than about her.

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.

New Book Highlights Melania Trump's Elegance and Style

CHANNALY PHILIPP

You rarely find Melania Trump featured on magazine covers, which is a pity, especially given her professional modeling background.

Fans of Mrs. Trump will appreciate a new book by L.D. Hicks, "Elegance in the White House," a beautiful collection of photos showcasing her time so far as first lady—"all done with elegance, style, and a fierce determination to protect her family," Hicks says.

"Melania's story and accomplishments are often written off or overshadowed in the media by the emphasis placed on her husband," Hicks says. "But she is a tough, stylish woman who escaped a communist upbringing to find massive success worldwide in the fashion industry and eventually become the 45th First Lady of the United States."

Hicks presents some background about the first lady, but it's the photos that really hold your attention. These capture moments that, in the constant din of news broadcasts and headlines, easily get lost.



"Melania Trump: Elegance in the White House" by L.D. Hicks (Post Hill Press, \$30).

Her easy, confident elegance is obvious; and her style choices are fun to pore over. But what jumped out at me the most while perusing the book—perhaps due to how much these instances are under-reported—was Mrs. Trump's charitable work.

Her BE BEST initiative has three components: the well-being of children, online safety, and families affected by opioid abuse. It is especially when she visits babies and children that you can see the first lady's genuine smile truly shine; her ease and comfort highlight the role she has mentioned as her most important one: being a mother.

Hicks's book pays homage not just to the first lady's glamour, but also to a soft, nurturing side that's all too often overlooked.



First Lady Melania Trump during NORAD Santa Tracker phone calls on Dec. 24, 2018, in the State Dining Room of the White House—a Christmas Eve tradition for over 60 years to keep track of Santa's travels around the world.



First Lady Melania Trump at Cincinnati Children's Hospital, Feb. 5, 2018.



President Donald Trump introduces First Lady Melania Trump at the Freedom Inaugural Ball at the Washington Convention Center in Washington on Jan. 20, 2017.



First Lady Melania Trump gives a high five to 4-year-old Essence Overton during her visit to the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt in Nashville, Tenn., on July 24, 2018.

A Spanish Civil War ... in America?

DUSTIN BASS

This year marks the 80-year anniversary of the end of the Spanish Civil War. If you look at it, and not even that closely, you will see the political and social similarities between the Spain of the 1930s and America today.

So what caused the Spanish Civil War? There was the complaint that the Army and the Church both played too big of a role in politics. There was also the complaint of mass poverty. These two complaints can hardly be argued against, yet the outcomes were understandable, as Spain had been a very Catholic-centric power for a vast period of time and the country's economy was too centered around agriculture.

Economically, Spain had kept up with most of its European counterparts through the mid-to late-1800s. By the turn of the 20th century, however, they had

fallen well behind and were on par in many respects with Russia.

The country experienced very slow growth in industry. To iterate the agriculture-centric point, approximately 50 percent of the male labor force was working in agriculture on the eve of the civil war. Even during the worst years of the Great Depression, only around 25 percent of Americans worked in agriculture.

It isn't strange for a people to clamor for change when the country as a whole is not competing on a global scale, or even regional scale. It is strange, however, for a people to clamor for change when their country is leading the world in so many areas. That is where America finds herself. It is almost as if a very large minority of Americans pine for the days of the most recent recession. Ask one of those Americans and they will respond in the negative, but ask them if America is heading in



Nationalist troops search a farmer and his wife for weapons after the capture of the Basque town of Irún during the Spanish Civil War on Sept. 6, 1936.

the right direction and they will again answer in the negative.

There is something called American exceptionalism that some Americans despise, as if it

were an emblem of supremacy. It isn't. It is merely a fact. America has been better than the rest of the world in just about every important category: economic, education, health care, research and development, and military. (A quick caveat: in terms of education, meaning that America has most of the top-tier universities in the world.)

It appears that many Americans feel guilty for being better off than everyone else in the world, as if America was gifted its greatness. America wasn't gifted greatness. It was earned—by blood, sweat, prayer, piety, freedom, and law.

Those aforementioned reasons for greatness are what are under attack, and it is for no good reason. The reason behind the complaints, however, does match up with that of the Spanish Civil War: ideology.

When Alfonso XIII was forced to leave the country in 1931 (though

he did not abdicate the throne) after the general elections put the Republican and Socialist parties in power, the Republic began.

At the onset, anti-Catholic sentiment raged through parts of the country. Churches were burned. Priests and nuns were killed. Anti-private property propaganda came into play. The Republic's mantra was "neither property, nor God, nor bosses." The anarchist youth manifesto stated, "For the Revolution to be a fact, we must demolish the three pillars of reaction: the church, the army, and capitalism."

In America today, there is a concerted effort to undermine most of these ideals: God, the church, private property, bosses (private business owners), and capitalism. Only the army stands unattacked, which may be because unlike the Spanish Army of the early 20th century, the U.S. military is and always has been apolitical.

• God and the Church: Our faith in God and our belief in the necessity of the church is es-

sential to helping retain some semblance of sanity within American society. As George Washington stated in his presidential farewell address, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports."

As George Washington stated in his presidential farewell address, 'Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports.'

- Private Property: The right to private property keeps us from falling into chaos by ensuring we don't take what truly belongs to someone else (or simply put "Thou shalt not steal") and provides individuals and families with a sense of pride. As James Otis once wrote, "A man's house is his castle."
- Bosses: John Donne once wrote, "No man is an island." Accountability is a human necessity. To that point, bosses are necessary to keep order within an economy. The threat of being fired is a strong motivator to work hard, learn more, advance, and continue moving America's economy forward.
- Capitalism: Historian Niall Ferguson once wrote that "Imperial falls are associated with fiscal crises." America's capitalist society has continued to secure her financially for these past couple of centuries. It has not been without faltering, but one needs only look at how administrations have pushed for intervention to see how American busi-

ness can be undermined by her own government, even when it has the best of intentions.

For America to fall, it must first begin with the destruction of its morality and the removal of spiritual authority (God and church), then move to the elimination of private property, the elimination of earthly authority (bosses), and finally a financial crisis. America has withstood numerous recessions and depressions, but her moral authority always remained intact.

The current demand for less moral and earthly authority continues to increase. Government continues to file eminent domain lawsuits, as activists shout that Americans are "on stolen land." Regulations from government agencies continue to pile up, making it more difficult for "bosses" to run their private businesses, and for some nearly impossible to break into certain industries without receiving outrageous and more often than not unnecessary government licenses. Lastly, and

this has been on display in the Democratic debates, capitalism is decried by the likes of Sanders, Warren, and, well, just about all of them. The cry for equality echoes the sentiments of Spain's new Republic. Those cries hit a deafening pitch during the years of the war as blood ran through the streets.

In America, it already feels like a return to Spain's 1931, and for more than the aforementioned reasons. Spain's balance of power swung back and forth from that point onward till 1936, when Francisco Franco and his army moved in.

If America isn't careful, we will end up removing all of our "indispensable supports" and when chaos and order collide, no one will be able to tell the difference between the two. Just as it was in the Spanish Civil War.

Dustin Bass is the co-founder of The Sons of History, a YouTube series and weekly podcast about all things history. He is a former journalist turned entrepreneur. He is also an author.



LINDSEY KOTIK | KOM CREATIVE STUDIOS, LLC



COURTESY OF KATY MCQUAID



COURTESY OF KATY MCQUAID



COURTESY OF KATY MCQUAID

‘Everybody Loves Grace’

A Dog’s Life Advice for the New Year

ANDREW THOMAS

Katy McQuaid has written an illustrated children’s book series entitled “Everybody Loves Grace,” which features sage life advice for both kids and adults. The series is told from the perspective of her 13-year-old Finnish Lapphund, named Grace. McQuaid worked for the CIA for more than 30 years, and is the founder of McQuaid Corporate Performance. I had an opportunity to speak with McQuaid to discuss her book series, and her four life lessons: be kind, be brave, cuddle up, and have fun.



“Everybody Loves Grace: An Amazing True Story of How Grace Brings Love to Everyone She Meets” by Katy McQuaid.

THE EPOCH TIMES: What motivated you to write the book series “Everybody Loves Grace”?

KATY MCQUAID: It actually came after a walk-up at Denver Health. The head of the ambulance squad, the captain, stopped dead in his tracks, and he petted Grace, and she looked deep in his eyes. He said, “If I could only start my day like this every day.” I had friends for years tell me to write a book. And I said that story really isn’t [my] story, it’s Grace’s story about how everybody just loves her and her ability to impact people’s lives just by looking in their eyes.

THE EPOCH TIME: How did your career in the CIA influence what you wrote in the book series?

MS. MCQUAID: For 12 years, I lived overseas, and I lived in a lot of tough places. The influence was I always did work with children or I would see children on the streets. When I lived in Afghanistan, we would go [to] an orphanage occasionally, and I just have a heart for children. I see children with far less than what I grew up with, or what many kids in the United States grow up with. I wanted to convey that there’s hope and there’s love no matter what your circumstances are. We can make an impact on people’s lives. Grace does it every day.

THE EPOCH TIMES: How can simple acts of kindness have a profound effect on others?

MS. MCQUAID: A simple act of kindness can make somebody feel like they’re seen, and that they’re being heard. Grace takes that extra minute or three minutes to be with somebody, and they feel like somebody cares, that somebody is listening, somebody notices, [and] somebody asks. That’s what a simple act of kindness is. For Grace, it could be as

simple as just looking in their eyes, and when she does that, of course, she looks straight down into their heart. It’s about the gift of presence. Just writing a simple thank you note is a simple act of kindness. Writing a note of congratulations. Bringing in somebody’s newspaper. Bringing in a trash can for an elderly neighbor. Offering to take an elderly neighbor to a doctor’s appointment. That’s a simple act of kindness.

THE EPOCH TIMES: What does it mean to be fully present for someone, and why is that so important?

MS. MCQUAID: The gift of presence is holding a space for somebody. It’s listening. It’s holding a space for somebody to talk and share what’s on their mind. That’s what the gift of presence is. It’s about not being on our cell-phone, not thinking about the next errand we have to do, but fully being present with someone as they’re speaking or when we’re spending time with them and not being distracted by technology and what else is going on in our mind. Really what the gift of presence does is it creates a safe space. It creates connection, and then that connection leads to trust, a feeling of love at some level, and kindness.

THE EPOCH TIMES: How does one turn a negative situation into a positive situation?

MS. MCQUAID: I think one way is to truly believe that things happen for a reason. It’s here to teach us a lesson. Taking a step back and reflecting on the situation and what I learned from it. How can I apply that to make sure it doesn’t happen again in the future or how I can use that to serve in the future?

THE EPOCH TIMES: Why is the journey just as important as the destination?

MS. MCQUAID: Because so many important things happen on the journey. There are times in my life I’ve been focused on the next promotion, the next job, and I’ve missed what’s happening currently. And that’s actually part of being present. Being present on the journey and enjoying the things that are happening on the journey are just as important as when we get there.

THE EPOCH TIMES: What can people learn from taking the road less traveled?

MS. MCQUAID: I feel like I did that in so many ways in my life. In taking the road less traveled, I became my own

self. I was true to who I am, and it allowed me to be who I am, and have the courage to be who I am instead of following the more popular route. At the agency, by taking the road less traveled, I got some really great opportunities and unique assignments because I was willing to do what others weren’t.

THE EPOCH TIMES: What advice do you have for someone who is moving to a new place, whether it’s a kid who is starting at a new school or an adult at a new job?

MS. MCQUAID: My first word of advice is it takes six months to settle in. No matter how many times one moves, it takes about six months to wake up and feel like you belong. Have courage and strength through those first six months to know there are going to be highs and lows, and that it can be difficult in those first months. But rest assured, in about six months, it’s like magic. You wake up one day and think, “This is where I belong.”

THE EPOCH TIMES: What do you hope readers take away from the series?

MS. MCQUAID: My overarching goal is to touch people with kindness, and for them to understand the impact that kindness can have. But also, I want to encourage. I want people to feel a sense of empowerment and courage and hope as they go through life every day. While these are children’s books, they’ve been really impacting parents and adults. An 80-year-old woman named Grace came to one of the book readings, and at the end of the book reading, I looked up and she was just shedding tears. She said, “Katy, the world needs more of this. We just need kindness.” My goal for the book is if there’s any way to touch people’s lives, children, parents, 80-year-old Graces through Grace’s story, that’s what I want to do. I want to touch people with simple acts of kindness.

1. Katy McQuaid with her 13-year-old Finnish Lapphund, named Grace.
2. Katy McQuaid is the author of the illustrated children’s book series “Everybody Loves Grace.”
3. 4. Katy McQuaid’s 13-year-old Finnish Lapphund, named Grace.

Asa James Swan: On Helping People Become Better Leaders

CATHERINE YANG

Asa James Swan became deeply interested in leadership and government in his teens. As a freshman in high school, he ran for class president. At age 15, he started college and a year later became student body president. His parents later told him that they remembered walking and seeing their teenage son glued to the TV and switching between C-SPAN and several news channels during the 1994 midterm elections, and thinking “What is he doing? Why is our teenage son obsessed with these election results?”

Swan has just spent this past year as the Chief Leadership Officer of the Commonwealth of Kentucky—an increasingly popular position in the private sector, but rarely heard of in the public sector. For the past several decades, Kentucky consistently ranked as one of the most corrupt state governments, and Swan, a historian by trade, joined the government four years ago hoping he could help change that.

“Healthy cultures push out corruption,” he said during his job interview with the governor’s office. That caught their attention, and Swan joined the Transportation cabinet.

A few months into his position there as chief of staff, Swan decided to give a talk titled “Creating a Culture of Honor.” Attendees were interested in implementing Swan’s ideas, and things grew from there.

“I really wanted to work on their culture and help make it better,” Swan said. “If the culture got healthier, then it would help address some of the systemic problems that my cabinet had had over the years.”

“And even just people who love doing their work aren’t being tempted nearly as easily to break the law or do something unethical. Most of the people there are really good, hard-working professionals... they’re loyal, they’re faithful, and they’ve given their lives to this,” Swan said. A healthy culture could incite against the few bad apples who get into government for the wrong reasons. “Everybody wins when the culture is better—everybody wins. Especially the taxpayers,” he said. Buoyed by case studies of culture change in the private sector, Swan wanted to see if he couldn’t bring better leadership to the bureaucracy.

The talk went well—it turned out many were interested in making their workplaces a better place to be, as well as more efficient and innovative. Swan started doing more talks, first to small groups, then in front of bigger groups. The next thing he knew, he was at a

conference presenting to an audience of a thousand. “These things just kind of fall into your lap,” Swan said. This eventually turned into Swan’s full-time position. At the beginning of this year, the outgoing governor, Matt Bevin, had appointed him CLO.

Leadership Lessons

Swan says the first thing he tells every group is about how leadership affects culture. “Everybody takes their cues from the senior leader,” Swan said. “In my mind, that’s the beginning of all leadership training, that the senior leader, whether he or she knows it or not, is giving off cues that define work culture.”

People look to this senior leader and model their behavior, whether good or bad, and the senior leader is often unaware of the extent this is taking place, and what the pitfalls are. For example, a senior leader who is constantly busy and very productive may not think of their work habits as a bad thing, Swan said. But then the team watches those lunch desks and no vacations and think they’re not allowed to take time off or take a break.

“Just cues like that begin to define what I call the ‘ghost rules’ of an office workplace,” Swan said.

Modeling the culture you as a leader want to see is the first of three core tenets to Swan’s philosophy. The second one is that good leaders know how to follow, and take any role or rank in a team and still lead. In fact, many stories of great leadership that Swan hears are ones when someone not in a senior leader position decided to step up and lead.

“They don’t always have to be up front, so there’s a humility aspect to that,” Swan said.

“The third tenet is that you should be the leader that others want to follow,” he said. This requires growing yourself as a leader, and becoming the kind of person who builds trust, shows others they are valued, and helps them succeed.

“A good leader is very intentional about creating a healthy culture—I like to call it culture of honor and empowerment,” Swan said. The empowerment is important, because it creates more effective teams, with members supported by the leader to carry out various initiatives. “The leader goes and gives their authority away... healthy teams feel empowered by their senior leader.”

A good culture isn’t just a nice add-on, Swan said.

“Marcus Buckingham’s research has shown over and over that when people go to work, they want to be a part of



COURTESY OF ASA JAMES SWAN

Asa James Swan is the Chief Leadership Officer of the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

something bigger than themselves. And if they don’t feel that way, they begin to shut down and their work product diminishes,” Swan said. It was heartening to see that the questions he started to ask were the ones other government employees wanted to answer.

“How can we make this place better? How can we save taxpayers money? How can we do things cheaper and more efficiently and yet improve in the quality of our work?” Swan said. “But how can we make it so people love coming to work and feel like they’re making a difference?”

As CLO, Swan was invited to various cabinet offices. The secretaries function like CEOs of their own areas of government, and they know Swan is available to help with anything from addressing the culture at large or finding ways to improve small things like strengthening the feedback loop.

“Sometimes I’m invited for a whole day, sometimes I come back for an hour,” Swan said. “What I love is usually after I come the first time, I get another invitation.”

Swan has defined four areas of leadership development: leading yourself, leading others, leading the room, and serving those we lead.

A Passion for Potential

Swan said when he ran for freshman class president in college, he was just a kid, and so he probably did it for selfish reasons.

“But when I won, I thought, ‘Oh gosh, how do I lead?’” Swan said. “That began a desire for me to learn: What do good leaders do and how do they live?”

He began with historical examples,

reading about Churchill, Reagan, Jesus, Thatcher, Gandhi, and so on. His interest only grew from there, and by the time he was student body president in college, his interest in leadership and government was completely intertwined.

“That just became one of my desires, to become a good leader who puts people first and help them get better and unlock their potential,” Swan said. “That’s when I began to feel a calling into this realm—and as you know, this is a hard realm. It’s toxic, it’s full of people that are here for the wrong reasons. Thankfully, there are still a lot of people here for the right reasons.”

Today, instead of being glued to C-SPAN, Swan attends the Global Leadership Summit twice a year without fail.

“I recommend it to you—nothing I do all year is more deeply refreshing and inspiring,” he said. It sweeps aside any cynicism he’s accumulated about his work, and fills him with fresh ideas.

His first job out of college was on a political campaign, which led him to Capitol Hill, before he left politics to become a history professor for eight years. Then Swan left teaching to work on Allison Ball’s campaign for Kentucky state treasurer; the two of them later married, and now have a 15-month-old son. “Like most dads, I’m obsessed with him and I think he hung the moon,” he said.

“And as draining as politics and government can be, my friends and my family along with life, they helped me just rejuvenate and recharge and come back in and fight the good fight every day,” Swan said.

Family, faith, and community help ground him, and Swan is intent on work-life balance. He cooks a lot, travels, and has been working on his doctorate on the side. His thesis is about power and power relationships, and how that connects with spaces and places, Swan said—more specifically the ancient fishing village-turned neighborhood in Edinburgh where his grandmother emigrated from, and the abuse of power that marked the place over time. “It’s fascinating, but it’s a very sad story,” Swan said.

Swan says his passion is to help people grow into their potential—and that people trump politics any day. But the government does have bearing on the day-to-day lives of everyday citizens, and that should be for the better, not the worse.

“Low taxes, government getting out of the way, them feeling empowered to just pursue any dreams that they have,” he said. “I’d love to see people just have better lives and good policy, and government really does impact people’s day-to-day lives.”

How Can Generation Z Compete With Robots? Focus on the Human Touch

NEW YORK—It sounds counter-intuitive, but members of Generation Z will have to focus on human connections if they want to compete with robots for the jobs of the future.

Born after 1996 on the heels of the millennials, Gen Z is just entering the workforce. Its members are the first true digital natives, and their ability to adapt to an automating workplace will likely determine their success.

While science and engineering degrees are on the rise, “soft” skills such as intellectual insight, flexibility, intuition, and creativity will be essential for workers competing with machines that are growing more technically proficient.

Here are the soft skills Gen Z members need to succeed:

Be an Effective Strategic Communicator

Some employers fear that digital native workers might be too much like the robots they are competing with. What will make Gen Z workers stand out? Good communication skills.

Those in technology fields of



FIZKES/SHUTTERSTOCK

ten work remotely or in relative isolation, so they don’t always get enough time to sharpen their interpersonal skills, said Jason Wingard, dean and professor of the school of professional studies at Columbia University.

There is a way for young people to train for that skill, though, added Vicki Walia, chief talent and capability officer at financial services giant Prudential.

“Gen Zs should not under-emphasize the importance of relationship building, listening, communicating, working collaboratively,” Walia said.

One way to do this is through mentorship. Young workers should work to form relationships with older colleagues or even engage in “reverse mentorships,” helping an older worker learn a new technology skill.

Last year, Russell Bingham, a senior engineering major, participated in the clinic program at Harvey Mudd College in Claremont, California, which partners student teams with companies. The interactions were “eye-opening,” Bingham said, making him find better ways to interact with colleagues.

Young workers should work to form relationships with older colleagues or even engage in “reverse mentorships,” helping an older worker learn a new technology skill.

Be a Continuous Learner

While most of Generation Z is still in school, they already need to think about how to continually adapt to a fast-changing world. Their advantage, said Walia, is that they are “digitally capable and multidimensional.”

To succeed, they must be pragmatic and realistic about their skills and how desired skill sets will change. For example, Walia said graduates might be trained in Microsoft Excel, but a job might require them to learn how to interpret that data.

“Storytelling skills are an important part of being able to help others interpret the data, and use it to tell a story through data visualization,” Walia said.

More industry knowledge also equals more money—up to \$6,387 more a year in salary in a high-wage industry—according to a study the MIT-IBM Watson AI lab did between 2010 and 2017.

Find Work that Gives You a Sense of Purpose

Nearly half of the Gen Zs said they had experienced job burnout in the past year, according to

a survey by ServiceNow, a Santa Clara, California, cloud computing company. Half said they were considering a job outside their current industry because of it.

Workers are at their best when doing something meaningful to them, said Obed Louissaint, vice president of talent at IBM.

To avoid burnout, young people should couple finding purpose with taking proper mental breaks and trying to build healthy habits, Louissaint added.

Harvey Mudd student Bingham, for instance, is looking for a job that lets him apply his science and engineering skills to projects with societal impact. He recently worked as part of the expedition team that located the HMS Urge submarine after it was lost at sea for 77 years.

“That experience has led me to strongly value the fact that my unique robotics skill set can be an asset to people and projects totally outside the direct development of robots,” Bingham said.

By Caroline Monahan
From Reuters

THE TRUTH ABOUT CLASSICAL CHINESE DANCE

A much deeper, richer, history than is commonly known

CATHERINE YANG

Classical ballet has a familiar place in our minds. We know who invented it, the major stars and the eras they pioneered, and the classics of the repertoire—Christmas comes, and so does “The Nutcracker.” We know the five positions of ballet, which from inception to the present day have not changed. Classical Chinese dance, the equally complex system of the East, has a much more complicated provenance.

So much so, that even one school in China that claims to have invented it is unclear about where the movements originated.

That school, the Beijing Dance Academy (BDA), officially supported by the Chinese regime, makes the claim to have invented “classical Chinese dance” because it is simply commonly believed. Due to the Academy’s extensive dance curriculum, younger generations of dancers and scholars have mistakenly made that assumption.

But of course it wasn’t. “What BDA has is a program, a pedagogy, and system of movement that reorganizes classical Chinese dance, and brought it into the academy system. That’s it,” says Guo Hua Ping, a classical Chinese dance instructor in New York.

“How can a modern teaching system suddenly become ‘classical’ with a history of 5,000 years?” Guo says.

To better understand the formation of this art, rooted in a tradition going back 5,000 years, we spoke to experts who have dedicated their lives to preserving the art form.

Training in Opera

Guo Hua Ping, now in her 80s, was born in China in 1935 and grew up in Beijing. Throughout her career, she saw the art form develop, grow in popularity, and morph into something entirely different.

“I must have started [dance] when I was about 13, and I have never done

anything else since. What else can you call it but fate?” Guo said.

This was very early communist China, before the Cultural Revolution. Guo remembers, as some of her earliest memories, New Year events at temples, with dances and martial arts performances.

“There were two temples near where I grew up,” Guo said. These were places of reverence for the heavens, great halls established by emperors to pay respects to the divine. During major holidays, they were sites of celebration, where people flocked to pray and burn incense to the gods and watch performances.

“There were Peking Opera performance groups, and they would put on shows—the costumes, acting, dancing, props, the various movements of Peking opera. It was all there,” Guo said. “I was very young, and I loved it. I’d go home and copy what I’d seen, just for play.”

She would later understand that these glimpses of Peking Opera she’d seen were the real deal, a long-standing traditional performing art that had been passed down and developed through the ages.

“This was actually Chinese dance,” she said; it became an important reference point for her later. Chinese dance came from the dances of more than 300 kinds of traditional Chinese operas, such as Kunqu Opera and Peking Opera. These are the main sources of classical Chinese dance.

Guo ended up joining a performing arts military institute, which at one point was named the Zhongnan Theater Company, when the state started recruiting little troopers and they saw that she showed talent in the little skits and plays at school.

There, the students learned from Peking Opera experts, like those who’d studied with Mei Lanfang, the famous artist who was the first to spread Chinese opera outside of China. Students might go on to specialize in various things or various roles, but Chinese opera was the fundamental basis for all of it, and everyone took these classes.

As Guo explained, you didn’t start with a separate theory or a technique course on vocal training or footwork; these were entire stories passed via demonstration from teachers to students. The teachers would take scenes from well-known operas and teach them in their entirety—the steps, the staging, the gestures, the songs, even how to warm up—to every class. The experts themselves came from theatrical troupes that typically had a sort of apprenticeship system, with one principal dancer leading a number of students.

“Like the art troupe I was in at the time, many dance professional groups all over the country were learning and arranging dance styles and techniques from traditional operas such as Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera, which were generally referred to as ‘classical Chinese dance,’” Guo said.

Guo took a short moment to demonstrate—a distinct turn of the head, the way the fingers were placed and hands moved, the inflection in

tone. “Everybody knew this,” she said, describing several fundamental steps with their names. Guo recalled in the same breath how different types of new characters took to the stage with an introduction, and how different props like twin swords were used. She described an opera scene in particular, which was taught to early classes, depicting a young lady consoling an emperor with a song. This was a systematic art form with a developed vocabulary of movement and established repertoire.

A few years after Guo started studying at the institute, the Beijing Dance School, later renamed the Beijing Dance Academy (BDA), was formed by the state in 1954. This school began one of the biggest changes to Chinese dance itself.

The formation of the school included first interviewing many Peking Opera experts to decide how to best teach Chinese dance systematically. Then dance teachers from the Soviet Union were invited to lead the classes, which introduced another layer of changes to what was known as Chinese dance.

“Dancers from the Soviet Union ... created a Chinese-Ballet hybrid sort of form,” Guo said.

The Ballet Hybrid

The communist states of China and the Soviet Union had good relations at the time, and so even though China had not yet begun to “open up” to the world, the state invited many Soviet Union dance experts to serve as instructors.

Guo explained how BDA used ballet pedagogy from the beginning. With the help of Soviet ballet experts and ballet teaching systems, they sought to reorganize classical Chinese dance, drawing from Chinese opera dance with a corresponding teaching system.

It was impossible for the instructors to pick up, much less be able to teach, something developed over thousands of years in full. As the language of ballet was introduced, certain elements automatically disappeared from the vocabulary—most obviously, tumbling techniques like midair somersaults or flying backward flips.

There were more fundamental things lost in this use of foreign pedagogy, because the character of each dance form is different to begin with.

“There are many differences ... Traditional Chinese dance has explosive starts and a sort of circular way of moving, rounded movements,” said Vina Lee, a classical Chinese dance instructor who grew up training in this period of the Chinese-Ballet hybrid form. At the time, it was so mixed that she would not have known which parts were drawn from ballet and which were from traditional Chinese dance.

Lee, now president of Fei Tian College in upstate New York, said up front that it was probably not until she came to the States that she started to understand classical Chinese dance, even though she was a ballet instructor for many years before that.

Though this Chinese-Ballet hybrid dominated the scene for a few decades before it gave way to other forms, its introduction played a significant role in the loss of classical Chinese dance.

“Because Beijing [Dance Academy] was using this Chinese-Ballet hybrid, the whole country fell in line and replicated it as well. They put dancers on pointe,” she said.

“But, to use ballet to express Chinese things, it actually doesn’t work. You’re using a Western language to convey the content of another culture,” Lee said. Think about how difficult it is to properly translate an idiom and retain its meaning, for instance, and multiply that many times over.

Translation between languages for everyday things might be a simple task, but this is art, and art with deep cultural roots. The East has no concept of the “Pietà,” for instance, and the West is not immediately familiar with the idea of spiritual cultivation.

“Each gesture, every turn of the head, every look—they’re distinctly cultural.”

She demonstrates, just in little things like the angle of the head, or how to hold your arms, or the placement of the fingers. The difference is stark and immediate. Tiny changes made to every step along the way can add up to quite a lot. “Or, if your upper body is Chinese dance but your feet are on pointe, what does that convey?”

“It’s not that ballet isn’t beautiful or complete, but it’s an entirely different form,” Lee said. “Ballet is about beautiful, long lines and clean leaps and landings. How do you mix that? And the [Chinese Communist Party-approved] Revolutionary Ballets had a very strong propagandistic message, not quite compatible with classical ballet either.”

But the biggest detriment to the development of Chinese dance was not that it mixed in a few ballet moves. It was that it removed tradition from the equation and opened the doors for further hybridization writ large. Traditional Chinese dance, which largely came from Chinese opera, with roots in the imperial courts of ancient dynasties, had never been passed along and taught on a massive, national scale. Not like the Chinese-Ballet hybrid was. In just a few years, people forgot or were forced to forget the significance of the movements and stories passed down via Chinese opera, and things that are not meaningful are later easily removed.

The Revolution

China and the Soviet Union eventually parted ways; the experts left, and the Cultural Revolution took place shortly thereafter.

“You either followed the [Chinese Communist] Party or you were sent off to work in the camps,” Lee said, understating the bloody violence of the period. “So there was a break in artistic development for a period of time.”

During this period, there were just what was called the “Eight Model Plays.” This set of operas and ballets was engineered by communist leader Mao Zedong’s wife, Jiang Qing, and they were meant to glorify the communist revolution and usher in Mao’s cult of personality.

Guo, who had been dancing all of her life, said no one dared to perform any other operas during that time. Mao wanted to replace the old with his own new; even Confucius was thrown out. Who would dare try to develop content in that direction?

“What could we perform?” She demonstrated a few abrupt movements, the kind a child might come up with in jest to mock Hitler or Stalin in a march, and then made a face. If you look up “Red Detachment of Women,” the best-known ballet of the bunch today, it does actually look like that. Violent Marxist themes communicated through the elegant, etiquette-driven classical ballet is more or less a Frankenstein creature of dance.

After the Cultural Revolution, institutes across the nation were replaced by various performing arts troupes, many of which changed names several times as district lines were redrawn. There were still ballet schools, Guo said, but there was nothing called “traditional Chinese dance” or “classical Chinese dance.” Various elements of traditional Chinese dance, like the tumbling techniques or impressive kicks, were used by anyone and everyone however they wished, notably in gymnastics and acrobatics competitions. Dance was a mixed bag with little philosophy behind it, except perhaps to dazzle and impress and draw in any audience one could. There was no other way for an artist to make a living in a society that had done away with culture.

“It was a very messy period,” Guo said. “The worst of it was probably that Chinese people could no longer recognize in the arts what aspects were Chinese. We couldn’t recognize our own tradition.”

Rediscovering Chinese Culture

Lee remembers that she had never been particularly proud to be Chinese until

she started learning classical Chinese dance and, by extension, traditional Chinese culture.

“I’d previously not understood, and frankly wasn’t interested in, Chinese arts. I didn’t know how to appreciate them,” Lee said. “I had to realize what the culture was all about.”

She described it as a learning process going back to the fundamentals, of both mind and body.

Just as ballet has, over the centuries, been an expression of various Western cultures, classical Chinese dance can be well understood as the expression of traditional Chinese culture through aesthetic movement.

We need to take into account the timeline: This is civilization stretching back 5,000 years, with formative cultural figures like Confucius and Laozu being near contemporaries of Socrates, considered the father of philosophy in the West—two civilizations ago. And it has only been less than a century since the communist takeover of China swung a cleaver down to break the long line of continuous tradition.

So what is traditional Chinese culture about? At its very foundation is the idea of harmony between heaven and earth, and reverence for the divine. It is said to be “divinely inspired,” because ancient Chinese people believed that life itself was given by the divine, along with most aspects of Chinese culture.

Before the first dynasty was established, there were the Three Sovereigns or demigods: Suiren, who invented fire; Fuxi, who invented hunting and fishing; and Shennong, the inventor of agriculture. Then there were the early emperors, who were believed to either have divine capabilities or could communicate with divine beings. Everything from the written language to the clothing and the way emperors ruled had some connection, an explicit connection, to the divine.

In writings by scholars and historians spanning millennia, there are constant mentions of the divine and of living virtuously, in accordance with heaven, so that people might receive blessings from the gods. The lessons of history across the numerous dynasties are understood to be distilled into the five cardinal virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness. Inextricable from the culture are also the three religions of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism.

Lee goes on to explain that this value system is one important component of understanding what classical Chinese dance is, in part, because knowing this, one begins to see the reason one moves this way or that way to convey an idea or feeling. Classical Chinese dance is typically a storytelling art form, and in order to portray or understand great historical figures like Emperor Kangxi, General Yue Fei, or the poet Li Bai, you must understand the cultural context of their stories. If you take the culture out of Chinese dance, it really isn’t Chinese dance.

Finding the Movements

With the communist campaigns having left China’s traditional culture in ruins, there has been little for artists to rely on, even if they wish to piece together something authentic.

But if you understand the traditional culture, according to these dancers, you already have a great many of the pieces with which to build something original yet traditional.

There are clear ideals of femininity and masculinity, for example, Lee said, and it’s not hard to tell whether your dance expresses that. You also start to understand what traditional Chinese art is about and can see when there is a piece that doesn’t quite fit; a previously foreign language becomes easier to decipher.

“With traditional Chinese culture, in the art, a lot of it comes from a clear and calm place of mind. A sort of peace that



Peter Huang, 18, gold award winner in the male adult division of the International Classical Chinese Dance Competition, performs “Drinking Alone by the Moonlight” at BMCC Tribeca Performing Arts Center in New York on Oct. 12, 2014.

DAVID/THE EPOCH TIMES

“It was a very messy period. The worst of it was probably that Chinese people could no longer recognize in the arts what aspects were Chinese. We couldn’t recognize our own tradition.”

Guo Hua Ping, classical Chinese dance instructor



Classical Chinese dance instructor Guo Hua Ping.

is precisely an oasis in our busy, modern-day lives,” Lee said.

Having the foundational understanding of traditional Chinese culture becomes useful in recognizing the technique and system of movements inherent in the dance form as well.

Many of the movements look similar to martial arts, for instance, which developed in parallel to the aesthetic art of dance over the 5,000 years. Lee points out that in Chinese, the two words share a homophone. Martial arts is “wushu,” and dance is “wudao,” though the “wu” character is written differently for each.

These forms, in fact, share many movements. Lee demonstrates a punch, and then again with a quicker start and softer ending and turn of her hand to finish. “You beautify the movements when using them in dance,” she said.

Classical Chinese dance movements had been passed down through imperial courts and regional opera productions over thousands of years before they were whittled away piece by piece after the end of the last dynasty. But martial arts movements were not affected in the same way.

Even when martial arts fell in popularity, or when they lost their spiritual component, the movements and sets of movements did not change, and those old martial arts practitioners in the mountains still passed them down.

“You can’t change the movements because they’re functional,” Lee said. “If you change it, it’s not effective anymore.” If someone strikes at you, you still have to dodge. There is obviously a better or worse way to use a spear or a sword. There is no making it up as you go on the battlefield.

Thus, a lot of the movements and also how they combine has been retained, and many see it as a blessing.

These movements retained in martial arts, along with the way of moving drawn from Chinese opera, create a very vivid language.

The movements themselves, along with a systematic approach of how these movements should be linked together—drawn from the long legacy of dance and opera—create a very vivid language.

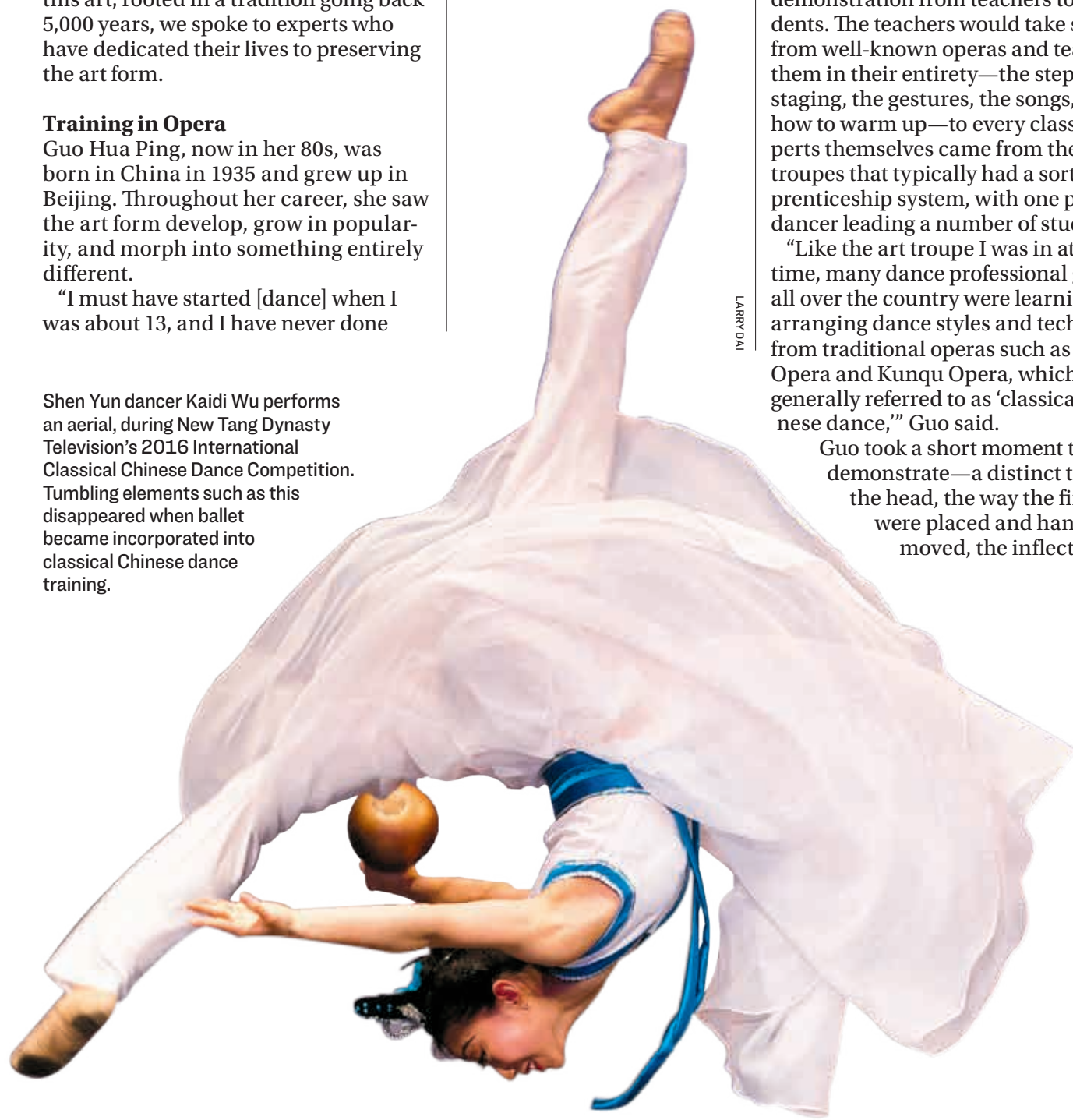
As the experts explain it, classical Chinese dance is so expressive because it’s the meaning behind a movement that drives the body into movement.

This is referred to as “yun,” or the bearing of the dancer, who may be embodying a specific emperor or hero from a legend, or a character less specific, like a scholar from the Tang Dynasty, or a princess in the Manchurian court.

Culture’s Impact

This is why technique is not enough. You can be a dancer with the highest kicks and most impressive leaps, but if you don’t have the vocabulary—the method of movement, the cultural understanding—when you get on stage, you can’t convincingly portray anyone.

Continued on Page 10



Shen Yun dancer Kaidi Wu performs an aerial, during New Tang Dynasty Television’s 2016 International Classical Chinese Dance Competition. Tumbling elements such as this disappeared when ballet became incorporated into classical Chinese dance training.

LARRY RAY

SHEN YUN PERFORMING ARTS

Shen Yun Kicks Off 2020 Season on East and West Coasts

CATHERINE YANG

Shen Yun Performing Arts began this season with a premiere in its home state of New York, where audience members such as Goldie Bryant have made the performance a holiday tradition. “I feel blessed to be able to experience the quality of the performance as the dancers share with us all that they have,” said Bryant, a retired health physicist and associate commissioner of the New York State Health Department. Here at The Performing Arts Center at Purchase College on Dec. 20, it was Bryant’s sixth time seeing Shen Yun.

Bryant said her “holidays have been enriched by seeing the show” every year, and she said it felt “special being able to enjoy what the dancers have to share.” “The exquisiteness of the dance, choreography, and the music that supported the choreography, it’s just wonderful, and I’ll be back again next year,” she said.

Later that day, the first Shen Yun performance on the West Coast kicked off with a performance in Berkeley, California, where audience members expressed an appreciation for the traditional culture Shen Yun brings out through music and dance.

Ken Churich, senior vice president of a commercial real estate company, enjoyed the performance with his wife at Zellerbach Hall on Dec. 20.

“The precision is outstanding,” he said. “The choreography and the...tumbling, the dance moves, I’ve never seen anything like it with so many people and so consistent. The finer details are really, really extraordinary, and the music is nice. Everything, and the timing of it, is really something we’ve never seen before. It’s outstanding.”

He said the dancers “are true athletes,” and praised the impressive feats he saw onstage, coupled with the fact that it was clear this stemmed from a deep tradition.



THE EPOCH TIMES



SALLY SUN/THE EPOCH TIMES



GARY WANG/THE EPOCH TIMES

(Above) Shen Yun Performing Arts Global Company’s curtain call at Zellerbach Hall in Berkeley, Calif., on Dec. 20, 2019.

(Left) Goldie Bryant enjoyed Shen Yun Performing Arts at The Performing Arts Center of Purchase College in Purchase, N.Y., on Dec. 20, 2019.

(Right) Ken Churich and his wife enjoyed Shen Yun at Zellerbach Hall in Berkeley, Calif., on Dec. 20, 2019.

“The exquisiteness of the dance, choreography, and the music that supported the choreography, it’s just wonderful.”

Goldie Bryant

“It gives you a greater appreciation,” he said. “You can tell that the traditions go generations deep. It’s very spiritual.”

Shen Yun, formed in 2006 by artists who wanted to share the authentic traditional Chinese culture with the world, has now grown to seven companies. Performances begin around the world this week.

In North America, shows will soon be playing in Stamford, Connecticut; San Jose and San Francisco, California; Dallas and Houston, Texas; and Ottawa and Hamilton, Canada. In Asia, the tour begins in Japan, where Shen Yun will visit nine cities; in Europe, shows will begin in Florence, Italy, this week; and start in the UK over the New Year.

For more information and tickets, see ShenYunPerformingArts.org

The Epoch Times considers Shen Yun Performing Arts the significant cultural event of our time and has covered audience reactions since the company’s inception in 2006. The Epoch Times is a media sponsor of Shen Yun Performing Arts.

The Truth About Classical Chinese Dance

Continued from Page 9

“When you fully understand classical Chinese dance, it’s like, ‘Oh! It is a rich and complex language of its own,’” Lee said.

If you speak to classical Chinese dancers today, Lee included, many explain the creative process of learning classical Chinese dance to that of learning what it means to be human. This is partly because as a performing artist, one often serves as a translator of the depth and brilliance of human experience. Just as classical musicians are interpreting for listeners the scores of long gone but genius composers, classical Chinese dancers are actually interpreting the divinely inspired culture and history of ancient China.

“These stories all have cultural context,” Lee said. “If you don’t understand purity and calmness, you can’t express it.”

“To learn classical Chinese dance, you need to have that moral and cultural foundation—that’s why people feel it’s beautiful,” Lee said. She often hears from audiences that it’s so beautiful, but they’re grasping for the how, or why they feel that almost ethereal calm.

It’s because these artists pursue beauty of a transcendent nature, as in beauty, truth, and goodness. It only takes a twist of the gaze or slight turn of the body to turn that beauty into that of the mere sensory sort—from something sincere into something ironic, or worse, vulgar.



COPYRIGHT SHEN YUN PERFORMING ARTS

Female Shen Yun dancers perform a classical Chinese dance.

“It stems from your mindset,” Lee reiterates. Your intention drives your movement, and through such a rich and expressive language, the audience is sure to understand what you have conveyed. Though the form itself is not boundless, it can convey boundless things, Lee said.

This is the type of expression where your soul is on display.

Turning Toward Tradition
Guo, who is principal of the Fei Tian Academy of the Arts, and Lee have both been company managers for Shen Yun

Performing Arts, the New York-based company that put classical Chinese dance on the map.

Some schools in China, lacking the understanding of traditional culture, have tried to cobble together movements and styles much less successfully. Those who have worked with Shen Yun recognize that it’s become the top classical Chinese dance company internationally, but they say it’s not because that has been the goal.

“These traditions of 5,000 years, they’re very precious, meant to be treasured,” Guo said. “Tradition cannot be

separated from our responsibility. Every one of us [artists] has a responsibility.”

“We’re returning toward tradition and traditional values—this isn’t easy. Even the value system here is different, so everything we express [compared to other schools] looks different. Whether it’s Han Xin, or Yue Fei, or Wu Song, how can you express these figures with modern sensibilities? They’d be unrecognizable,” she said. “And what are you trying to give the audience? Something of meaning, of value... We’re not here to sell tickets, but to give the audience the best things, the best of human culture, wisdom, and relationships.”

Although there is no “classical repertoire” as pertains to classical Chinese dance, and perhaps the pedagogy has been reinvented by various schools in the last few decades, the gestures, system of movements, technique, stories, and expressive soul of the art form are things borne of 5,000 years of divinely inspired civilization.

Those who pursue classical Chinese dance today aren’t in search of “historically informed performances,” but seek to reconnect deeply with a culture that was violently stripped away from the Chinese people less than a hundred years ago. The developments in Chinese dance that Guo has seen over her life are, in reality, developments dictated by the state or a result of the state’s Marxist ideology push, and not at all organic changes driven by artists. Until today, that is.



Week 1, 2020

FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES



THE Old Year

by John Clare

The Old Year’s gone away
To nothingness and night:
We cannot find him all the day
Nor hear him in the night:
He left no footstep, mark or place
In either shade or sun:
The last year he’d a neighbour’s face,
In this he’s known by none.

All nothing everywhere:
Mists we on mornings see
Have more of substance when they’re here
And more of form than he.
He was a friend by every fire,
In every cot and hall—
A guest to every heart’s desire,
And now he’s nought at all.

Old papers thrown away,
Old garments cast aside,
The talk of yesterday,
Are things identified;
But time once torn away
No voices can recall:
The eve of New Year’s Day
Left the Old Year lost to all.

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

WHERE DID THE MATH TEACHER RING IN THE NEW YEAR?

TIMES SQUARE.

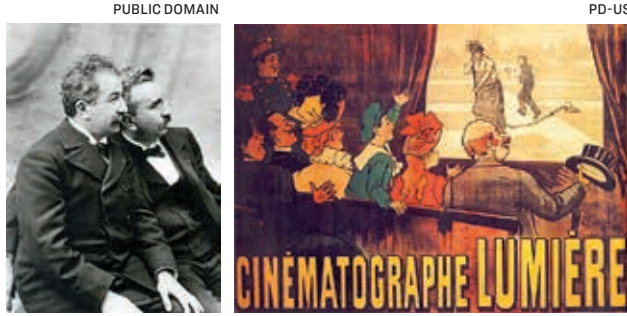
LIGHTFIELD STUDIOS/SHUTTERSTOCK

“It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves.”

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, POET AND PLAYWRIGHT (1564-1616)

ALL IMAGES BY SHUTTERSTOCK

MOVIES ARE BORN



PUBLIC DOMAIN

The Lumière brothers.

On Dec. 28, 1895, the cinématographe, an early motion-picture device, was shown to a public audience in Paris. It was designed by brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière. The word “cinema” is derived from their invention.

A Lumière cinématographe at the Institut Lumière in France.



VICTORGRIGAS/CCA-SA 4.0 INTERNATIONAL

By Aidan Danza, age 13

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: BLACK BEAR

An adult black bear.

In the northeastern part of the country, we have very few large predators.

We do not have the west’s wolves, or grizzly bears, but in some of the more forested areas of New Jersey, New York, and New England, there is the black bear.

Black bears are predominantly black, but they also can be brown, cinnamon, blue-gray, blue-black, or rarely white. They are around four to seven feet from nose to tail.

Around the northeast, they only live in forested, rural areas, and they occasionally turn up in people’s backyards, at night, digging through trash and bird feeders. They will eat just about anything, but their normal fare is insects, fruit, nuts, grasses, and roots. They do also eat live prey (normally fish and mammals) as well as carrion.

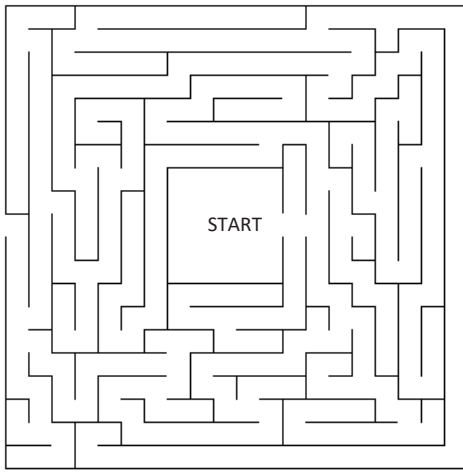
Bears keep territories that they don’t protect from other bears. Bears mate in fall, and also start to fatten up for hibernation. While in the den, a female gives birth to two or three cubs, normally during January, which are nursed in the den until spring arrives. When spring comes, they all leave the den and start hunting for food. Around a year after leaving the den, the mother forces the cubs to leave and go out on their own.

It is well known that bears hibernate. Normally, their hibernation depends on the climate. For example, if a black bear has lived for a year in Canada, it will sleep for longer and more deeply, because food is only available from May to August in the northern regions. However, a black bear in Florida may hibernate for a very short time or not even at all, because food is normally available for the whole year.

A black bear cub.

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

AMAZING ESCAPES!



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

Easy puzzle 1

6	10
56	8
5	

+ - x ÷

Solution For Easy 1
9 + 0 + 5 x 8

Medium puzzle 1

5	16
44	12
1	

+ - x ÷

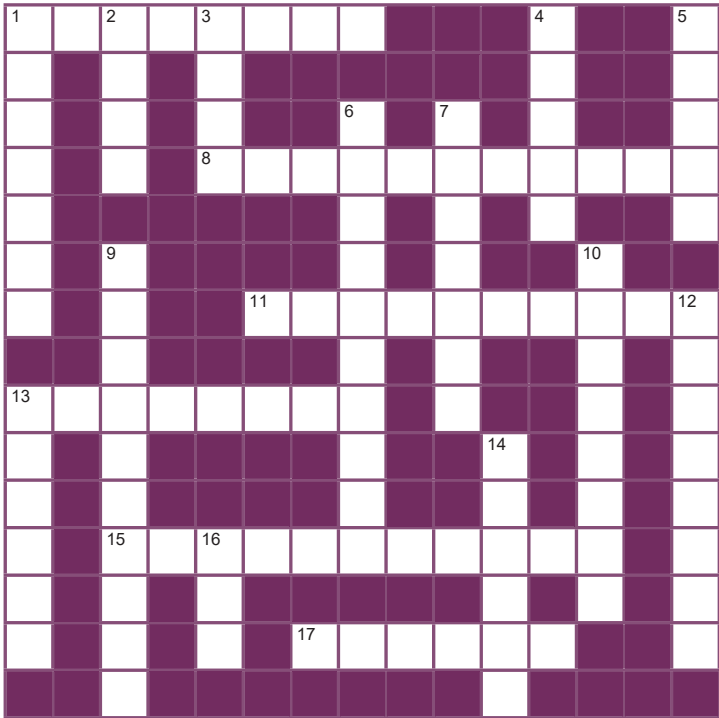
Solution for Medium 1
1 x (9! - 9 x 2)

Hard puzzle 1

9	33
51	12
4	

+ - x ÷

Solution for Hard 1
88 - 9 x (6 + 2)



Across

- 1 Celebratory (8)
- 8 Party supplies (11)
- 11 Eagerness (10)
- 13 Desk item (8)
- 15 Crowded place on New Year’s Eve (11)
- 17 Mother, Father, Brothers & Sisters (8)

Down

- 1 It starts when the ball drops at Times Square (7)
- 2 Formal dance (4)
- 3 Garish (4)
- 4 Score (5)
- 5 Spread (5)
- 6 Noisily energetic (10)
- 7 Big feast (7)
- 9 Looking back on (10)
- 10 Comedian’s accolade (8)
- 12 “once upon a ____ dreary...” (8)
- 13 Brit’s farewell (6)
- 14 Jan 1st celebrations! (6)
- 16 Unruly crowd (3)

Ancient Inspiration for Today

A SHOW THAT CANNOT BE SEEN IN CHINA



神韻晚會 2020
SHEN YUN



Reviving 5,000 Years of Civilization

Based in the U.S., Shen Yun is able to present on the world stage authentic Chinese culture untainted by communism.

Exquisite beauty from the heavens, profound wisdom from dynasties past, universal values from timeless legends all spring to life through classical Chinese dance, enchanting orchestral music, glamorous costumes, and patented digital backdrops. Shen Yun offers an immersive experience that will uplift your spirit and touch your soul. It's 5,000 years of civilization reborn!

"A fascinating insight into what China's culture used to be and what I hope one day will be restored to China."

—Edward McMillan-Scott, former Vice-President of the European Parliament

"It is breathtaking! I am walking away deeply inspired and profoundly moved!"

—Rita Cosby, Emmy Award-winning journalist

"Powerful choreography... Truly magical. A must-see!"

—IN New York Magazine



DEC 20–22, 2019

The Performing Arts Center, Purchase NY

735 Anderson Hill Road, Purchase, NY 10577

Prices: \$100–\$200

DEC 25–27, 2019

The Palace Theatre, Stamford CT

61 Atlantic Street, Stamford, CT 06901

Prices: \$80–\$165

MAR 4–29, 2020

Lincoln Center David H. Koch Theater

20 Lincoln Center Plaza, New York, NY 10023

Prices: \$80–\$300

APR 23–29, 2020

New Jersey Performing Arts Center

1 Center Street, Newark, NJ 07102

Prices: \$85–\$200

A perfect gift for your loved ones!

ORDERING

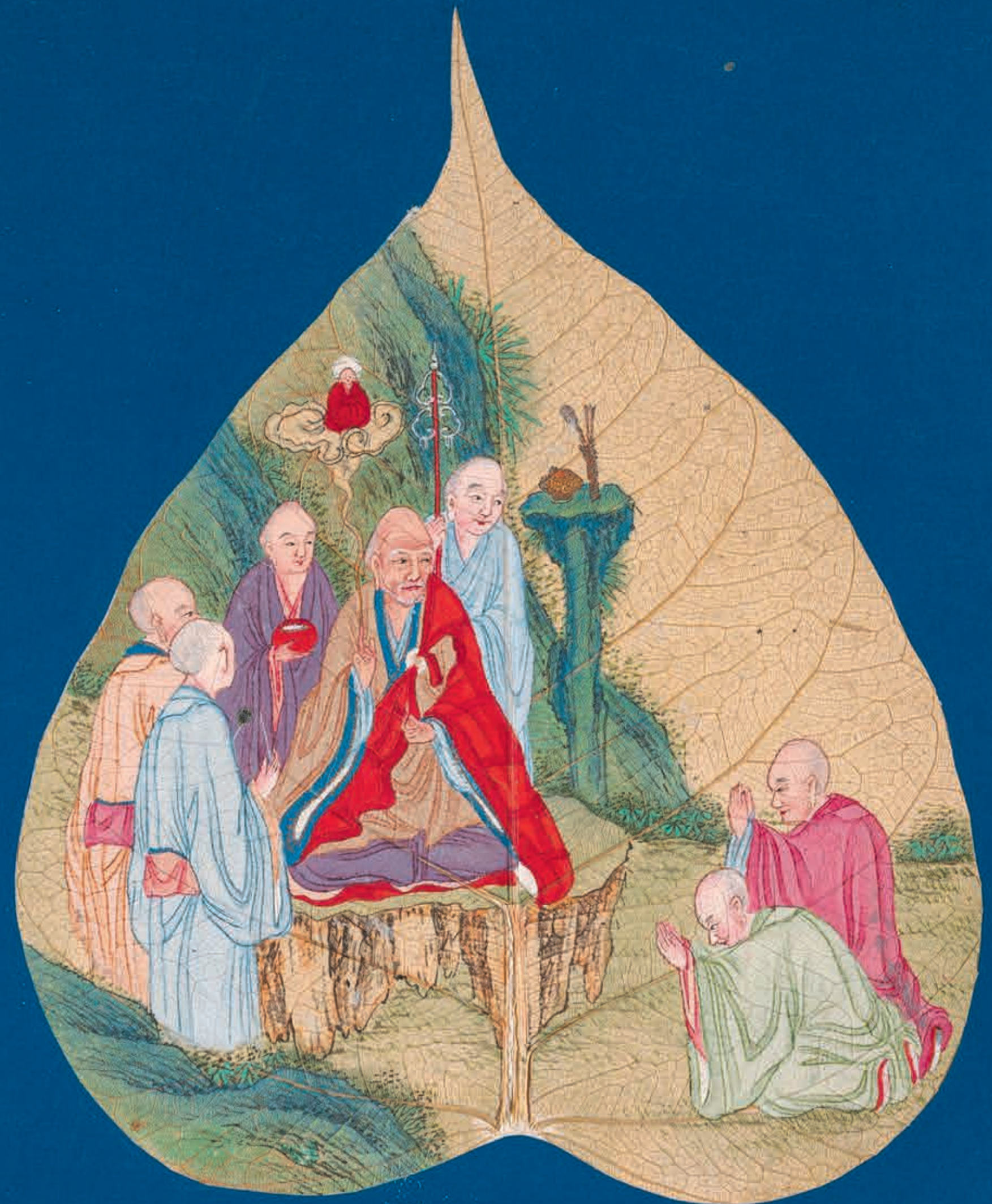
1. Online: **ShenYun.com/NY**
2. Hotline: **888-90-SHOWS (74697)**

Online: **ShenYun.com/NY** | Hotline: **888-90-SHOWS (74697)**

DEVOTIONAL ART

Holiday Spirit, Eastern Style

Make your holiday season divine at The Metropolitan Museum of Art



A detail from one page in an album depicting luohans (enlightened beings). "Luohans," Ming (1368–1644) or Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), by an unidentified artist. Album of 18 leaves; ink and color on bodhi tree leaves. Rogers Fund, 1912; The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

J.H. WHITE

NEW YORK—This time of year always reminds me of the divine. With Christ's birthday being at the center of the holiday season, it's no surprise. But the holiday also reminds me of divinity from the East. Every year, I attend a performance of Shen Yun Performing Arts—the classical Chinese dance company—and this time of year is when their tour starts.

Shen Yun's website states, "Experience the divine culture's return."

But this year, I was lucky, or simply blessed. Before seeing Shen Yun, I was given a prelude to their expression of ancient China's divine culture through a completely unrelated event: I visited The Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibition "Another World Lies Beyond: Chinese Art and the Divine," showing through Jan. 5, 2020.

The exhibition's poster hooked me right away. Seven ascetic saints draped in robes of vibrant hues of pink and purple were delicately painted on a leaf. Standing on a cliff,

surrounded by lush greens, they appeared to be conjuring special powers, opening a window to a celestial kingdom in the sky.

The leaf is part of a collection of 18 beautifully painted bodhi leaves, miraculously preserved for three centuries. The collection is called "Luohans" ("Arhats" in Sanskrit), the first level of attainment status of Buddhahood, when an enlightened being has given up all worldly cravings.

"The stories depict the luohans performing various miracles," said

exhibition curator Joseph Scheier-Dolberg by email. He's the Oscar Tang and Agnes Hsu-Tang Associate Curator of Chinese Paintings in the Department of Asian Art at The Met.

The bodhi leaf, which looks like a spade or an upside down heart, comes from a type of ficus tree. It's revered by Buddhists as the sacred Tree of Enlightenment, named "Bodhi tree," since the historical Buddha attained enlightenment under it in the fifth century B.C.

Continued on Page 16



THE EPOCH TIMES

ARTS&TRADITION

To advertise, call 212-292-8359 or email advertise@epochtimes.nyc



雲坊 YUN BOUTIQUE

WEAR A PIECE OF HEAVEN | WWW.YUNBOUTIQUE.COM

Discover the timeless elegance of traditional Chinese culture with Yun Boutique, connecting past to present and heaven to earth.

THE WALLET PEN®



Oprah's Favorite Thing!

Now, you always have a pen.

Actual Size

Sterling Silver

www.THEwalletpen.com

Made in Vermont

LITERATURE

Cheers! A Literary Celebration of New Year’s

JEFF MINICK

2020. Now there’s a number with some heft to it. It offers gravitas, sounding like an Army tank or a shotgun. “20/20” is also the name of a long-running television newsmagazine, which in turn takes its name from 20/20, meaning visual acuity or perfect eyesight. The 20th year of the third millennium even brings a sense of fun, as 2020 is a Leap Year and so allows “leaplings” to celebrate their real birthdays and gives the rest of us a 366-day year.

At my age, having an extra day in any year is a big-time lagniappe.

And despite our current political climate, or perhaps because of it, most of us are ready to celebrate. Some will eat black-eyed peas, greens, and corn bread for good luck. Some will raise a glass of champagne. Lots of us will give a kiss to a loved one at midnight, or watch the Times Square Ball drop, or resolve to lose weight, exercise more, and take up a healthier diet.

Writers Toast the Day

As many writers and poets remind us, New Year’s is more than a flip of a calendar page. It’s that time when we say goodbye to the past—good, bad, and ugly—and smile in hope at the future.

According to Alfred, Lord Tennyson, New Year’s means that “Hope smiles from the threshold of the year to come, whispering, ‘It will be happier.’” Here is one of the reasons we anticipate stepping through a portal of time into the future. When we’ve experienced a terrible year, when “wretched” might as well be our middle name, when we’ve fallen on our face so many times that up looks like down, some of us look to the new year hopeful for some magical turnaround in circumstances.

Reluctant to depend on whim or chance to determine our fate, others of us take matters into our own hands and make resolutions.

As G.K. Chesterton wrote: “The object of a New Year is not that we should have a new year. It is that we should have a new soul and a new nose; new feet, a new backbone, new ears, and new eyes. Unless a particular man made New Year resolutions, he would make no resolutions. Unless a man starts afresh about things, he will certainly do nothing effective.”

Benjamin Franklin seconded this notion. “Be always at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let each new year find you a better man.”

Mr. Clemens Begs to Differ

Not every author celebrates New Year’s resolutions. Mark Twain allowed the cynical part of his nature to deliver this comment about such pledges: “Yesterday, everybody smoked his last cigar, took his last drink and swore his last oath. Today, we are a pious and exemplary community. Thirty days from now, we shall have cast our reformation to the winds and gone to cutting our ancient shortcomings considerably shorter than ever.”

Twain also remarked: “Now is the accepted time to make your regular annual good resolutions. Next week you can begin paying hell with them as usual.”

Ah, Mr. Clemens. Cynicism and wit sell in any season, but New Year’s hardly seems the time to poke a needle into the balloon of hope.

2 Poets

We get a cheerier view of such vows from Edgar Guest, a popular poet in the first half of the 20th century but little read today.

A happy New Year! Grant that I
May bring no tear to any eye
When this New Year in time shall end
Let it be said I’ve played the friend,
Have lived and loved and labored here,
And made of it a happy year.

Sometimes—and just at New Year’s—we

are in such a rush to embrace the future that we pay scant attention to our present. In “A Song For New Year’s Eve,” poet William Cullen Bryant reminds us to snatch as much joy and song as possible from the old year before seeing in the new one. In the first stanza, he writes:

Stay yet, my friends, a moment stay—
Stay till the good old year,
So long a companion of our way,
Shakes hands and leaves us here.
Oh stay, oh stay,
One little hour, and then away.

2 Poems

Often, too, our expectations for the departure of the old and the arrival of the new causes us to forget that we will still face all those conditions derived from being human. In “15 Classic Poems for the New Year,” Bob Holman and Margery Snyder include Ella Wheeler Wilcox’s “The Year,” a poem that is new to me but which powerfully sums up years old and new, and reminds us that new and old are inevitably linked. As Holman and Snyder suggest, this one should be read aloud for the way “it rolls off the tongue when recited.”

What can be said in New Year rhymes,
That’s not been said a thousand times?

The new years come, the old years go,
We know we dream, we dream we know.

We rise up laughing with the light,
We lie down weeping with the night.

We hug the world until it stings,
We curse it then and sigh for wings.

We live, we love, we woo, we wed,
We breathe our brides, we shed our dead.

We laugh, we weep, we hope, we fear,
And that’s the burden of the year.

In “New Year: A Dialogue,” Wilcox visits the hopes and promises of that first day of January:

MORTAL

“The night is cold, the hour is late,
The world is bleak and drear;
Who is it knocking at my door?”

THE NEW YEAR

“I am Good Cheer.”

MORTAL

“Your voice is strange; I know you not;
In shadows dark I grope;
What seek ye here?”

THE NEW YEAR

“Friend, let me in; my name is Hope.”

MORTAL

“And mine is Failure; you but mock the
life you seek to bless. Pass on.”



Edgar Guest, the early 20th century poet, on his radio program in 1935.



Celebrate the New Year with great minds and hearts.

THE NEW YEAR

“Nay, open wide the door; I am Success.”

MORTAL

“But I am ill and spent with pain; too late
has come your wealth. I cannot use it.”

THE NEW YEAR

“Listen, friend; I am Good Health.”

MORTAL

“Now, wide I fling my door. Come in,
and your fair statements prove.”

THE NEW YEAR

“But you must open, too, your heart, for
I am Love.”

Cup of Kindness

And lest we forget, it was a poet, Robert Burns, who gave us the unofficial anthem for New Year’s, a Scots poem and tune we still sing today. Here’s the first

stanza in modern English:

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
and never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
and auld lang syne?
Chorus:
For auld lang syne, my dear,
for auld lang syne,
we’ll take a cup of kindness yet,
for auld lang syne.

“A cup of kindness”: What sweet words.
May we raise that cup to loved ones,
friends, and even strangers not just at
midnight on New Year’s Eve, but on every
other day of the year.
Happy New Year, everyone!


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.



Portrait of the Scottish poet Robert Burns, 1787, by Alexander Nasmyth, Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Burns wrote the poem “Auld Lang Syne.”



Poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox circa 1919.



Become a Published Author with Dorrance. We want to read your book!

Trusted by authors for nearly 100 years, Dorrance has made countless authors’ dreams come true.





Our staff is made up of writers, just like you, and we are dedicated to making publishing dreams come true.

Complete Book Publishing Services

FIVE EASY STEPS TO PUBLICATION:

1. Consultation

2. Book Production

3. Promotion

4. Distribution

5. Merchandising and Fulfillment

Call now to receive your FREE Author’s Guide

877-655-4006 or www.dorranceinfo.com/epoch



PUBLIC DOMAIN

“
For many in pre-modern China,
spirituality was ever-present.

Joseph Scheier-Dolberg, curator



PUBLIC DOMAIN

(Above)
“Daoist Immortal Li Tieguai Receiving a Visitor,” Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), by an unidentified artist. Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk. Purchase, Friends of Asian Art Gifts, 2016; The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

(Left)
“Thousand-Armed, Thousand-Eyed Guanyin,” 1629, by Zhou Bangzhang. Hanging scroll; ink and color on silk with painted border. Promised Gift of Oscar L. Tang and Agnes Hsu-Tang; The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

DEVOTIONAL ART

Holiday Spirit, Eastern Style

Continued from **Page 13**

“In China, painters used leaves of the bodhi tree to create albums like this, which invest the ground of the image with an extra layer of sacred power by connecting it to the Buddha’s awakening,” the website states.

The anonymous artist’s idea to add “an extra layer of sacred power” seems to capture not only what artists of ancient China thought, but also how society thought as a whole.

“For many in pre-modern China, spirituality was ever-present,” Scheier-Dolberg said. “From devotion to one’s departed ancestors to the yearly rhythm of Buddhist festivals to Daoist divination ceremonies, the flow of one’s days, months, and years was often regulated by spiritual engagements.”

Buddhism’s Core Tenet: Compassion
The enlightenment attainment status

higher than the Arhat is the Bodhisattva—“a Buddhist being of great spiritual accomplishment who postpones enlightenment to work for the salvation of others,” the exhibition’s wall text says. (The third level is Tathagata, which some scholars consider true Buddhahood because the enlightened beings at this level oversee their own paradises to which they can save sentient beings.)

While compassion and self-sacrifice are common to all bodhisattvas throughout history, Guanyin has been viewed as the most benevolent, “always ready to aid a devotee in their darkest hour. This radical compassion—which extends to all beings, in all places, at all times—is captured in Guanyin’s name, which means ‘Perceiver of Sounds,’” the exhibition’s wall text explains.

The 17th-century Ming Dynasty hanging scroll called “Thousand-Armed, Thousand-Eyed Guanyin” illustrates the bodhisattva with 10 heads vertically at-

tached to the main body. The thousand arms and hands—each with an eye in the center of the palm—are spread out to the sides and hold different talismans, such as a battle-ax, lotus flower, bow and arrow, and herbs. Above the 10th head sits another small Guanyin with legs crossed in the lotus position, on a bed of lotuses. Surrounding Guanyin are countless beings, including non-Buddhist figures, such as the Thunder God and the Mother of Lightning, who are among the bodhisattva’s retinue.

The multiple heads and arms of Guanyin could suggest the deity’s transformative nature and ability to adapt in form and methodology to help sentient beings. Sometimes a man, sometimes a woman, Guanyin, for example, could shapeshift from meditator to seductress, depending on how to test, teach, and ultimately help the worshiper grow from the spiritual challenge.

“It is one of the few ritual paintings of this level of quality to survive from this period,” Scheier-Dolberg said. Adding to the piece’s importance are two rare qualities: It is signed by a named artist (Zhou Bangzhang) and dated (1629).

Don’t Judge a Book by Its Cover

You can’t discuss the divine in ancient China without discussing Daoism, the native belief system founded by Lao Zi, which is known especially for its yin-

yang symbol, suggesting a harmony of opposing energies or forces.

“The Daoist notion of qi [energy] permeating and regulating the cosmos was powerful and widely held in pre-modern China,” Scheier-Dolberg said. “This belief system argues that all things in the cosmos are connected and dynamically interacting at all times. Within such a worldview, man and nature are not distinct, but aspects of one system.”

The 15th-century work “Daoist Immortal Li Tieguai Receiving a Visitor” shows how seriously these cultivators took their focus of connecting with the Dao. Legend tells us that the Daoist immortal Li Tieguai would go deep into a trance and let his spirit roam outside of his dormant body. On one outing, his spirit was gone for so long that his assistant thought he had died and cremated him. When Li returned and found his body missing, he inhabited the body of a beggar who walked with an iron crutch, and was known thereafter as Li Tieguai—“Iron-Crutch Li.”

Li Tieguai’s lame, disheveled, and wild appearance in this work is juxtaposed with a formally dressed official bowing to him, paying his respects. It’s an important reminder for the holiday—the true gifts of the season aren’t the shiniest ones but the ones of the spirit.

J.H. White is an arts, culture, and men’s fashion journalist living in New York.

DEVOTIONAL ART

An Ancient Chinese Tradition: A Home Full of Deities

LORRAINE FERRIER

In the not too distant past, the Chinese freely worshiped their ancestors and deities within their own homes. Worship was an important part of daily life and had been that way since ancient times.

Since the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took control of the Republic of China in 1949, it has discouraged and finally all but destroyed traditional Chinese culture. Today the religious and traditional beliefs of the Chinese people have been banned, and any trace of their existence has been virtually destroyed or maligned.

Private devotional artworks may no longer exist in China, but many large institutions around the world hold examples of these images, Wen-chien Cheng explained in a phone interview. Cheng is the co-curator of “Gods in My Home: Chinese New Year With Ancestor Portraits and Deity Prints,” an exhibition at the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada, which closes on Jan. 5, 2020.

A lot of these images rarely survived because they weren’t deemed collectible items, or perhaps they were pasted onto the walls of homes, or were burned as part of devotional rituals, Cheng explained. And, of course, many images were destroyed by the CCP.

Some of the ancestor portraits seen today were purchased by Westerners in the early 20th century. At that time, China experienced immense political turmoil after the fall of the Qing Dynasty in the Republican Revolution of 1911. Many Chinese had to sell their family devotional heirlooms to survive, Cheng said.

And in the early 1920s, she said, many of the images survived thanks to the missionaries and explorers who were in China. The missionaries were fascinated by the fact that the Chinese worshiped many gods, in contrast to their one God, and they wanted to study the images to understand more. They “found all these images curious, very interesting, and very cheap to acquire,” she said.

Exhibits in the show deliberately vary in quality, from elaborate, commissioned ancestor portraits to simple paper prints. The selection shows that whether a devotee was rich or poor, the intent behind each image was the same: pious worship.

Defining the Deity Images

Cheng invites visitors to view the exhibits with a similar sense of curiosity as the missionaries had, because in Chinese culture the “human relationship with the divine spirit may differ from other cultures,” she said.

Since ancient times, the Chinese have acknowledged and believed in the presence of divine spirits, Cheng said. They believed that “keeping a harmonious and good relationship between the divine spirits and



▲ The Dragon King god, 19th to mid-20th century. Woodblock print, ink and color on paper; 12 1/4 inches by 11 inches. Beijing.

“
Keeping a
harmonious
and good
relationship
between the
divine spirits
and the
earthly world
is the key to
keeping the
wellness of
the people.

Wen-chien Cheng,
co-curator

▲ Portable shrine for housing spirit tablets, late 18th to early 19th century. Painted and gilded wood; 145 1/4 inches by 37 3/8 inches by 23 5/8 inches. Shanxi.

Some of these traditions continue today in places like Taiwan, Hong Kong, and some villages in China.



ALL PHOTOS BY 2013 ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

▲ Ancestor portrait of an elderly woman, Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), by an unidentified artist. Hanging scroll, ink and color on silk; 67 7/8 inches by 38 inches.

the earthly world is the key to keeping the wellness of the people.” Honoring the divine and gaining blessings is a universal belief across many religions, she added.

Cheng suggests the images fall into two categories: the universally acknowledged deities, including household gods, and also ancestors’ portraits.

All Chinese people would have been aware of the universally worshiped deities. These originated from various sources, such as the religions of Daoism and Buddhism, and traditional legends. For example, the Buddhist Bodhisattva of compassion, Guanyin, can be seen in the home in many different ways. Each form Guanyin takes depends on which of the 33 manifestations, male and female, might help with particular human dilemmas. These manifestations, Cheng said, are detailed in the Lotus Sutra, a Buddhist verse. For instance, Guanyin can be seen as the goddess of childbirth, often holding a baby in her arms.

Other examples might be stove gods, who have a protective presence in the household, or professional deities that bring prosperity to particular professions. Even legendary figures could become deities that guard a business.

Honoring the Ancestors

The ancestor portraits may seem similar to the Western portrait tradition, where portraits would be hung in a castle or a stately home. Cheng pointed out that unlike Western portraits, Chinese portraits were not displayed year round. They were taken out for certain periods of time to be worshiped, such as New Year, and then carefully stored away.

Wealthy families would commission their own portraits while they were alive, to prepare the image to be worshiped after they died. Poorer families would buy generic prints of a couple and then add the family name. In these images, a spirit tablet would usually be depicted.

The spirit tablet is a wooden structure that is named after an ancestor and gives the wandering soul a place to reside; the tablet represents the spirit of the deceased. These tablets would be housed in a special cabinet in the hallway of a home or in the family shrine.

Sometimes, the spirit tablets depict deities. There is one in the Royal Ontario Museum collection that represents the God of Fortune, Cheng said.

A unique exhibit is a miniature shrine,

and this is the first time that the shrine has been on show since its acquisition in 2009. Miniature shrines were commissioned by the wealthy to house their spirit tablets, and the shrines imitated the actual architecture of the family shrines.

The spirit tablet represents an ancient Chinese belief, Cheng said, that when a person dies there are two different souls—one ascends to the heavens and the other goes under the earth. Cheng recalls a banner in a Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) tomb, although the belief predates this time. The banner shows an earthly monk that houses the earthly soul, along with images of the soul (the second soul) ascending to the heavens.

The Power of Worship

Some of the simplest images on show are the paper gods, which form a set called “100 pictures,” representing the gods in the universe. “They’re very simple but also very powerful images that people [would] worship,” Cheng said.

The exhibition has 78 Beijing paper gods, which are in the distinctive Beijing style: a simple outline printed on paper that is lightly brushed with color, a little red and sometimes green, to finish the images. The major focus is on the face of the deity, as can be seen in “The Dragon King” image.

The “100 pictures” would be part of the Chinese New Year celebrations. You wouldn’t necessarily have to have a full set. Poorer families would have an image of a god on top of a pile of blank papers. “The emphasis was as long as you were very sincere and you believed in the image, that [it] really represented the gods, it would ... represent the gods,” Cheng said.

The Chinese believed the deities came down to earth the moment the New Year arrived. Typically, on Chinese New Year’s Eve, an altar table was set up with these paper gods. When the first hour of the Chinese New Year approached, incense and firecrackers were lit, and after worshipping the paper gods, the images were burned in order to send the deities back to the heavens. This tradition still takes place in some small villages in China.

To find out more about “Gods in My Home: Chinese New Year With Ancestor Portraits and Deity Prints,” co-curated by Wen-chien Cheng and Yanwen Jiang (the 2017–2018 J.S. Lee Memorial Fellow), visit ROM.on.ca

LAUT UTAM/SHUTTERSTOCK



Choosing God in Our Times

An ancient Indian story about making the right choice

IAN KANE

The Bhagavad Gita (or Gita) contains much profound wisdom. However, the key event leading to the victory of Arjuna over Duryodhana in the Gita occurs in a prequel incident outlined in the Indian epic the Mahabharata. This incident is fascinating because it is so pregnant with multiple meanings that resonate with us today. In describing this, one has to strip away much of the complexity and detail that the Indian epic delights in, but the central issues are clear.

Relationships between Duryodhana and his family, the Kauravas, and Arjuna and his family, the Pandavas, have reached a critically low point. At stake is who rules the kingdom. Duryodhana (whose name in Sanskrit means "extremely hard") is advised to consult and seek help from Krishna, the living god and embodiment of Vishnu (for some Indians, the supreme deity). Arjuna (which means "white or clear") has the same idea. There is the suggestion that whoever gets to Krishna's house first receives a special gift.

Duryodhana, it is said, is propelled by greed and so makes sure that he is there first. Krishna, though, is asleep in his bed, and it would be a massive act of irreverence to wake him, so Duryodhana sits at the head of his bed, fretting all night, willing that Krishna wake and see that he is there first. Arjuna, on the other hand, says his prayers, gets a good night's sleep, and when he wakes prepares and grooms himself properly. Eventually, he arrives at Krishna's house only to find that Krishna is still sleeping. As Duryodhana is at the head of the bed, Arjuna seats himself at the foot of Krishna's bed and reverently prays.

Who Is First?

At that moment, Krishna wakes and sees ... Arjuna first! He is immediately aware of what they both want and also that Duryodhana was first, yet he has seen Arjuna before him. But there are two gifts Krishna says. Duryodhana demands that as he arrived first, he should get first pick. The two gifts are a choice between himself, Krishna, completely unarmed but being by one's side in the chariot as one goes to fight, or to have the entire Vrishni army at one's disposal in the

war to come. This army would be a huge advantage in any battle.

Krishna turns down Duryodhana's demand to choose first on the grounds that the god saw Arjuna first and because Arjuna is younger, so he gets first pick. This is the critical moment: Will Arjuna select to have the god by his side or opt to have the most powerful army in the world? Duryodhana is extremely concerned by this turn of events, but his concern turns to intense joy when Arjuna selects to have the god alone and rejects the army; for, as Arjuna reasons, what good is the army without the god to guide him?

So it is that Duryodhana returns to his base (Hastinapura) with the Vrishini army allied to him; he also manages to win over the army of the maternal uncle of the Pandavas. In short, he has an apparently unassailable military strength. But what we know from the Gita is that this apparent strength becomes ineffective against Arjuna and his noncombatant charioteer, the god Krishna. Indeed, before his defeat at the hands of Arjuna, one of Duryodhana's own allies (Shakuni) warns him that Krishna is worth many armies and that this transaction is no cause for rejoicing.

This, in essence, is the pre-story to the Gita, so why is it so significant? And why does it foretell Duryodhana's inevitable defeat, despite all his military prowess and armies? First, before commenting on these issues specifically, we might address its relevance. For today, militarism is increasing in the world and various countries wish to own the greatest, the most powerful army or armies. That in itself is not necessarily a bad thing; it only becomes so when, as with Duryodhana, something more important than power has



A manuscript illustration of the Battle of Kurukshetra. Kurukshetra is a city in the north Indian state of Haryana and is the setting of the Hindu epic poem the "Mahabharata."

been abandoned. That something is at the heart of this story.

It is said that Duryodhana suffered from two major vices: pride (or arrogance) and greed. We see this in his illegitimate determination to hold on to the kingship in the first place, and also in small things: rushing to get the prize from Krishna and—impiously—positioning himself at the head of the bed. In his pride, he felt that being at the head was his place. Duryodhana didn't really believe that Krishna was a god, else why take a position above him?

Contrast this behavior with Arjuna's, who positioned himself at the foot of the bed; that is, below the god. One moment's thought, too, might have revealed to him that upon opening his eyes, where would the god naturally be looking? At the head of the bed, behind him; or at the foot, before him? Obviously, on waking, we look down the bed! This elementary error lost him the chance to choose that gift he wanted most.

Duryodhana got what he wanted—a form of godlessness.

Getting What You Want

But, of course, that loss of choice seemed not to matter as Arjuna chose what Duryodhana did not want: the presence of the god in his chariot. Arjuna clearly divined that he had to have the god with him if he were to have any chance of success in this world. So Duryodhana got what he wanted—a form of godlessness—but not so much because he chose it, but rather because his own desires punished him by materializing in an unexpected way. As the Buddhist saying observes: "You will not be punished for your anger. You'll be punished by your anger."

However, the meaning of this story is deeper still, for we need to understand that the Gita story is symbolic. Every man and every woman is at war against the material world of illusion. Yes, paradoxically, the so-called real world is the world of illusion, or what in the East is called "maya." This parallels the Christian understanding of the corrupt world below and the spiritual world above. (Jesus Christ, we remember, "came down" from heaven.) In the Gita, Arjuna's chariot has



Duryodhana showing off his army. Gorakhpur Geeta Press. University of Toronto Collection.

five horses and this is highly significant. We see that the chariot is his body and the horses represent his five senses. Arjuna, therefore, is the ego or will driving the chariot, and this will or ego must control the horses—not be led astray by the senses—if they are in the first instance to win the race, obtain victory, and achieve everlasting life, which is to supersede maya or illusion.

Who Is Krishna Really?

Following this neat symbolism, we might ask who, then, is Krishna, the charioteer we allow on board? One answer to this question must surely be our own soul. Krishna, the living god, is really an aspect of our soul, and if we lose or ignore our own soul and its intuitive voice within us (what in the Old Testament Elijah experienced as the "still, small voice"), then we cannot drive our own chariot (our body) successfully or achieve victory in the battles against the forces of evil, as represented by the godless Duryodhana.

We note here that the soul does not actually fight; we commune with it as we would with a friend, a lover—nay, deeper than that even. It is our own essential self, our own being crying to be heard within us and to direct us onto the right way.

This again ties in with Christianity, for Christ himself urges believers to consider the loss of the soul as the greatest catastrophe that can befall a man. All the riches (or armies for that matter) of the world will not compensate for the loss. Patrick Harpur put it this way: "Even if we are not specifically religious we can all still resonate with the

notion that there is some part of us which should not be sold, betrayed or lost at any cost."

Therefore, we have to, as individuals and communities and nations, always consult the soul within us to establish what is right, and not allow the will or ego unfettered control of our destinies, since, as we know from Duryodhana, it will make the wrong choices and be driven by false desires. Writing about this in a psychological context, Thomas Moore observed: "When soul is neglected, it doesn't just go away; it appears symptomatically in obsessions, addictions, violence and loss of meaning." These are exactly the behaviors of Duryodhana.

Achieving Our Destiny

Carl Jung said it even more emphatically: "A man likes to believe that he is master of his soul. But as long as he is unable to control his moods and emotions, or to be conscious of the myriad secret ways in which unconscious factors insinuate themselves into his arrangements and decisions, he is certainly not his own master." Arjuna, by allowing the charioteer to come on board and heeding the god's advice, was able to control and realize his destiny and overcome the most appalling odds stacked against him.

We too have a choice: Do we acknowledge the reality of our souls and allow them to direct our wills and egos so that we go in the right direction, or do we, like godless Duryodhana, think we can control everything through our own strength and power? The chief project of modernism has been, of course, to follow Duryodhana and to dismantle all belief in the soul, and so stymie all access to it for most people. Chaos, confusion, and despair has been the result of all that. If we are to renew individuals and society, then we have to allow Krishna to enter our chariots and speak with us.

James Sale is an English businessman whose company, Motivational Maps Ltd., operates in 14 countries. He is the author of over 40 books on management and education from major international publishers including Macmillan, Pearson, and Routledge. As a poet, he won first prize in The Society of Classical Poets' 2017 competition and recently spoke at the group's first symposium held at New York's Princeton Club.

Rey (Daisy Ridley) fights a drone, in the overly action-packed "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker."



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF 2019 LUCASFILM LTD.

FILM REVIEW

A Neutered Conclusion to a Once-Great Franchise

IAN KANE

"Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker" marks the ninth (and supposedly) final film in the long-running, pop culture, "Star Wars" franchise. Director J.J. Abrams took over the series' reins back in 2015 with "The Force Awakens," and since that time, it's been a pretty rocky ride for fans of the original films, as well as for some of the newer fans who have on-boarded.

"Star Wars" fans have always been a famously divided lot, but killing off the most-beloved of the old characters in the first relaunch film made many go nuclear with disdain for the franchise's new direction. And a new, not-so-cleverly-disguised tactic became apparent, which was to embrace the new and let the old die off. Any dreams of seeing the old characters (Luke, Leia, Han, and so on) meet up for a touching reunion was dashed to pieces right from the outset.

In their place, the new cast almost seems to have been conceived of in a corporate boardroom, with strict adherence to politically correct box-checking and an overly conscious decision to pander to as many demographics as possible.

If the seventh and eighth films pushed this tactic to the fore, this final "Star Wars" film feels strangely contradictory. Everything kicks off with the oddly contrived resurrection of the old character Emperor Palpatine, who apparently has

been reconstituted by a gaggle of Sith subordinates.

This act alone just about makes much of the first six films almost seem irrelevant, since the entire story arc was about the rise of Skywalker, his subsequent battle with his evil dad, and the eventual destruction of his daddy's overlord Palpatine. In other words, with the conclusion of the sixth film, everything wrapped up rather nicely.

In any event, Palpatine is hiding out on a hidden planet called Exegol. He isn't looking too hot these days, as he's now connected to a life-assisting machine and has no pupils. However, the scabrous villain still has enough gusto to hatch a new dastardly plan, which includes an entire slew of Star Destroyers.

Meanwhile, Rey (Daisy Ridley), the main new superheroine of the final trilogy, still suffers from PTSD flashbacks (usually involving her parents). Accompanying Rey are her space pals, Finn (John Boyega) and Poe (Oscar Isaac). Together, they're on a quest to find a special artifact secreted on some far-off planet.

This fetch quest seems artificially injected into the script. In video games, fetch quests are frequently used by game developers to puff up a game's playtime and make things seem more interesting than they really are. However, these quests are usually irrelevant to the overarching plot, which is the case here. These types of fetch quest tropes are sort of understandable in fluff-fest cinema such as the "Jumanji" films, which literally take place

'Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker'

Director

J.J. Abrams

Starring

Carrie Fisher, Mark Hamill, Adam Driver, Daisy Ridley, John Boyega, Oscar Isaac

Rated

PG-13

Running Time

2 hours, 21 minutes

Release Date

Dec. 20

★★★★★

(L-R) John Boyega, Joonas Suotamo (behind), Daisy Ridley, Anthony Daniels, and Oscar Isaac star in the latest and possibly final "Star Wars" film.

Give Your Brain a Workout!

JUDD HOLLANDER

NEW YORK—More often than not, the answer to solving a riddle is staring you right in the face. The trick is to be able to see the solution. Magician and cruciverbalist (crossword constructor) David Kwong happily demonstrates his prowess in a return engagement of his absolutely brain-twisting one-man show, "The Enigmatist."

Fascinated by puzzles and magic from an early age, Kwong grew up trying to understand the secrets behind them. He learned long ago that "there is no such thing as magic," but rather that every feat performed, every sleight of hand or seeming impossibility, has its roots in a sequence of events the pres-

digitator has learned to make the trick work.

The secret, of course, is not simply to be able to fool an audience but also to make them enjoy being fooled. Kwong does exactly that. Using his love for puzzles and enthusiasm for sharing, he imparts some particularly fascinating stories featuring cryptologists (some of the early pioneers in the field), and a specific mystery that has endured for over a century.

The fun starts well before Kwong actually appears. Upon arrival, audience members wander about in various rooms and are tasked with solving four very intricate puzzles. In fact, the audience is advised to arrive 30 minutes prior to curtain to afford time to solve these puzzles.

I'm ashamed to report

that I could only solve one of the four, and didn't do too much better with most of the other challenges Kwong presents. I did come up with the answer to one of them before anyone else, though. (Hint to those planning on attending: While you have to look very carefully at all of the little details, be sure to look just as carefully at the overall canvas.)

Lean, almost wiry, and impeccably dressed in a sharp gray suit, Kwong moves about with the air of a stalking jungle animal, eager to pounce on a particular mystery and, once it is subdued, impart its specific secrets to the audience.

The magician has a keen sense of perception and quite a sharp memory. He



David Kwong, who is "The Enigmatist," and a guest participant.

'The Enigmatist'

The High Line Hotel
180 10th Ave.
New York

Running Time
1 hour, 30 minutes

Closes

Jan. 11, 2020
(check website for updates)

Tickets

EnigmatistShow.com

demonstrates these skills by some solutions no one sees coming as he constructs a crossword puzzle with the audience. Not to mention that he shows knowledge of something he simply could not have known about in advance, yet knows all the same.

Perhaps the most engaging element of the entire show, one made particularly clear when Kwong is giving the audience what amounts to a crash course in the history of cryptography, is that despite being based on science and mathematical formulas, the true secret of working in the field is being able to think outside of the box. A flash of inspiration can be the key to unlocking what was once thought impos-

sible to figure out. That, and how sometimes the best form of revenge can come with a puzzle that can never be solved.

The fun starts well before illusionist David Kwong actually appears.

Challenging from beginning to end, "The Enigmatist" takes the idea of brainteasers to an entirely new level—with Kwong being the perfect teacher.

Judd Hollander is a reviewer for Stagebuzz.com and a member of the Drama Desk and the Outer Critics Circle.

within game worlds. But here they just come off as lazy and apish, as if needed to pad out the sagging script.

Things move at lightspeed, and we're treated to a nostalgia-fest of cameos, apparently in a self-conscious decision to pander to older fans. These include such "Star Wars" stalwarts as Lando Calrissian (Billy Dee Williams) and General Leia, the latter of whom is eerily (or morbidly, if you will) pieced together using hi-tech trickery and "archive footage," since the actress, Carrie Fisher, tragically passed away in 2016.

We also get a slapdash of action scenes that whizz by at equally breakneck speeds. These include noisy Stormtrooper raids, humongous fleet-on-fleet battles, Stormtroopers flying high through the air with jetpacks, Force powers galore, Stormtroopers dying by the thousands, Resistance comrades riding across the surfaces of Star Destroyers on exotic alien beasts, Stormtroopers ... Well, you get the point.

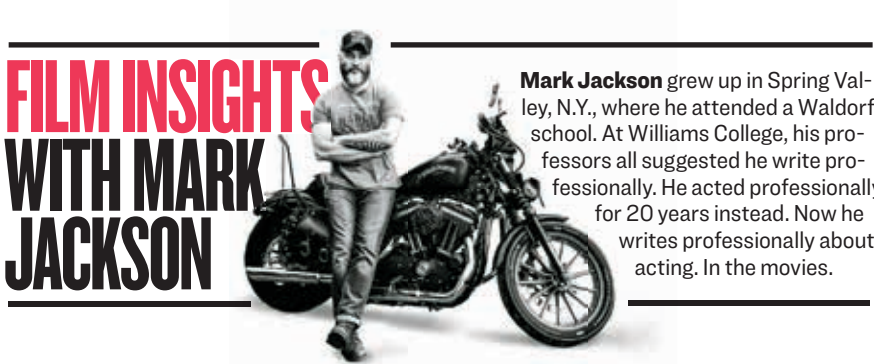
Things move at lightspeed, and we're treated to a nostalgia-fest of cameos.

These action scenes contain a lot of CGI gimmickry and really make you long for the good ol' days when filmmakers had the patience (and skill) to build and utilize practical effects. Even with a few action scenes that actually look constructed, everything is happening at such a spastic pace that you can't really decipher what's going on. Much like the film's plotline, instead of having anything to do with furthering the narrative, the action seems shoehorned in as if the filmmaker's just said, "Meh, just toss 'em in, since audiences have such short attention spans anyway."

In the end, "Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker" isn't a terrible film as much as it's a soulless one, much like its two predecessors. Overall, many of the newer cast members frankly lack the charm and charisma of the original actors. The writing is also hackneyed and at many times illogical, and the overall product seems like an insincere pander-fest to the politically correct powers that be. Hopefully, this will really, actually mark the end of this worn-out, threadbare franchise and usher in a new wave of unique, interesting, and original ones.

Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To see more, visit DreamFlightEnt.com





#MeToo Movie Bombs

MARK JACKSON

Roger Ailes was a fixture of American politics for decades. The #MeToo movie “Bombshell” is the more-or-less true story of his getting the boot from Fox News, the conservative media empire, precipitated by two real-life characters: former Fox news correspondent Megyn Kelly (Charlize Theron) and former “Fox & Friends” host Gretchen Carlson (Nicole Kidman).

There’s a third, composite, fictitious woman, Kayla Pospisil (Margot Robbie), who was so dead set on climbing the ladder at Fox that she allows herself (as most of the attractive women at Fox had) to be molested by Ailes.

“Bombshell” should have been great. These stories need telling in the worst way, and in this case most of the badness of “Bombshell” can be attributed to a breezy, issues-lite, cheap-feeling script by Charles Randolph.

I don’t usually find myself saying this, but the screenplay should probably have been written by a woman. It lacks the requisite gravitas for such subject matter, and therefore has much in common with “The Laundromat” in terms of a too-superficial, jokey treat-

ment of a serious topic.

The skirt-hiking in Kayla’s “interview,” requested by Ailes for his viewing pleasure, is stomach-turning (“It’s a visual medium Kayla”). Her subsequent admission to her friend Jess Carr (the always excellent Kate McKinnon) of further, grosser actions with Ailes, is the film’s only attempt at portraying the soul havoc that this sort of casting-couch activity can wreak on its victims. It’s a good start because Margot Robbie is a fine actress, but this aspect of Ailes’s abuse of power is glossed over too lightly.

Wait a minute—victims? Didn’t she have a choice to do disgusting things or not to do them? That’s as true as it is meaningless. New York and Los Angeles are rampant with pretty little girls getting off buses from far-flung locations in America, trying to escape sexual abuse at home but not having a lot of options, and thus leaping from the frying pan into the fire via the casting couch.

A-Listers in a C-Movie

“Bombshell” is sadly pretty much only about the presence of a first-rate cast. Kate McKinnon is endlessly dynamic; this woman just



(L-R) Charlize Theron, Nicole Kidman, and Margot Robbie in a movie that should have had more impact: “Bombshell.”

needs a half-decent star vehicle, and she’ll skyrocket out of “Saturday Night Live” and rule Hollywood for years to come. Here, she plays a liberal Democrat working deep in the closet regarding that identity, at Fox News.

Charlize Theron, who is South African, nails Kelly’s voice to the point of channeling, and Oscar-winner Kidman is no stranger to playing TV newscasters since her turn as a weatherwoman in 1995’s “To Die For.” And John Lithgow, here in a fat-suit, is, of course, always eminently watchable.

What It Should Have Been

“Bombshell” has quite the title; one expects to be bombed with something substantial. Perhaps it’s due to the fact that this is the third treatment of this topic recently: There was a late-2018 documentary, “Divide and Conquer: The Story of Roger Ailes,” as well as the Showtime miniseries “The Loudest Voice,” with Russell Crowe as Ailes.

“Bombshell” might have been more impactful if it had been the first film about the behind-the-scenes casting-couch culture of Ailes. Maybe it would have been even more powerful had the story been tied to that of Ailes’s colleague, and also fired host, Bill O’Reilly for the same reasons.

Perhaps, it was because the more substantial treatment had already been rendered that director Jay Roach opted for more of a slick, superficial telling. Which also smacks of cash-cow motivations.

It basically makes up a story about a fictitious investigation Megyn conducts to see if any other Fox News female staff members will step up and corroborate Gretchen’s accusations of sexual harassment. Megyn only steps up herself after she figures out that Roger Ailes is still sexually abusing women 10 years after it happened to her.

It would have been more exciting to watch the true story of Gretchen Carlson going up

against the man responsible for George Bush Sr.’s infamous racism-reeking Willie Horton campaign ads, and who magically conjured up an election win for Richard Nixon.

Carlson managed to secret a smartphone right under Ailes’s security team’s collective noses, and recorded him, dead to rights, owning up to his rampant casting-couch trampoline. That’s more-compelling storytelling.

‘Bombshell’

Director
Jay Roach

Starring
Charlize Theron, Nicole Kidman, Margot Robbie, John Lithgow, Kate McKinnon, Connie Britton, Malcolm McDowell, Allison Janney

Running Time
1 hour, 48 minutes

Rated
R

Release Date
Dec. 20

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Ancient Inspiration for Today

A SHOW THAT CANNOT BE SEEN IN CHINA





神韻晚會 2020

SHEN YUN

Reviving 5,000 Years of Civilization

Based in the U.S., Shen Yun is able to present on the world stage authentic Chinese culture untainted by communism.

Exquisite beauty from the heavens, profound wisdom from dynasties past, universal values from timeless legends all spring to life through classical Chinese dance, enchanting orchestral music, glamorous costumes, and patented digital backdrops. Shen Yun offers an immersive experience that will uplift your spirit and touch your soul. It’s 5,000 years of civilization reborn!

“A fascinating insight into what China’s culture used to be and what I hope one day will be restored to China.”

—Edward McMillan-Scott, former Vice-President of the European Parliament

“Powerful choreography... Truly magical. A must-see!”

—IN New York Magazine

PERFECT HOLIDAY GIFT!

Purchase, NY | Dec 20–22, 2019
Stamford, CT | Dec 25–27, 2019

Lincoln Center | Mar 4–29, 2020
NJPAC | Apr 23–29, 2020

ShenYun.com/NY
888.907.4697