

THE EPOCH TIMES LIFE & TRADITION

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9 Steps to Your Next Family Vacation

BARBARA DANZA

It's vacation planning season! Whether you're dreaming of a luxury escape or rustic campout—it's time to get this year's adventures on the calendar.

Never has it been more important for families to schedule focused time together. The benefits of stepping away from the day-to-day, setting out into the unknown, reveling in the joys and wonders of an adventure together and cherishing memories for a lifetime are priceless.

Here are nine steps to planning your family's next vacation.

Budget

You know what makes a vacation multiple times better than it already is? Paying for it before you go.

Resist the temptation to get into debt. Pay your vacation with cash; accrue no interest, and come home to no balance. Of course, practically speaking, you may use a credit card to book various elements of your trip, but be sure to pay it off completely, right away.

If you're planning a trip that requires a substantial outlay, make a plan to save what's needed in

advance. Using your online banking's automatic savings tools, along with perhaps cutting some expenses, can go a long way toward affording a nice getaway.

Consider the costs of food, excursions, transportation, and gratuities, in addition to general accommodations. Remember the most important thing is that you and your family are together, so if extravagance isn't in the budget, plan something simple. With this goal in mind, determine your travel budget and move to step two.

Calendar

Now that you understand your financial constraints, you need to determine your time constraints. Review the coming year at a glance together with your family to determine the best week(s) to target. Take note of work, school, and personal obligations. Consider the impact different weeks have on costs and crowds in different destinations. Narrow your options down to a few choice weeks.

Research

Oh, this part is fun. Now that you know what parameters you're working within you can dive into deciding where you want to go.



Enjoy the ideas and inspiration that so often come with relaxation and a change of pace.

Will you be seeking out warmth and palm trees in the winter? Perhaps you're on a mission to see a particular landmark or natural wonder. Perhaps your family enjoys a particular interest you want to learn more about. Perhaps you're looking simply for downtime and relaxation.

Whatever your aim, consider the possibilities, enjoy the process, and narrow down your choices to one or two destinations.

Availability

When you're ready to book your trip, you'll want to work on accommodations first. Where will you be sleeping? In a tent? A cabin? A hotel? A resort? On a cruise ship? Perhaps some combination?

Find the option that satisfies as many of your family's preferences as possible while respecting your budgetary constraints. Be sure to take note of cancellation policies before booking.

Transportation

Once you know when you're going and where you're going, you'll need to determine how you'll get there.

If you're planning a road trip, make sure your vehicle is in top shape and ready.

Otherwise, line up all of the planes, trains, and automobiles you'll be using to get around. Transportation costs can get steep, so be sure to stick to your budget, making adjustments to your plans as needed.

Activities

Once you get where you're going, what will you do? You may be setting out to see historic sites or natural wonders. Perhaps you'll be visiting theme parks. Maybe you'll be taking in the cuisine and culture of a foreign place. Possibly you'll be lounging, swimming, and ensuring the only decision you need to make is what to eat.

Begin to jot down an itinerary for your trip—in as much or as little detail as you deem necessary. A general idea of what you'll do may inform tickets or reservations you'll need to secure, items you'll need to pack, and additional budgetary considerations.

Countdown

Once your trip is planned, make the most of the weeks or months you have to look forward to it. When an adventure is on the calendar, the anticipation and excitement are enough to put some extra pep in everyone's step. Consider keeping a visual countdown somewhere in your home marking "x" days until vacation.

Prepare

As your countdown presses on, begin to set aside items you want to pack. Start early to avoid stress and make sure each family mem-

ber has everything they need. Tie up loose ends at work and at home. Clean your home so it welcomes you back on your return.

Enjoy

At last, when it's time to set out—go and enjoy!

Enjoy this precious time together with your family. Enjoy the unique experiences this particular adventure brings you. Enjoy stepping back from the everyday into a different environment, a different routine, and a different mode of being. Enjoy seeing your family enjoy the same. Enjoy the ideas and inspiration that so often come with relaxation and a change of pace. Enjoy the fruits of your labor. Enjoy the blessings in your life.

Reentry

As all things do, your vacation will come to an end. Reenter regular life with ease as you return to a clean and tidy home, no lingering costs from your trip, lifetime memories, and a fresh sense of gratitude and inspiration. While it's always nice to get away, it's also nice to come home. Relish being back, enjoy souvenirs and pictures, and remember—it's never too early to start dreaming up the next adventure.

Words of Encouragement

A Matter of Life and Death

JEFF MINICK

In the YouTube video "Rex Murphy Interviews Jordan Peterson," Peterson speaks of the hundreds of people, many of them young, who stop him in the street or send him messages online thanking him for helping turn their lives around. At approximately 24 minutes into the video, Peterson, speaking of the cumulative effects their comments have cast on his "general state of mind," begins weeping. "I had no idea the degree to which people were dying for a word of encouragement," he says, adding that so many suffer from a "despair that can be ameliorated with not much more than words of encouragement."

This scene deeply touched me. There was Peterson, a psychologist, a renowned intellectual, author, and speaker, shedding real tears and sharing real emotions over the despair he had witnessed in others, anguish that might be overcome with simple encouragement.

Lack of Love Alone

In the first 8 lines of her sonnet "Love Is Not All," Edna St. Vincent Millay shared a similar observation of our need for love and emotional support:

Love is not all: it is not meat nor drink
Nor slumber nor a roof against the rain;
Nor yet a floating spar to men that sink
And rise and sink and rise and sink again;
Love can not fill the thickened lung with breath,
Nor clean the blood, nor set the fractured bone;
Yet many a man is making friends with death
Even as I speak, for lack of love alone.

The lack of love, the lack of encouragement, can be as deadly to body and soul as poison. Some of my readers may have crawled on hand and knee through hell, as I have, either because of circumstances—the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, a divorce—or because of a wrong we ourselves have committed. From that experience, we know that the words and deeds of others can become lifelines pulling us out of the gloom and into the sunshine, helping us to regain our footing and find the right path.

We know this truth, but how often do we practice it? How often do we try to boost the spirits of others?

What I Have Failed to Do

Recently in church three women were weeping silently around me. One was a girl in her early twenties sitting with a young man directly in front of me. She didn't take communion, which in the Catholic Church means she was in a state of mortal sin, and when the man rose to go to the altar, she buried her face in her hands. The second looked to be a college student, who

sat in the pew a few feet away from me, her eyes glistening with unhappy tears. The third was a pregnant mom standing by a stained glass window, waiting to rejoin her husband and children in the pew, tears glimmering in her eyes.

I wanted to offer consolation. If nothing else, I could have spoken some variation of the words from Graham Greene's novel "Brighton Rock": "You cannot conceive, nor can I, the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God," a line I memorized long ago when I needed that thought inside of me. At the least I could have asked these women the inane question, "Are you okay?"

But I spoke to none of them, mostly for fear of being deemed ridiculous, some meddling old guy. I put on my overcoat and left the church.

In many churches, the faithful recite together an Act of Contrition that contains these words, or variations: "I have sinned in thought, word, and deed; in what I have done and what I have failed to do..."

The majority of us, I suspect, acknowledge, at least in our hearts, the wrong we've done. But what about what we "have failed to do"? What if we miss the chance to extend to others the gifts of comfort and exhortation?

Encouraging the Young

Most parents are quick to encourage their children. When Manuel wants to quit his piano lessons, his mother sits him down and explains that someday he will find playing the piano a gift and a joy. When Marie wins a major role in a school play but is plagued by a case of the butterflies on opening night, her father reminds her that she knows the lines by heart and that she was received nothing but praise for her acting from the director.

Coaches and teachers who inspire the young are worth their weight in gold.

Most parents are quick to encourage their children, whether it's about learning new skills such as riding a bike, or persevering in their music practice.



JACOB LUND/SHUTTERSTOCK

The best among them are tough on the kids, demanding much from them and delivering praise only when it is deserved. By holding back a little, these mentors give real meaning to their words, and kids will treasure that moment, perhaps for the rest of their lives.

Good Medicine

As we grow older, however, we often find encouragement in short supply, which is what brought Jordan Peterson to tears. Rarely is this failure deliberate—no, we are simply unmindful, and neglect to extend the inspiration and hope that might rescue a family member or friend.

Such negligence may occur from simple ignorance—we don't know the person or the circumstances well enough to advance support and inspiration—but all too often the adults closest to us are the ones we fail. Oddly enough, intimacy and familiarity can blind us to their pain, to their thirst for encouragement. We know them so well, their routine and the foods they enjoy and the movies they like, that we forget to build them up with compliments and uplifting remarks.

It's weird, isn't it, that such an effective medication for pain or doubt—as Peterson says, "a word of encouragement"—often remains locked in a cabinet.

To Strengthen, to Hearten

Here's one example of how encouragement can change the whole game. A friend of mine has written a book, a memoir about a trip by train she took from Greenville, South Carolina, to Seattle, Washington, and back again. She had received little support in writing the book, and asked to share it with me. I read the manuscript, and told her the truth, that she had written a fine book, that I could hear her voice on every page, that she had in this time of ugly political strife given readers a positive portrait of Americans very different than the one painted by our politicians and mainstream media.

Together we edited the book, and then she read the entire manuscript aloud to me, usually by phone, and today the book is ready to be published.

To encourage comes via Latin from the Old French "encora-gier," which meant "to strengthen, to hearten."

We have the power to strengthen and hearten those around us.

It's simple, really. We can give them words to live by.

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.

How to Feel Genuinely Happy for Others

BARBARA DANZA

When you see others doing well—what's your initial reaction? In your mind, in your heart—do you feel genuine happiness for them or do you feel a bit uneasy?

More commonly, it seems, it can be difficult to cheer others on, share in others' joys, truly be happy for others—even loved ones—and mean it. Though it may be difficult to admit, the negative reaction upon seeing someone else's good news is a manifestation of jealousy—a pervasive emotion that can lead to one's own bitterness and suffering in life. If left to fester, you may even find yourself wishing ill on others. The path of jealousy is a dark one.

Though it may feel like a natural, gut instinct, with effort you can let go of



Choose to cheer on this fellow soul who is enjoying some good in this life. You may find seeing joy in others can bring a deep well of joy for yourself.

jealousy. The result of such an effort is a sense of lightheartedness, compassion, and optimism.

Here are a few ways to begin to let go of jealousy.

Recognize Inspiration

The very idea that someone's good news is triggering your jealousy can teach you something about yourself. They have or do something that you, apparently, aspire to. That may be helpful information to you in your life.

What's more, they are showing you that it's possible. How great! Rather than giving into the negative feelings towards them, try thanking them for the inspiration and wish them even greater success.

Celebrate Diversity

Diversity is talked about in many contexts these days, but true diversity of the human experience exists among all individual lives. We all are born into different circumstances with different

characteristics and personalities, talents and weaknesses. The vast variety that exists among humanity is truly remarkable and wonderful—something to be celebrated.

From this perspective, seeing others do well can easily be met with a sense of wonder, rather than disdain. That's a piece of the story of their life, not yours. You have your own unique path to follow.

Find Compassion

It's difficult to be jealous and compassionate at the same time. While jealousy is rooted in selfishness, compassion is rooted in selflessness.

The truth about every life is that it contains suffering. You don't know anyone who hasn't suffered.

When someone experiences joy, success, or blessings it is truly something to be celebrated. You likely don't know all that they overcame, the work they put

It's difficult to be jealous and compassionate at the same time.

in, or the hard times they went through. You also can't understand the insecurities they feel or the challenges they face.

If your mind is focused on a sense of unfairness or why you don't have the same, your thoughts are mired in selfishness. You're thinking only of yourself.

Instead, choose to cheer on this fellow soul who is enjoying some good in this life. You may find seeing joy in others can bring a deep well of joy for yourself.

Whatever Will Be, Will Be

Sometimes in life you may want something. You believe you have the skills and talents necessary and that it should be yours. No matter how hard you fight for it, though, you don't get it. This does happen.

Conversely, sometimes what turns out to be the most wonderful aspects of your life seem to have fallen into your lap. This happens, too.

While we may wish to believe that our efforts are all it takes to reach our aims, we should recognize that there are larger forces at play. Your own personal efforts may not always pan out the way you want or may turn out better than you could have possibly imagined. Allow yourself to recognize that you're not totally in control here.

Fate is not necessarily in your hands. A looser grip on the reins, and faith in something bigger can go a long way toward eliminating the bitterness of jealousy.

Let Go

Jealousy harms people who harbor it, along with the environment they inhabit and those around them. It's toxic.

If you find yourself feeling jealous—it's wonderful that you recognize it. That in itself shows great wisdom and objectivity. Now you can start to try to let it go.



To be truly helpful, the one being helped must also have the proper disposition.

Any truly effective solution for such social ills as homelessness must always involve a willingness that goes two ways, not just one.

When Helping Hurts

JOSHUA CHARLES

I recently had an encounter that reminded me of one of the most paradoxical, even annoying realities of life: that sometimes, helping hurts. No matter our intentions, no matter our selflessness, no matter the genuine goodness of our heart and actions, there are some people, and some times, when all our helping will do nothing but make the situation worse. Our help is unhelpful. I was at a gas station after church. I was filling up my tank, and then walked toward the station to get a cup of coffee. As I walked from my car to the station, I saw a woman near the door sitting on the street. By all appearances, she was very poor—at best—and homeless, at worst. Her hair was matted, her clothes were dirty, and her demeanor made the possibility of drug use apparent.

I felt a great deal of sympathy for her. I didn't know her story of background—I wasn't judging her at all. "There but for the grace of God go I," I thought to myself. As much as I believe in the power of human beings to make choices, and as much as I affirm the necessity of consequences, I also have a deep sense of empathy and solidarity with those who are struggling. All of us struggle, and oftentimes, very few, if anyone,

knows the backstory.

So I asked her, "Could I get you some food?" She got up, and simply said "Yea."

We walked into the gas station, and I said, pointing to the food aisle, get whatever you want. I made a very subtle suggestion about trying to get some of the healthier stuff (pointing to the granola and protein bars, etc.). "I'm going to get a cup of coffee, so just get whatever you'd like, and I'll pay for it when I pay for my coffee."

I got my coffee, and all of a sudden, I hear a slight uproar from the cashier. He raised his voice and his hands, clearly trying to get my attention. "Were you getting this for her?" I asked what he was referring to. "This lottery ticket," he said. Turned out that my new acquaintance, while she had picked out some food, was also trying to get lottery ticket out of me as well—and not one of the cheap ones, but a \$20 one!

Internally, I was blown away. But I didn't show it—as annoyed as I was by what this woman tried to pull on me, I still felt a need to respect her dignity. I told her, "No, no, that's not okay. But if you want one of the cheap ones, that's fine." So she surrendered the \$20 lottery ticket, and went for one of the \$1 ones. She got more out of me than I offered, but much less than she tried to extort.

We left the gas station, she had her food, and her lottery ticket. I said goodbye and that I would pray for her. She didn't say a word to me, and just walked off. I didn't do what I did for a "thank you," but it struck me that not only did she express no gratitude, but she also took advantage of my free offer of help. I didn't go away angry—but felt a deep sense of sadness for her. I also had another sensation I wasn't expecting: helplessness. I was, in the deepest sense, incapable of helping this woman. I was helpless to help her.

I was reminded of a letter George Washington had written to his nephew, Bushrod, on the wise way to help others:

"Let your heart feel for the affliction, and distresses of everyone—and let your hand give, in proportion to your purse—remembering always, the estimation of the Widow's mite [Luke 21:1-4]. But, that it is not every one who asketh, that deserveth charity; all however are worthy of the inquiry—or the deserving may suffer."

And there it is: the crucial insight that desiring to be helpful is not enough to make something actually helpful. To be truly helpful, the one being helped must also have the proper disposition. This is something most of us know in our own lives—that we can't help those we love, family



"I am for doing good to the poor, but I differ in opinion of the means. I think the best way of doing good to the poor, is not making them easy in poverty, but leading or driving them out of it."

Benjamin Franklin

and friends, if they don't want help—but which we often fail to apply in our "solutions" to poverty and homelessness.

I am not claiming that everyone in poverty or who is homeless is the same as this woman—God bless her. But it is undeniable that at least some are, and that any truly effective solution for such social ills must always involve a willingness that goes two ways, not just one.

Benjamin Franklin—a man widely known for his generosity and charity—had brutally honest words about this phenomenon, namely the reality that sometimes "helping" actually hurts, from his observations of it in Great Britain:

"For my own part, I am not so well satisfied of the goodness of this thing. I am for doing good to the poor, but I differ in opinion of the means. I think the best way of doing good to the poor, is not making them easy in poverty, but leading or driving them out of it.

In my youth I travelled much, and I observed in different countries, that the more public provisions were made for the poor, the less they provided for themselves, and of course became poorer. And, on the contrary, the less was done for them, the more they did for themselves, and became richer.

There is no country in the world [referring to Great Britain] where so many provisions are established for them; so many hospitals to receive them when they are sick or lame, founded and maintained by voluntary charities; so many alms-houses for the aged of both sexes, together with a solemn general law made by the rich to subject their estates to a heavy tax for the support of the poor.

Under all these obligations, are our poor modest, humble, and thankful; and do they use their best endeavors to maintain themselves, and lighten our shoulders of this burden? On the contrary, I affirm that there is no country in the world in which the poor are more idle, dissolute, drunken, and insolent. The day you passed that act, you took away from before their eyes the greatest of all inducements to industry, frugality, and sobriety, by giving them a dependence on somewhat else than a careful accumulation during youth and health, for support in age or sickness.

In short, you offered a premium for the encouragement of idleness, and you should not now wonder that it has had its effect in the increase of poverty."

Franklin knew more than anyone that helping isn't always helping.

Sometimes helping hurts. And wisdom is knowing the difference.

Joshua Charles is a historian, speaker, and No. 1 *New York Times* bestselling author of several books on history, politics, and religion. His work has been published in many prominent outlets. He's an affiliated scholar of the Faith and Liberty Discovery Center in Philadelphia.

Checking the Engine: Telling the Truth to Your Doctor and Other Tips

JEFF MINICK

When January rolls around, it's time for me to put away Christmas decorations, make—and all too often, break—some New Year's resolutions, send off birthday greetings to a few friends and relatives, pause to remember the woman, now deceased but still beloved, who became my wife in January of 1978, and brace up for at least another two months of cold weather. It's also time for my annual physical.

My Friend Sam

My physician—I'll call him Sam—practices medicine in Asheville, North Carolina. Though I moved to Front Royal, Virginia, over three years ago, I still make an annual trek to Asheville for my physical because of my respect for Sam's abilities.

Sam and I know each other well. Four of his children passed through the homeschool seminars I once taught in Asheville, I've dined with him and his lovely wife on numerous occasions, he was my youngest son's basketball coach and later attended his wedding here in Virginia, and he once stuck by me in a terrible time of personal crisis having nothing to do with my physical health.

This examination in Sam's office usually involves a good deal of conversation. Sam sets my appointments for 7 a.m., possibly because that early hour allows for longer visits. We catch up on family news as Sam runs his tests and makes notes on his computer, and of course, we discuss my health. Sam always asks if I am still indulging in my bad habits, drinking too much on too many evenings and neglecting to take enough exercise.

Bad Habits

When Sam asks me how many drinks I typically imbibe, or about my ineffectual attempts to get into shape, I try to be as truthful as possible. What would be the point of deceiving a doctor other than shame? Once I asked him how often he thought his patients lied to him when asked questions about their diet, their exercise, their own bad habits, and their prescriptions.

"About 85 percent of the time," Sam said, a figure I had trouble believing until I researched the topic online and found data confirming his estimate.

On another visit, Sam asked me, "So how do you feel about your bad habits? The drinking? The failure to exercise?"

"Guilty," I told him. "Always guilty." "Let me tell you a story about a patient who was just here yesterday," he said. "He's a man in his seventies who's overweight. For years, he's tried to shed some pounds but just can't seem to do it. He was telling me again how much he wanted to lose weight, and how he had failed, and I told him, 'Look, Jim, you're 76 years old. Why don't you drop the guilt and just enjoy those sausage biscuits and hamburgers you love?' Well, he just exploded. 'You're my doctor,' he said. 'You're not supposed to say things like that.'"

Sam looked at me for a moment and said, "Here's the point: If you're going to indulge, then at least enjoy the ride."

Good News, Bad News

Once he asked me how I was feeling mentally and spiritually.

"I'm happy about 80 percent of the time," I said. "I think that's pretty good."

Sam shook his head. "You need to marry again. You need to find a widow and remarry. And here's the good news. With every year that goes by, more men your age are dying than women. So the pool for widows is expanding."

"That's not good news," I said. "It's terrible news. I'm a man. That means I could soon be one of those dead guys."

Helping Me to See Myself

For several years I was in the habit of waking every morning around 3 a.m., getting up to read or write, and then falling back asleep around 5 a.m. I asked Sam if I could do anything about my sleep pattern.

"How long do you stay in bed after you wake up?" he asked.

"At least five minutes," I said.

Sam burst out laughing. "Give it 30 minutes, if you really want to try to fall back asleep."

As on other occasions, Sam had helped me to see myself. This past visit, for example, we returned to the subject



▲ We always hear about doctors needing a "good bedside manner." It's much easier to practice that bedside manner when patients bring humor and understanding into the examining room.

of exercise. "I get up in the morning and promise myself I'll go to the gym, but then evening rolls around, and I vote against it."

"You don't need a gym," Sam said. "Just go outside and walk 30 minutes a day."

So these days I'm giving that advice a shot.

Some Suggestions

Now for some takeaway points for my readers. This advice may seem trite and stale, but please hear me out.

"Tell the truth to your doctor. If you're a smoker and your physician asks how many cigarettes you smoke a day, try to deliver an accurate count. If you have trouble losing weight, tell your caregiver what you eat and how much exercise you take. We may justifiably fib to a host that supper was delicious, we can tell a child he did a great job on the soccer field even though he flubbed numerous plays, but we are fools if we lie to our doctors.

*Develop some rapport with your doctor. We always hear about doctors needing a "good bedside manner." It's much easier to practice that bedside manner when patients bring humor and understanding into the examining room. A physician like Sam deals daily with problems ranging from a chest cold to cirrhosis. Facing these problems every day, particularly the

catastrophes, takes a toll. My father was a physician, a general practitioner who also delivered over 600 babies while living eight years in a small town. My wife was an intensive care nurse and later an instructor in nursing. I have witnessed firsthand the stress demanded by such jobs. Understand that your physician is human and stressed. Aim for engagement.

*Get regular checkups. Years ago, after my first physical, Sam told me I was past due for a colonoscopy. "At your age, you need one," he said, "so we'll schedule it." Afterward, when Sam told me the results of that examination and how the team had to cut out several polyps, he said, "Good thing we did this. You'd have been in the ground in another three or four years."

*Most of all, take care of yourself. So much of our good health depends not on medical care, but on eating the right foods, exercising, and avoiding bad habits.

Time, I guess, for me to heed my own advice.

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.

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Three Wishes for Ruby's Residents has raised \$250,000 since its founding.

It All Started With Three Wishes

Ruby Chitsey, 12, brings kindness and comfort to nursing home residents

ANDREW THOMAS

Ever since she was young, 12-year-old Ruby Chitsey of Harrison, Arkansas, has been accompanying her mother to the nursing homes where she works.

"That's kind of just my happy place and I love it there," Ruby explained. "I just feel like it's such an awesome environment to learn, and just have a great time."

In 2018, Ruby noticed a resident named Pearl during one of her trips to the nursing home. Pearl had been gazing out the window, and Ruby asked why. She told Ruby that her dog had just left, and she couldn't afford to keep him. A couple of days later, Ruby asked Pearl if she could have any three things in the world, what would she want.

Pearl told Ruby she wanted world peace, a Chicago pizza, and a trip to an exotic island. The requests were not what Ruby expected, and she quickly began approaching other seniors asking them what their three wishes were.

"Our most common wishes are chocolate, haircuts, Cheeto Puffs, lots of shoes, new pillows, better books, and especially warm blankets," Ruby said.

As a result, she founded the nonprofit organization Three Wishes for Ruby's Residents. It started in the homes where her mother works, but the initiative has expanded nationwide.

The organization has a kid-run board that raises awareness and funds for the 1.5 million seniors living in our nation's nursing homes, and of these, notably the 65 percent, or 975,000 who primarily depend on Medicaid, according to the AARP. These seniors receive just a \$40 monthly stipend from government assistance for personal expenses that the home does not cover.

Inspiring Seniors

Ruby has met several seniors who have made lasting impressions on her. One of Ruby's residents who suffered a stroke can't speak but always maintains a positive attitude.

"She always just keeps her head up high, above the clouds, and she's just so awesome. We gave her an electric wheelchair because we've found that it's harder for her to push around to go to point A, to point B, to point C ... it's just changed her life," Ruby said.

A resident named Marilyn has joined Ruby and assists her by handing out chocolates to the other seniors in the home. Over time, Ruby has gained confidence and learned the importance of positivity. Throughout her work with the elderly, Ruby has learned some important life lessons.

"Mostly just to keep your head high, and that they're just like me. Even though we may be 50, 60 years apart that we're still the same," Ruby said.

She thinks society overlooks the elderly population and she feels they deserve significantly more attention.

She would like to see the \$40 stipend increase, and she wants more people to visit nursing homes to create a friendlier atmosphere.

The feedback and reactions Ruby receives are the most rewarding part of her work. During its first year, Three Wishes for Ruby's Residents fulfilled 2,500 wishes and to date has raised \$250,000 for the impoverished elderly. For Ruby, the mission is simple yet powerful.

"I just want to change the world for the better, and for them," Ruby said.



Ruby Chitsey delivers food to an elderly resident.



Most of us know that we can't help those we love, family and friends, if they don't want help.

Elizabeth Melendez Fisher Good on Reclaiming Stolen Voices and Dreams

As the founder and CEO of anti-trafficking organizations Selah Freedom and the Selah Way Foundation, Good is helping survivors start anew



Elizabeth Melendez Fisher Good, CEO and co-founder of anti-trafficking organizations Selah Freedom and the Selah Way Foundation.

“It opens your eyes to many different ways people’s talents are stolen, their voices are stolen—their purpose, identity—and just replaced with shame and different things.

Elizabeth Melendez Fisher Good

CHANNALY PHILIPP

Elizabeth Melendez Fisher Good was a church-going girl; she was known as a “good girl.” Then at age 12, she was molested by a trusted family friend. Afterward, he arranged for her to ride with him to church, and molested her more on the way there.

From that sudden loss of innocence, the walls of her life would gradually start crumbling—alongside her self-worth. At age 14, she was raped. It was only the start of what would be years of descent into a personal hell, where she was all but “dead on the outside.”

What happened to Good triggered a pattern in her life: alcohol abuse, hooking up, pornography. It would take the better part of two decades before Good would find her way and her purpose in life.

Now, as the founder and CEO of anti-trafficking organizations Selah Freedom and the Selah Way Foundation, Good works to prevent human trafficking and to rescue children from it.

Today, Good looks like your “every mom,” and she has an easy laugh and a vivacious personality. But there is something else about her. When people are around her, they feel free to unburden themselves with secrets they’ve carried for years.

If you were to ask her, she’d tell you it’s because she has so freely told her own story—to her family, to her children, to media outlets—because she knows that unaddressed trauma festers and may even repeat across generations. And that part of the process of healing from trauma is to shed light on it.

‘Everybody Has a Destiny’

When Good moved from Chicago to Florida, she found out that Florida was one of the top states for human trafficking and that kids were being sold in her own community. It was then that she felt compelled to found

Selah Freedom. “Selah” is a Hebrew word, meaning to rest or to reflect.

When girls are first brought in to Selah, some of them stay at an “assessment house” for about four to six weeks. It typically takes seven or eight interventions before a girl will even agree to receive help.

“They are scary-looking, because they’re trying to scare people away,” Good said. “They look hard, they dress hard and make everything hard. Their aspect is hard.”

Once at the assessment house, the girls enter a transition period. It’s during this selah, after years of being abused, not having control over either life or body, that they can stop, pause, and think about their next move. There are discussion groups and staff members to help them, but it all starts with their choice to grow and change and to set their own direction.

After a couple of years, at graduation, you hardly recognize them.

“The softness, it’s amazing. ... These are girls that were left for dead and they wanted to die like there was no hope. ... They’re doing great.”

One girl she recalled came in making zero eye contact, “couldn’t speak to save [her] life,” had no sense of self-value, and harbored “1,000 percent shame.” She is now a brand ambassador for a national company.

Good points to this as a dramatic example from sex trafficking, but she said there are parts of us that we’ve allowed to go dormant—our dreams, talents, and perhaps even our purpose in life.

Grooming

Through years of listening to girls, to survivors of sex trafficking, and to women around her around the country, Good noticed that they often—like her—had a defining moment when they lost their voice and identity. And that even in cases when a woman hasn’t been sexually abused, there were ways in which she might have been manipulated in subtler ways.

“It opens your eyes to many different ways people’s talents are stolen, their voices are stolen—their purpose, identity—and just replaced with shame and different things,” she said.

She was compelled to write her newly released book “Groomed: Overcoming the Messages That Shaped Our Past and Limit Our Future” to use her personal story to illustrate how different types of grooming can affect people.

Over the years, Good has found that grooming doesn’t occur just in the realm of trafficking or sexual abuse. There are far subtler ways that people are shaped and manipulated.

Perhaps it was remarks from family members about your weight, or controlling people who made you feel invisible. Maybe it was a fear of not having enough money, or feeling that you could—or had to—handle it all. In the process, you may have surrendered your own identity or your voice and lost sight of your purpose in life.

Taking a page from the survivors at Selah, Good prescribes exactly that: selah, a time for reflection. A selah looks like a quiet retreat from the routine, a bit of intentional time set aside—whether an hour or a few days—without external distractions.

Good poses a number of questions people can ask themselves, such as: Who am I when no one else is around?

Is there a secret from my early memories that I’ve been carrying with me?

What are three things that you can change today about the way you live your life? What’s stopping you?

It’s about discernment, not judgment. All these questions serve to clear your way, from reflection to a new start.

In her book, Good quotes C.S. Lewis: “You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.”

Selah

Good is now focused on building her organizations, which are growing. A



big focus of the Selah Way Foundation is its prevention initiative.

Good said that one of nine kids will be approached on social media with ill intentions.

“People are like, ‘Oh, my kids are fine, they’re home or in their bedroom.’ If they’re on Instagram or

Snapchat or some social media, you don’t know what they’re doing,” Good said.

“People are out there trying to become their friend ... feeding the lines like, ‘Oh, wow, did anyone ever tell you you’re so handsome? Hey, do you want to just send me one picture?’ And before you know

it, these kids are down this secret pathway.”

Another priority is working with first responders, who survivors say often miss signs that they are being abused.

Good explained: “We’ve had so many girls who said, ‘Law enforce-



ment pulled the car over. They never thought that it was the trafficker. They could have rescued me.’ They didn’t know what they’re looking at. Or at [the] ER ... kids are being brought in with broken noses, all this different stuff, and then they’re fixed up and given right back to their trafficker, who brought them in.”

Faith

Reflecting on her darkest moments, Good says her faith sustained her through her suffering.

“I almost feel like I was very specially protected, because for some reason, even when I was dead on the outside, and appeared like the hardest, the worst, didn’t care, I had such an intimate inner dialogue,” Good said. “I have journals upon journals just crying out to God, ‘You know who I am, help me.’”

When she got a job at a restaurant in her teenage years, there was an older woman there, a waitress named Gloria, who’d given her a nickname, “Tish.”

“She’s like, ‘You’re just a Tish. I look at you, you’re just beautiful, you’re so sweet.’ I was able to be myself with her. I was the sweet little part of me that had been dead for so many years, you know?”

“I feel like that’s what God has done to help me, is put people in my path when I didn’t even believe in myself anymore, to remind me of who I am, that they see me the way that He sees me. ... That’s why I feel like we have to do that for others, because that’s what got me through.”

Good has been using her story on behalf of thousands of abused children and women.

“Being honest about my story—the good and bad parts, the pain and the grace—has opened the door for so many other women to explore their own and write their stories of redemption,” she wrote in “Groomed.”

“What’s your story?” she asked. “When the time is right, I hope you’ll feel empowered to share it.”

(Above) Good at a speaking event.

(Left) Good embraces a survivor of sex trafficking.

How a Bodybuilder Lifted His Way to the American Dream

ANDREW THOMAS

When the Iran–Iraq War broke out in 1980, Sam Bakhtiar was a child. He can remember hearing sirens and the blackouts at night as bombs fell over Tehran, Iran.

“I remember looking at the sky and you see planes flying by dropping bombs, and you see anti-air missiles going up. So that’s how I lived between ages of 3 and 11,” Bakhtiar recalled.

It’s been a long road between then and now, from war-stricken Iran to southern California. The successful 46-year-old is now an entrepreneur, bodybuilder, doctor, and CEO of The Camp Transformation Center, a fitness franchise with more than 110 locations in the United States and Mexico.

“I can tell you so many stories of my life where I was just devastated, I thought it was the end for me. But when I look back now, something so much better came after it,” Bakhtiar said.

Refugees

In Tehran, Bakhtiar lived with his mother and grandparents in a rented house, after his parents divorced.

His mother didn’t want her

only son to be thrust into the war or to become an innocent casualty, so the two fled Iran when he was 11 years old.

He and his mother packed one bag and fled to France with just \$500. After spending a year in France as refugees, the two traveled to the United States. All he knew about it was what he had gathered from television shows such as “Dallas” and “The A-Team.”

When Bakhtiar and his mother arrived in Sharon, Pennsylvania, the reality on the ground was in stark contrast to what he had seen on television. Sharon was a steel town, and when they arrived in 1985, all of the steel mills began shutting down. The town quickly experienced an economic downturn.

“Everybody was out of work,” Bakhtiar said, “My uncle did what most Middle Easterners do when they first come to America, when they want to become an entrepreneur—they open up a convenience store in the worst neighborhoods.”

Drug dealers, pimps, and prostitutes were commonplace in this rough part of town. He worked for his uncle, and ultimately enrolled in school in



Bakhtiar is the CEO of The Camp Transformation Center, a fitness franchise with over 110 locations across the U.S. and Mexico.

seventh grade. He didn’t speak English, and being from the Middle East, he felt out of place among the black and white students. And the school didn’t have a soccer team, which he had been playing ever since he could walk.

“I’m in a new country, don’t speak the language. Nobody likes me. I don’t belong in any group. Now, my favorite sport is not there. I’m devastated,” Bakhtiar recalled.

Bakhtiar tried out for the basketball team but didn’t make the cut. He cried all the way

home and told his mother how unhappy he was in the United States. She encouraged him and took him to the Boys Club so he could work on his game.

“My mom never let me quit,” he said.

Bodybuilding One day, as Bakhtiar was going to the basketball court, he came across guys coming from a room upstairs who were built like bodybuilders. Immediately, he knew he wanted to emulate people like Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwar-



zenegger. It would take work.

“I was a scrawny, awkward kid. I had the worst genetics in the world,” he said.

Bakhtiar would wait for people to leave the weight room upstairs, and go up and work out by himself because he felt intimidated by the others. After a few months, he began to put on some muscle.

“What happened was tremendous,” he said. “What it did for me physically is nothing compared to what it did for me mentally and emotionally, because I was literally depressed.

I had no friends. Nobody accepted me. And now, I started feeling better about myself. Now, I started being obsessed about body transformation.”

Whenever he received any allowance, he would spend it on exercise and nutrition literature or protein powder. Over time, he realized he wanted to become a bodybuilder and help others who had gone through a similar experience, even as his mother urged him to become a doctor, a lawyer, or an engineer.

Bakhtiar decided he wanted to become a doctor, but was reluctant at the prospect of having to perform surgeries on people.

One night while driving, Bakhtiar and his girlfriend were hit by a drunk driver, which motivated him to see a chiropractor to address his injuries. The doctor described how his specialty was muscles, bones, nutrition, and the human body, and Bakhtiar was immediately intrigued and decided to pursue a doctorate in chiropractic.

Pursuing the Dream

After Bakhtiar graduated from Penn State University, he was particularly disillusioned once he learned he had \$150,000 in student loans. He began working as a manager at a gym,

but the location was going out of business. That’s when he decided to start a personal-training business.

After working through college, he had saved \$20,000 and hadn’t spent any of it. But to open his first location, he would need \$35,000. His mother had started her own business, and she lent him the \$15,000 to open his gym. He was going to chiropractor school while he was trying to start his own business, and was participating in bodybuilding competitions as well.

He started to gain notoriety from the competitions, and his gym business started to take off. As a 27-year-old, he was making between \$10,000 and \$15,000 a month.

Recession

But the recession of 2008 was a wake-up call for the young entrepreneur.

“2008 just came in and slapped me in the face, I wasn’t ready for it,” Bakhtiar said. He had never had anyone explain to him how the economy can fluctuate, and he was caught off-guard by the effect on his finances.

“I bought a home. I bought a nice car. I had all this kind of stuff, and now this. My revenue just started plummeting, and I didn’t know what to do. I was

devastated.”

His wife was pregnant with their first child at the time, they had a negative bank balance, and he also had just two weeks to pay his employees. He sank into a deep depression.

“I have become the guy who welcomes hardship. Matter of fact, I have learned to be uncomfortable when I’m comfortable.”

Sam Bakhtiar

“I just got up every morning even though, some days, it was so tough to get up, and I’m like, I have no choice. In life, whenever something like that happens I guess you have two choices, either feel sorry for yourself and just lie down, or get up and try to fight back,” Bakhtiar said.

Divorce

Between 2009 and 2014, Bakhtiar and his family were in severe financial trouble; they began receiving foreclosure notices on their home. By 2014, business started to pick

up, but the resulting demands on his time and energy took their toll on him as a husband and as a father. One day at work, he was suddenly served divorce papers.

Bakhtiar moved to a hotel and thought about how he had come from a single-parent home and didn’t want his family to fall apart. To cope, his first thought was to go out, drink, have a good time, and start seeing other women.

Priorities

But he quickly realized that those distractions wouldn’t solve his personal issues, leading him to contemplate how to continue moving forward. His main priority was to spend time with his children—he began seeing them on Wednesdays and weekends—and he became determined to provide for them. He focused on expanding his business, and before long, his gym had 50 locations, and has continued to grow.

Hardship

“When a trial comes your way, when things get hard, you got to smile now,” he said. “You got to look at it dead in the face and say, ‘You know what, there’s something better at the other end. I wonder what the lesson is for me today to learn

from this?’ So, welcome hardship.

“I have become the guy who welcomes hardship. Matter of fact, I have learned to be uncomfortable when I’m comfortable.”

Bakhtiar has learned that the keys to success are hard work and grit.

“I always tell people the past doesn’t define you. The only thing that defines you is where you are right now. Where do you want to go? And are you willing to pay the price to get there?” he said. “As a human being, your duty to yourself and the world is to become the best version of yourself.”

And he has discovered that little accomplishments over time lead to big results.

“Be careful what you do, because it might become a habit, and first you make habits and then habits make you,” Bakhtiar said.

Bakhtiar came to the United States with his mother, a bag, and just \$500. Now, he’s a multimillionaire, and his discipline, focus, and resilience have helped him achieve his own American dream.

“Life is going to knock you down, but don’t stay down. Don’t let a setback in your life set you back. To me a setback is the perfect stage to make a comeback,” he said.



In 1954, William Holden won Best Actor for his performance in "Stalag 17."

FILM

The 1954 Academy Awards: New Technology and Old Standards

TIFFANY BRANNAN

On Feb. 9, the 2019 Oscars will be televised, a technology that we take for granted. On March 25, 1954, however, the thought of seeing the Oscars was enticing. For the first time, anyone who owned, borrowed, or was invited to sit before a television could enjoy the mysterious, glamorous event: Hollywood luminaries would be honored for 1953's greatest film achievements at the 26th Academy Awards ceremony.

According to cultural historian Thomas Doherty, NBC broadcast live from the RKO Pantages Theatre in Hollywood and the Center Theater in New York, sponsored by Oldsmobile. The cameramen's full-dress suits did not prevent old-school Hollywood folks from feeling invaded by the television staging. Many saw the film industry's collaboration with television as joining the enemy, but Hollywood was simply following an old motto: If



"From Here to Eternity" was the big winner at the 1954 Academy Awards.

you can't beat 'em, join 'em. That year, "From Here to Eternity" dominated the Oscars, winning eight awards, including Best Picture, Best Director (Fred Zinnemann), Best Supporting Actor (Frank Sinatra), and Best Supporting Actress (Donna Reed). It was the first film to equal the eight-award record of "Gone with the Wind" from 1939.

William Holden won his only Best Actor Oscar for playing a selfish American POW in 1944 Germany, who is accused of betrayal in "Stalag 17." In "Roman

Holiday," in her American debut, Audrey Hepburn played a lonely princess who enjoys one glorious day in Rome, earning Best Actress and a place among Hollywood royalty. However, these were not the most important Hollywood achievements recognized by the Academy that year.

An Unusual Oscar

Not all Oscars went to stars. Academy Honorary Awards are given to deserving people the Academy wouldn't recognize otherwise. In 1954, four Honor-

ary Awards were presented. One was bestowed on Pete Smith, who produced and narrated the comical shorts "Pete Smith Specialties." Since 1935, his humorous vignettes on various aspects of American life had been popular precursors to feature-length MGM films. In February of 1954, he had announced his intention to retire that autumn.

Two Honorary Awards were given for technical achievements. The first went to Twentieth Century Fox for developing CinemaScope technology. This widescreen process was used in 1953's historical blockbuster in Technicolor, "The Robe," which was nominated for Best Picture, Best Actor (Richard Burton), and Best Color Cinematography. It won Best Color Set Decoration and Best Color Costume Design that evening.

The other went to the Bell and Howell Company, which manufactured motion picture machinery, "for their pioneering and basic achievements in the industry." Founded by two

projectionists in 1907, this company was widely respected for its projectors.

When announcing the award, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences president Charles Brackett stated, "Without their contribution, the movies of today would still be the movies of yesterday." While the movie industry was embracing a new technology—television—the Academy also was giving "a tardy acknowledgment to a great indebtedness" to Bell and Howell's technology, which had been vital for years.

The fourth award was given to Joseph Breen for managing the Motion Picture Production Code. As Thomas Doherty stated in his biography of Breen, few television viewers were familiar with his name in 1954. Unlike actors, directors, or writers, he was never credited on the silver screen.

Since then, his memory has faded into obscurity. Who was Joseph Breen, and what is the Motion Picture Production Code which he managed?



Joseph I. Breen in the 1950s, working at the Production Code Administration.



The first PCA Seal of Approval, for the 1934 film "The World Moves On."

Honoring an Old Friend

In 1934, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) formed the Production Code Administration (PCA), their latest attempt at enforcing the Motion Picture Production Code, film decency rules adopted in 1930, which hadn't yet been effective.

The PCA was one last try at industry self-regulation before federal censorship would replace local censors to finally curtail the obscenity in early 1930s films. Thankfully, the PCA was destined to succeed, since something was different this time: Joseph Breen had never been in charge before.

Breen vowed to make all films "reasonably acceptable to reasonable people." Self-regulation throughout production ensured

they were decent from the start.

A family man, Breen didn't want to ruin films through rigid morality; he wanted to make them as entertaining as possible without offensive content. He became the filmmakers' friend by making them obey the Code that they had themselves

adopted.

He and his staff of eight tirelessly reviewed every script, lyric, and costume to help each film receive a PCA Seal of Approval, which was necessary for U.S. distribution. After 20 years of unwavering service, Breen retired on Oct. 14, 1954, due to poor health. The Honorary Award seems like an obvious farewell gesture. Did he deserve this honor?

In the Academy's 1953 Rules, the requirements for the award were: "For outstanding achievements not strictly within the categories listed in Rules Two (competitive awards) and Three (achievement awards). Honorary Awards shall only be given, however, for superlative and distinguished service in the making of motion pictures or

for outstanding service to the Academy." His years of turning objectionable material into decent, profitable films made him more than qualified.

When Charles Brackett presented the Oscar, he said: "The Motion Picture Production Code is a strong protection against self-appointed wildcat censorship groups. For his conscientious, open-minded, and dignified management of a difficult office, the Academy's board has voted an Honorary Award to the administrator of the Code, Mr. Joseph Breen."

Breen took his Oscar, thanked Brackett, and exited without speaking into the microphone. He had nothing to say to the audience; it was a gesture of thanks between his industry friends and himself. In the background, the orchestra played "Don't Fence Me In." He kept filmmakers in line, but Joe Breen never fenced them in.

Tiffany Brannan is an 18-year-old opera singer, Hollywood historian, travel writer, film blogger, vintage fashion expert, and ballet writer. In 2016, she and her sister founded the Pure Entertainment Preservation Society, an organization dedicated to reforming the arts by reinstating the Motion Picture Production Code.

SHEN YUN PERFORMING ARTS

Audience Reactions

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, and believes its mission to revive the 5,000-year civilization of China is history in the making, and in line with our mission of covering and preserving traditional arts and culture.



They are so strong, so focused, so graceful. It looked like the floor moved, not the dancers. It was everything that we've thought it would be. ... It'd be great if it can be shown in every classroom and every school. I really think it's that valuable.

SANDY NUGENT dance teacher and former studio owner, at Zellerbach Hall in Berkeley, Calif., on Feb. 1, 2020



This is the greatest performance, and I've traveled all over the world to 70 countries, including China, Russia, Eastern Europe ... This is the greatest performance I've ever seen ... This is sophisticated, this is elegant. The music is unbelievable. The dance will blow you away, and this represents all I hold dear.

ROBERT TRAVERS investment adviser, at the Hippodrome Theatre in Baltimore, Md., on Jan. 31, 2020



It was beautiful. It was very touching and moving ... It was a musical, visual movement masterpiece ... You could experience what they were trying to communicate through the music and the dance, which is really amazing.

KRISTINE HAAK flautist, at the Miller High Life Theatre in Milwaukee, Wis., on Feb. 1, 2020



It's very impressive, kind of tells the story of the spirituality of the world. I think it's portrayed very beautifully ... There's a lot of meaning to it, feeling to it ... It's kind of divine expression through men. There's a kind of real spiritual flow. We are all about the flow of spirituality. We are feeling that flow when we watch the dance show ... It's got a romance to it.

STEVE BURTON at the Long Center for the Performing Arts in Austin, Texas, on Feb. 1, 2020



This is an unbelievably phenomenal show. The music is absolutely extraordinary. The dancers are over the top, the cast to me is brilliant ... Definitely put it on your bucket list, put it at the top. It's so worth it, is so unique, and it's so enlightening. You will feel great when you leave. You'll be smiling.

JOANNE SMITH pianist, at Zellerbach Hall in Berkeley, Calif., on Feb. 1, 2020

FILM REVIEW: 'ASK NO QUESTIONS'

There's Fake News and Then There's Fake News

Slamdance '20 presents exposé of Chinese Communist Party framing Falun Dafa

JOE BENDEL

The world should be horrified by the evidence of genocide emerging from East Turkestan, but we shouldn't be so surprised. To a large extent, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is merely repeat-

ing the game plan it used to launch its wholesale persecution of Falun Dafa (also called Falun Gong).

Today, Party propaganda tells the world that it is simply routing out terrorists. In the case of Falun Gong, it was religious extremism. Filmmakers Jason Loftus and Eric Pedicelli ask the hard questions about the incident used to justify the anti-Falun Gong campaign that the Western media should have asked, in the riveting exposé documentary "Ask No Questions," which premiered at the 2020 Slamdance

Film Festival, in Park City, Utah.

Falun Gong is a traditional spiritual practice based on the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance that is not inherently political, but its rapid growth spooked the Communist Party; so true to form, the Party prohibited it. Those who still practiced were subjected to physical and mental torture in re-education camps. Whoever refused to recant became slave laborers in work camps (much like what is happening in East Turkestan).

There is no hyperventilating and no over-reaching, just reasonable questions.

For a while, the world expressed concern over this naked repression of Falun Gong, but the release of a videotape, supposedly documenting practitioners self-immolating on Tiananmen Square, largely defused the issue. (In fact, the International Olympic Committee rewarded the CCP for its brutality by approving China's bid for the 2008 Olympics.)

Ever since, the incident has made practitioners like Loftus defensive. Yet, when he took a hard look at the tape, he noticed some suspicious

inconsistencies. CNN reporter Lisa Weaver (who happened to be on the Square at that very moment) had questions about the official story, but she was not allowed to follow up because CNN wanted to protect its Beijing bureau.

Throughout "Ask No Questions," Loftus points out the strange circumstances surrounding the incident, starting with the fact that practitioners had no known history of the self-immolators ever practicing Falun Gong. He also interviews at length Chen Ruichang, a former state television official and Falun Gong practitioner, who refused to recant despite the brutal torture he endured in a prison camp.

Some of Loftus's evidence is circumstantial, but he readily identi-



'Ask No Questions'

Directors
Jason Loftus,
Eric Pedicelli

Documentary

Running Time
1 hour, 19 minutes

Watch for showings at film festivals near you.

★★★★★

A poster for "Ask No Questions."

fies it as such. He never overblows or overplays any objections to the official story, but the cumulative effect is overwhelming. Perhaps most chillingly, Loftus and Pedicelli identify the parallels between the alleged Falun Gong incident and a false-flag self-immolation chronicled in Wang Lixiong's novel "Yellow Peril," which the CCP authorities would be well familiar with, since they banned it in China.

Loftus appears throughout the film, providing a personal perspective, but he still marshals his case quite credibly and persuasively. He raises so many legitimate questions that it really puts CNN to shame. Again, there is no hyperventilating and no over-reaching, just reasonable questions.

However, there is one critical point Loftus misses. The possible (likely) framing of Falun Dafa did not just impact practitioners. The world's subsequent acceptance emboldened the CCP to apply such tactics against the Uyghurs in East Turkestan, and it is already starting to roll them out in Tibet.

Regardless, this is an incisive documentary that arrives at a perfect time. Highly and urgently recommended. "Ask No Questions" screened on Jan. 25 and 29, as part of this year's Slamdance.

Joe Bendel writes about independent film and lives in New York. To read his most recent articles, visit JBSpins.blogspot.com

How to Wear the White Shirt

From the Runway to Your Way

MANY NGOM

This classic staple is a wardrobe must-have. Once a symbol of wealth and distinction, the white shirt possesses high-end allure, especially when worn the right way. From the runway to the streets, get inspired by the trends and see how you can update the basic white shirt as well as your wardrobe with these few tips.



Black

I don't think that a black and white color combo is boring—au contraire! Pairing a black bottom with a crisp white shirt creates the most flattering silhouette. It's simple and easy, it suits all body shapes, and it's always elegant. We can learn from Coco Chanel or Audrey Hepburn, who both used a black and white color combination as their signature style.

FASHIONSTOCK.COM/SHUTTERSTOCK

Camel

This color combination is perfect in different fabrics as well as different shades. Camel is an expensive-looking color, which means that your wardrobe will always look chic when using this hue. Mixing it with white, it can be sophisticated for work or casual chic for the weekend.

FASHIONSTOCK.COM/SHUTTERSTOCK



KARL LAGERFELD



White Shirt and Jewelry

Gold accessories on a white shirt will boost your look to another level! First, necklaces; they can be worn stacked with an open collar all the way to the chest. Chanel does it so well with a silk white shirt. The brand uses pearls to mark a timeless look. As for the avant-garde, your look can still be timeless; just use unique and bold jewelry like Valentino did in his recent collection.

PASCAL LE SEGRETAIR/GETTY IMAGES

How to Care for Your White Shirt

Here are a few tips on how to keep your white shirt new and ... white!

You might already be using this miracle worker when cleaning your house—bleach. It will prevent your shirt from turning yellow or gray, and will keep your shirt crisp and clean.

If bleach is not an option, there is a more natural way. Use lemon. Mix half a cup of lemon juice with hot water, soak your shirt, and let it sit overnight. Then wash it the next day.

Don't abuse your shirt! When the collar or the armpits get yellowish over time, just replace it. If you like a particular style, buy two or three items so your look will always be on point.



Salita Blouse by Max Mara, \$401.



Nina Trumpet Sleeves Cotton Shirt by Le Sirenuse Positano, \$215.



Super Asymmetric Cotton-blend Shirt by palmer/harding, \$417.

COURTESY OF MATCHESFASHION

COURTESY OF MATCHESFASHION

COURTESY OF MATCHESFASHION

FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES

From a Railway Carriage

by Robert Louis Stevenson

Faster than fairies, faster than witches,
Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches;
And charging along like troops in a battle,
All through the meadows the horses and cattle:
All of the sights of the hill and the plain
Fly as thick as driving rain;
And ever again, in the wink of an eye,
Painted stations whistle by.

Here is a child who clammers and scrambles,
All by himself and gathering brambles;
Here is a tramp who stands and gazes;
And there is the green for stringing the daisies
Here is a cart run away in the road
Lumping along with man and load;
And here is a mill and there is a river;
Each a glimpse and gone for ever!

Did you hear about the MAGIC TRACTOR?

IT TURNED INTO A FIELD.

“Once you tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward, for there you have been, and there you will always long to return.”

LEONARDO DA VINCI (1452-1519)

This Week in History

THE WORLD'S SMALLEST COUNTRY IS ESTABLISHED

On Feb. 11, 1929, the Vatican City, a small enclave in Rome became an official city-state, making it the world's smallest country. Vatican City is ruled as a theocracy by the head of the Roman Catholic Church—the Pope. Some of the world's most famous paintings and sculptures reside in Vatican City, including Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. As of 2020, the population of the Vatican City is 801 according to a UN estimate.



Pontifical Swiss Guard in his traditional uniform.

ALL IMAGES IN PUBLIC DOMAIN

THE LARGEST FISH

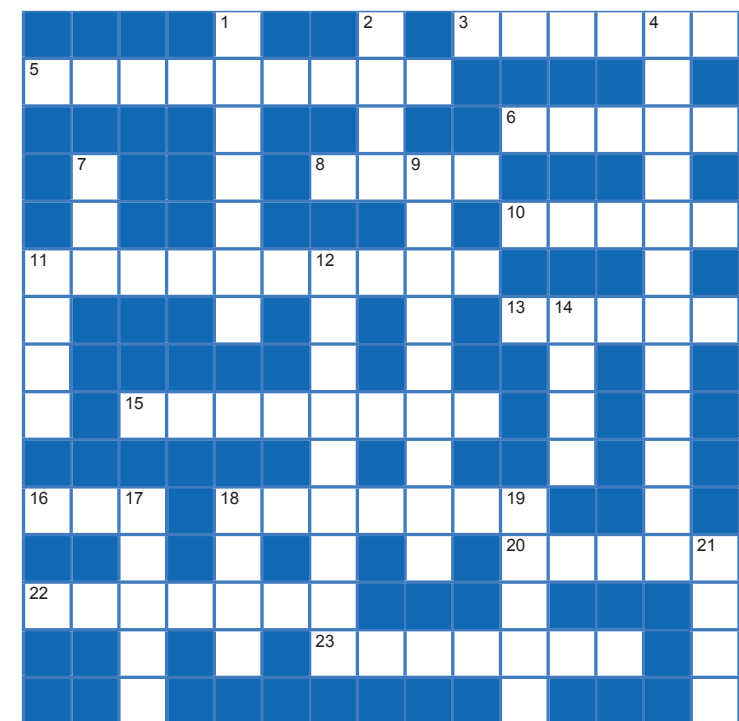
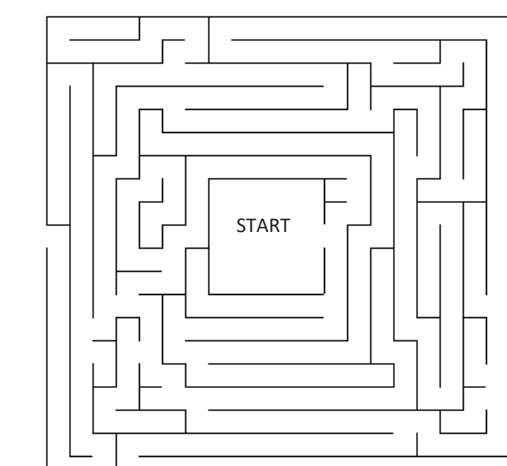
By Aidan Danza, age 13

Bronze Winner
THE BASKING SHARK
This shark won't harm you: it eats only tiny plankton. It feeds by simply opening its mouth (their mouth opens up to three feet wide), swallowing whatever food there is in front of it, and pumping out the excess water through the gills. It lives worldwide, but seems to prefer sub-polar waters. They are brown or black on top and white on the belly. Both the dorsal (top) and pectoral (bottom) fins can be up to six feet long each. They can be up to 33 feet long at longest.

Silver Winner
THE GIANT OARFISH
It is rumored that these enormous fish are the origin of the mythical creature—the Sea Serpent! The largest confirmed one was 36 feet long, and weighed 600 pounds. Dead ones wash ashore periodically but rarely, but it is even rarer to see a live one in the water, because of the deep depths they hang out in. They normally live in depths of 600 to 3000 feet, where they actually swim vertically. Like the basking shark, they feed on plankton, and sometimes also small crustaceans or squid, to swallow. They will basically eat anything that enters their mouth, though that mostly includes plankton, they won't hesitate to eat invertebrates and some fish.

Gold Winner
WHALE SHARK
Just like the other large fish in this article, Whale Sharks eat plankton. They are enormous—most are around 40 feet long and can weigh 15 tons, though some are even larger. They feed by keeping their mouth open and letting seawater filter out through the gills, occasionally closing its mouth.

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		
3	10		
97			
+	-	x	÷

Solution For Easy 1
9 - 6 + 01 = 01

Medium puzzle 1

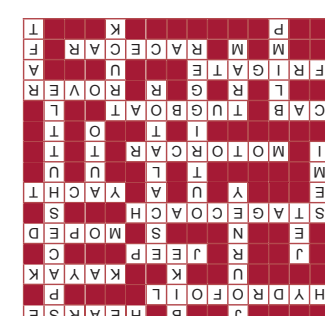
9	15		
8	15		
48			
+	-	x	÷

Solution for Medium 1
91 - 6 x (8 - 91)

Hard puzzle 1

3	30		
1	3		
20			
+	-	x	÷

Solution for Hard 1
1 - 8 x 8 = 08



Across

- 3 Final transport (6)
- 5 Airborne boat (9)
- 6 Eskimo craft (5)
- 8 WWII Army transport (4)
- 10 Bicycle with a motor (5)
- 11 Old West transport (10)

Down

- 1 Long trip (7)
- 2 Chopper (4)
- 4 "Atlantis" or "Endeavour" (12)
- 7 An F-15 fighter (3)
- 9 Mall transport (9)
- 11 "Ice Road Truckers" truck (4)
- 12 Canoe with an extension (9)
- 14 Kia or Cadillac (4)
- 17 Goodyear airship (5)
- 18 Way around London, once (4)
- 19 Highway cargo hauler (5)
- 21 Tom Sawyer's river rider (4)

13

- 13 Marina sight (5)
- 15 Auto (8)
- 16 In NYC, they may be yellow (3)
- 18 Barge helper (7)
- 20 Moon "jeep" (5)
- 22 Navy ship (7)
- 23 Fast one (7)



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**THE
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A conservator works tirelessly to bring back the former glory of the van Eyck brothers' Ghent Altarpiece, for St. Bavo's Cathedral in Ghent, Belgium. Here, she makes the final touches to the nearly 600-year-old paint.

SACRED ART

A Restoration of Divine Details

The Van Eyck Brothers' 'Adoration of the Mystic Lamb'

LORRAINE FERRIER

One of the most important paintings of the Northern Renaissance hasn't been quite itself for hundreds of years. Over the course of six centuries, large expanses of the Ghent Altarpiece polyptych, also known as the "Adoration of the Mystic Lamb," have been overpainted, mainly in the mid-16th century, to reflect the tastes of the time or to patch up damaged areas of canvas.

Now, the lower register of the Ghent Altarpiece can be seen as the van Eyck brothers, Hubrecht and Jan, intended it in 1432, when the commission was completed for St. Bavo's Cathedral in Ghent, Belgium. The cathedral also commissioned the current restoration of the entire altarpiece, which has

occurred over a number of phases, this being the end of phase two.

The lower register, now revealing the joyful details of the original, is on view in the Villa chapel in St. Bavo's Cathedral.

An Innovative Time for Art Jan van Eyck's brother Hubrecht (circa 1385-1426) was originally commissioned in 1425 to create the altarpiece, but Jan (1390-1441) took over the task completely when Hubrecht passed away in 1426. It's not understood who painted what, but many assume the majority was painted by Jan.

The van Eycks lived at a time when the early Italian Renaissance artists were paving the way for traditional Western art as we now know it. In Florence, Italy,

Masaccio was beginning to introduce in his paintings solid figures full of emotive gestures and life, a move away from the rather two-dimensional Gothic style.

Masaccio, inspired by his friend the architect Filippo Brunelleschi, used mathematics to pioneer single-point perspective in his paintings. Brunelleschi looked to ancient Roman architecture to revolutionize architecture. At the same time, Donatello was advancing sculpture.

Far from Italy, Jan van Eyck didn't have Rome in his backyard, so he looked to life for his models, placing figures intuitively into compositions, while his Italian peers were placing them with mathematical precision.

Continued on Page 16

THE EPOCH TIMES
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LITERATURE

DEAD POET'S SOCIETY: Robert Burns AND 'Burns Night'

JEFF MINICK

The old house was jammed and noisy, with people standing elbow to elbow in the bar, drinking beer, roaming the premises, and stepping to the porch for a cigarette or a cigar. Many of the men were dressed in kilts, and a number of the women wore tartan skirts and shawls. In the yard behind the house, others gathered round a blazing bonfire while a bagpiper slowly strolled back and forth, warming up his pipes for the evening's festivities.

Upstairs, a buffet awaited these guests, with the featured items being haggis and a large casserole dish of neeps (turnips) and tatties (potatoes). Soon the piper, preceded by a kilted young man carrying a broadsword, would pipe the haggis down the stairs before the assembled guests. Then would come poems and songs, various toasts, and a formal address regarding some aspect of Robert Burns and his work.

Burns Night

No—I was not in Scotland. I was at the Virginia Beer Museum on Chester Street in Front Royal to commemorate the birth of a Scots poet born more than 250 years ago. And on this day of his birth, Jan. 25, similar celebrations were taking place around the world.

Robert Burns (1759–1796) wrote more than 600 poems and songs in his short life. He adored his native country, supported the American and French Revolutions, drank too much whisky, loved several women, failed as a farmer, spent most of his life struggling to earn a living, and died of rheumatic fever. He could be curmudgeonly and opinionated, and his personal life was, to put it kindly, a mess.

Yet in Scotland and around the globe, "Burns Night" brings a celebration of this man, eclipsing in its festivities even Scotland's official national holiday, Saint Andrew's Day.

Admirers have erected more than 60 statues to Burns, putting him third in line behind Christopher Columbus and Queen Victoria in the number of statues dedicated to people other than religious figures. In a poll conducted in 2009, Burns was declared the "Greatest Scot" of all time, beating out such luminaries as William Wallace, Robert the Bruce, and Alexander Fleming.

Ponder that honor for a moment. If Americans were asked to name the 10 "Greatest Americans" of all time, we might safely wager that no poet would make the cut.

Fame and Homage

So how is it that his fans toast the Bard of Scotland in places like Chicago and Moscow?

One reason has to do with geographic dispersal. A variety of factors, especially poverty and the English suppression of Scotland following the Battle of Culloden, led Scots and Scots-Irish to migrate to places like America, Canada, and Australia. Here in the United States, for example, the Scots-Irish put down roots in frontier Appalachia, and their cultural influence on the region remains strongly felt even today. With these immigrants came the poetry of Robert Burns.

Burns was also regarded, both in his lifetime and afterward, as "a people's poet." His use of the vernacular, his poetic style, and many of his themes, especially his down-to-earth take on love and life, spoke to the man on the street, so much so that even in czarist Russia his words found an audience.

Of course, "Burns Night" has also kept alive his work. This celebration of the poet began shortly after his death and eventually became the phenomenon it is today. And phenomenon it is, as I observed at the Virginia Beer Museum.

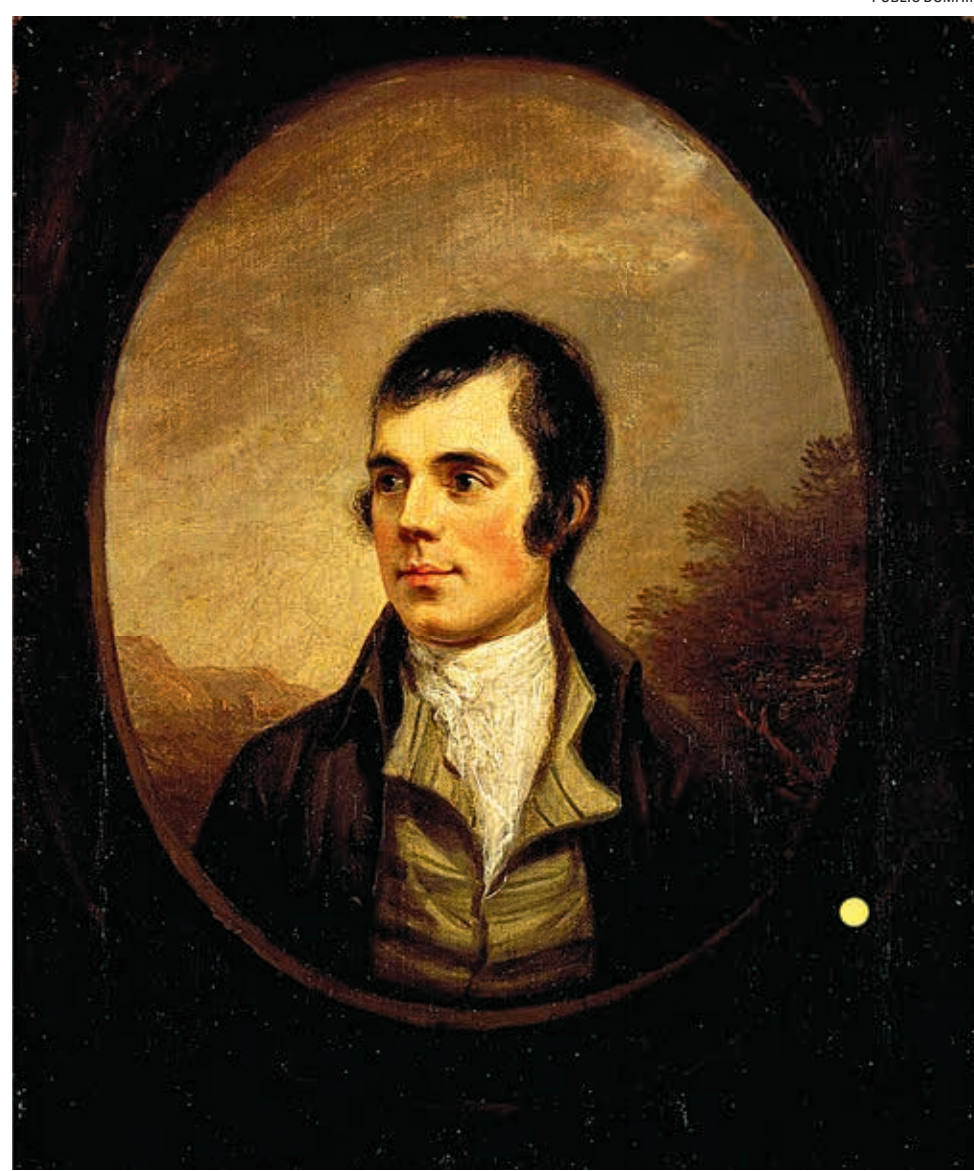
We Americans honor Shakespeare, yet few of us throw parties on his birthday. We honor our own writers by declaring their homes historical sites and by establishing societies to preserve and promote their work, but we have no annual observances to match the widespread homage shown to Burns.

'Nature's Own Beloved Bard'

Of course, the chief reason we remember and honor Robert Burns lies in his verse, which Samuel Taylor Coleridge esteemed as written by "Nature's own beloved bard." Emblematic of his appeal is one of his better-known poems, "A Red, Red Rose."

O my Luve is like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June;
O my Luve is like the melody
That's sweetly played in tune.
So fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
So deep in luve am I;
And I will luve thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry,
Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;
I will love thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.
And fare thee weel, my only luve!
And fare thee weel awhile!
And I will come again, my luve,
Though it were ten thousand mile.

PUBLIC DOMAIN



A portrait of the Scottish poet Robert Burns, 1787, by Alexander Nasmyth. Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

Here we see the quintessential Burnsian verse: simple, straightforward in meaning, written in dialect, words "so sweetly played in tune" that these might be lyrics for a song, which indeed they were. Here we feel the poet's joy, his exuberance in love and life. Note, too, that in the entire poem only seven words contain more than one syllable. This is language honed sharp as a razor.

Burns was a songwriter as much as a poet, and many of his compositions found a broad audience. From my childhood, I remember my mother playing the piano and singing "Flow gently, sweet Afton," and realized Burns had written the lyrics only when I began

teaching literature to homeschool students. And of course, whenever we raise our glasses on New Year's Eve and belt out "Auld Lang Syne," we are singing Burton's words to an old Scottish folk song, one of more than 300 such songs that Burns helped preserve.

Lifting a Glass

In his massive tome "Lives of the Poets," Michael Schmidt devotes a page to the criticism of Burns by Victorian poet and critic Matthew Arnold, who wrote that Burns's poetry often depicts "a harsh, a sordid, a repulsive world" and that his verse lacked "the high seriousness which comes from absolute sincerity."

Despite this critique, Arnold then goes on to compare Burns to Chaucer, writing: "Of life and the world, as they came before him, his views large, free, shrewd, benignant—truly poetic, therefore; and his manner of rendering what he sees is to match."

On Burns Night, the keynote speaker traditionally addresses some aspect of Robert Burns's life and work, and ends his remarks by raising his glass and declaring, "To the Immortal Memory of Robert Burns!"

Given the respect and love paid to the poet at the Virginia Beer Museum, and in an uncounted number of places around the globe, we may safely predict that Robert Burns is in no danger of being forgotten.

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.



Traditional Scottish fare served on Burns Night: Haggis, neeps, and tatties.



CONNOR BEATON/CC BY SA 4.0

Americans have no annual observances to match the widespread homage shown to poet Robert Burns.

4 A haggis being brought in at the Burns Club in Dundee, Scotland, for the 160th annual Burns supper on Jan. 25.



One of the 60 statues of the poet Robert Burns in the world, this one unveiled in the town center of Dumfries, Scotland, in 1882.

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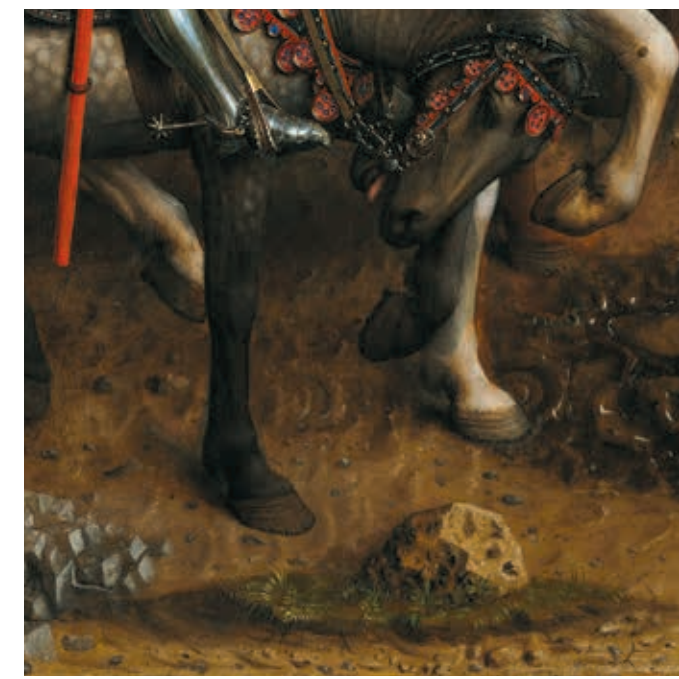
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The lower register of the open Ghent Altarpiece polypych in their restored frames, during the final retouching. (L-R): "The Just Judges," "The Knights of Christ," "Adoration of the Mystic Lamb," "The Hermits," and "The Pilgrims."



Detail of the lamb before treatment (L) and during the final retouching.



(Left) Detail of the foreground of "The Knights of Christ," during the final retouching. Even the stones are finely rendered, such as van Eyck's attention to detail.

(Right) Detail of the virgins during the final retouching.

KIK-IRPA, BRUSSELS

SACRED ART

A Restoration of Divine Details

The Van Eyck Brothers' 'Adoration of the Mystic Lamb'

Continued from Page 13

And while Italian painters continued to paint mainly with tempera, which uses egg to bind pigments, van Eyck preferred oil paints. Using oils gave artists more time to paint than tempera did, as oils dried slowly between each application of paint. And painting with oils also allowed more fluidity of the brushwork.

Van Eyck perfected the medium of oils. He painted layer upon layer of translucent glazes that allowed for exceptional blending and detailing. Such innovations allowed him to create glossiness and glimmers of reflected light, for example. His luminous figures were full of life, and the details of everyday life are so fine as to be minuscule. He also pioneered the three-quarter-view in portraits while most of his Italian peers used the profile-view in portraits.

The Ghent Altarpiece shows these innovations—his brilliant legacy—across the 11 feet by 15 feet polypych.

These are just some of the reasons that the Ghent Altarpiece is deemed the masterpiece of all the works by early Flemish artists.

Restoration

Over the seven years that conservators worked together on the

Ghent Altarpiece project, they've gained "an intimate understanding of the altarpiece" and "unique expertise," the international team of experts overseeing the project said in a press release.

For the last three of those years, the conservation team from the Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage has worked tirelessly on the lower register of the opened altarpiece to restore the four original panels painted by the van Eycks. "The Just Judges," one of the panels, is a copy of the van Eycks' painting. Jef van der Veken created it in 1945 to replace the panel that had been stolen in 1934.

The conservators worked at the Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent in a temporary studio, which was open to the public, allowing visitors a peek into much of the conservation process as it happened.

Visitors could watch the painstaking peeling away of the old paint. We can see the extent of the overpainting on a conservators' diagram of the lower register's central panel, which clearly shows in red, just how much of the composition was overpainted.

Only skilled hands and exceptionally keen eyes trained to differentiate between the varnish, overpaint, and the original paint could be trusted with such a delicate operation. The con-

servators looked through stereo microscopes while using surgical scalpels to chip the yellowed varnish and centuries-old paint away flake by flake, retouching paint where needed.

Van Eyck painted right down to the microcosm of what the human eye can see.

Luckily for us, the van Eyck brothers' original painting was well-preserved, with only five percent of the nearly 600-year-old original paint lost. Now, we can see how the brothers intended the Ghent Altarpiece to be.

The Reveal

The lower register depicts the "Adoration of the Mystic Lamb." On the altarpiece wings, we see different groups of people coming to adore the Lamb of God. On the left, the Knights of Christ (on the inner panel) arrive on horseback with the Just Knights not far behind (on the outer panel). On the right, pilgrims (on the outer panel) and hermits (on the inner panel) come on foot.

The paintings are rich with

symbolism. On the central panel, in the foreground is the Fountain of Life. At the center of the painting is the altar and the sacrificial lamb; the lamb's open wound pours blood into a chalice, symbolizing the Eucharist.

Before the restoration, the face of the lamb was unremarkable, but after peeling back the layers of paint, the lamb's face appears more human than animal. The eyes face forward, connecting calmly with the viewer's. Medieval artists commonly depicted the Lamb of God with human eyes.

Van Eyck painted right down to the microcosm of what the human eye can see. Every little thing is rendered as if it were significant; even the stones on the ground have been granted great detailing. It's almost as if the painting is a hymn, a Hallelujah if you like, to each and every divinely created thing.

Maybe this is how heaven will appear to us all. With our earthly concerns left behind, we may elevate to such a sense of awareness of each and every little thing.

To find out more about the van Eyck brothers' Ghent Altarpiece, visit Sint-BaafsKathedraal.be and cathedral visitors can learn more about the restoration from the exhibition: "The Return of the Lamb."



A conservator's diagram of the "Adoration of the Mystic Lamb" with overpainted parts shown in red. All the overpaints were removed during the restoration, revealing the original paint layer by the van Eycks.



Conservators work on the painting.



TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Beyond Music: The Tales of Maori Musical Instruments

A flute, a shell trumpet, and a yo-yo

LORRAINE FERRIER

"It was in the night, that the Gods sang the world into existence. From the world of light, into the world of music," said Ngai Tahu tribal leader Matiaha Tiramorehu in 1849, as he relayed the Maori creation story.

Tiramorehu, of course, said the words in Maori: Kei a te Po te timatatanga o te waiatatanga mai a te Atua. Ko te Ao, ko te Ao marama, ko te Ao tu roa.

Brian Flintoff, a master carver and traditional Maori instrument maker, stresses the above story in his book "Taonga Puoro: Singing Treasures: The Musical Instruments of the Maori." Flintoff believes that to appreciate the Maori musical instruments, the cosmology that brought them into existence needs to be understood, that is, the Maori myths and legends.

These tales have passed down the generations largely by word of mouth, with the details of the stories differing slightly. "There are lots of versions of the creation story as would be expected from an oral tradition where important points were added or omitted as fitted the circumstances of the telling, which shows the deficiencies of the printed word," Flintoff said in an email.

Traditional Maori musical instruments are more than the music they make.

"All the different types of Maori song stem from the emotions displayed by the gods during the creation aeons. There are songs of sorrow, anger, and lament; of loneliness, desire, and joy; of peace and love. The voices of the instruments and the movements of dance support and embellish the songs," Flintoff wrote.

Maori musical instruments are therefore a key part of maintaining the Maori tradition of storytelling, used to convey myths, ancestral knowledge, and more, thus enabling Maori lore to flourish for future generations.

Songs for Well-Being

One of the simplest of instruments is the porotiti, the Maori word for circle. But a porotiti can be any shape as long as it's balanced, Flintoff explained in a phone interview. It is spun on a string that goes forward and back through two holes in the center,

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRIAN FLINTOFF



Master carver Brian Flintoff outside his workshop in Nelson on New Zealand's South Island.

and as it gets up to speed it hums.

"We used to use a coat button on a piece of cotton when we were kids," Flintoff said. A throw-back to Scotland's heritage, he believes. Many may know the yo-yo, which is similar to the porotiti.

But Maori did something really unique with the instrument. They would blow on the porotiti as it was spinning, so it became a song catcher, he explained.

Not only does the porotiti catch songs, but its music is thought to be medicinal.

In the early days of European settlement, when the influenza came to New Zealand, the Maori had no protection against it. Flintoff explained that a group up in Taranaki, in the west of New Zealand's North Island, discovered that the children who had been playing the tiny porotiti weren't getting sick. So the Maori played the porotiti over all the children at night and lost none of them to the flu. Whereas in other areas of New Zealand, whole places were devastated by it.

"The old people, like me, would spin it and dance with it and move it around in different positions, and the vibrations going up the string would help with arthritis," Flintoff said.

Nowadays, people have had success with it in helping people with asthma, he added.

Hidden Messages

Listen closely to the koauau, the commonest of the Maori flutes, and you may just hear more than music. Expert musicians are able to play the koauau in such a way that you can hear the words of the

(Top) A koauau made by Brian Flintoff. A face is carved on each end of the flute. The end for blowing represents the face of the instrument, and the other end is the face of the music. Music is created by combining the flute's breath with the musician's breath.

(Above left) A bone porotiti by Brian Flintoff. Sound is created by spinning the porotiti and blowing on it as it spins.

(Above middle) "Pumoana Karoro" by Brian Flintoff. Shell trumpets are commonly called putatara. In the past, putatara were made from a specific kind of shell. When Flintoff uses other shells, he calls his shell trumpets pumoana.

(Above right) A Maori shell trumpet, called a putatara, made by Brian Flintoff. Maori are one of only a few cultures in the world that add a mouthpiece to shell trumpets.

“
All the different types of Maori song stem from the emotions displayed by the gods during the creation aeons.

Brian Flintoff,
master carver

song through the flute. So if you really know the song well, you may be able to pick up what the musician is "saying," Flintoff said.

There are great stories of people sending secret messages through the songs, he said. He recounted one such story of a young man caught wooing the princess of another tribe, for which his punishment would be death: The young man asks if he could please play his koauau first. So he starts by playing a song to his sweetheart. Listening to the song, she picks up that he is telling her to meet him at a certain place. Nobody else hears the message, but she is listening for it. He keeps playing for four hours, and everyone is so entranced with his wonderful playing that they all fall asleep. He takes the opportunity to escape. He runs off and jumps off a cliff into the water below, where his brothers are waiting in a canoe to take him to meet his princess.

Divine Knowledge

The first mention of the putatara or shell trumpet in Maori mythology is when a fanfare is sounded to herald the return of Tane, popularly known as the god of the forests. As the tale goes, Tane goes on a treacherous quest up to the heavens to bring back the three baskets of knowledge (kete o te wananga) to benefit all of mankind. Each of the three baskets contains a different kind of knowledge to help mankind: sacred knowledge, ancestral knowledge, and life knowledge.

Tane's heavenly trek is fraught with challenges, as all divine quests are. Not only did he have to navigate up to the 12th heaven to request the baskets from the supreme god, Io-matua-kore (Io), but his brother Whiro tries to stop him every which way he can. Even though Tane had been sacredly selected for the task, Whiro believes, as the elder brother, that he deserves to bring back the three baskets of knowledge.

Whiro sends scores of repulsive creatures such as insects, reptiles, and carrion-eating birds from heaven to thwart his brother's ascent. These malevolent beings try to obtain Tane's blood in order to curse and destroy him. But Tane keeps rising up through the heavens with the aid of sacred

winds—the whirlwind and the wind children, who protect and propel him higher.

Once at the summit of heaven, Tane meets the guardian gods of Io; he is purified and then honored with many sacred names. Io, of course, permits Tane's request for the three baskets. The guardian gods give him the baskets and two god-stones, which are able to discern whether a man's desire is good or evil.

The detailed story tells of Tane conquering evil and of his purification as he endures many divine tests during his ascent to heaven and descent to earth.

When Tane arrives back on earth, his family members Uru-ao and Tupai sound a fanfare that can be heard throughout the heavens, signaling to the gods that Tane has successfully descended back to earth. That fanfare is the first mention of the Maori shell trumpet that Tupai is said to have made.

A Peace Offering

The Maori are one of only a few cultures in the world, including the Tibetan people, who add a mouthpiece to the shell trumpet, Flintoff said. The wooden mouthpiece has its own story to tell. It is added on to the putatara because the wood comes from the land and the shell comes from the sea.

"If you go down to the beach, the land and sea are always fighting. It used to be terribly tedious fighting, but it's calmed down a bit now apparently.

"This was the way between the gods. They said, 'we'll use the wood and shell to make the instrument as a peace offering. And so the giving of gifts to make peace is established through a lovely story, and it becomes a natural part of your life,'" Flintoff said.

The shell trumpet can still be heard across New Zealand as part of Maori ceremonial protocol, at many marae (Maori meeting house and grounds) and beyond. Some schools even use them instead of a bell to mark the end of school periods. Perhaps the gods continue to hear them reverberate in the heavens, too.

To find out more about Brian Flintoff and hear some of his musical instruments, visit JadeAndBone.co.nz

FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON



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

'The Rhythm Section'

★★★★

Director
Reed Morano

Rated
R

Starring
Blake Lively, Jude Law,
Sterling K. Brown, Geoff Bell,
Raza Jaffrey, Tafveek Barhom,
Nasser Memarzia

Running Time
1 hour, 49 minutes

Release Date
Jan. 31

As Far From James Bond as You Can Get

MARK JACKSON

"The Rhythm Section" is the next step in the ongoing deconstruction and general grunge-ification of the debonair, Roger Moore-type James Bond spy movie.

The first wave of this grunging-up began with the Jason Bourne franchise. In the same way that "Alien" updated spaceship stories by smearing grime and print marks on the previously shiny equipment, making keyboards grubby and such, so also did Jason Bourne nitty-grit-ify the tuxedo-wearing Bond-ness of the spy genre. It exchanged sleek, Walther PPK handguns and suave, witty quips for vicious, Krav Maga-based street fighting.

Which, in turn, cross-pollinated by blowing back on the current Bond incarnations—Daniel Craig's grittier, grungier Bond should really be named Jason Bond.

'The Rhythm Section': A Revenge Tale

Blake Lively plays Stephanie Patrick, a summa cum laude-level Oxford student, whose life was hit by a hurricane in the form of a transatlantic-flight plane crash that killed her entire family. The resultant PTSD of that trauma is a virulent downward spiral, dead-ending in her becoming a heroin-addicted prostitute. Which is ... perhaps a bit much. Oxford? Junkie prostitute? OK whatever. Could happen.

Three years later, an investigative journalist named Proctor (Raza Jaffrey) hunts her down, revealing that the tragedy was actually caused by a bomb and not mechanical failure. Which lights a fire of vengeance under her that could double as a death wish: When asked later by her mentor about her life (and the danger to it), she replies, "What about it?"

Once Stephanie realizes that she can trust Proctor, she succumbs to immediate overzealous-revenge desire and blows her cover by not being able to bring herself to pull the trigger on bombmaker Reza (Tafveek Barhom), which then gets Proctor killed.

So now (like Jennifer Garner in "Peppermint," among others) follows the ubiquitous training in martial arts and weaponry montage. Discovering among Proctor's belongings a photo of Scotland with geographic coordinates, Stephanie takes a bus to the Scottish Highlands. We don't at first understand what she's up to.

Once she gets there, Iain Boyd, a former MI6 agent (Jude Law), makes her do special operations military things, like shoot guns, observe her "rhythm section" for balance and calm ("Think of your heart as the drums, your breathing as the bass"), and swim in a freezing Scottish loch.

By the way, this superfan of "Braveheart" (myself) had a bit of a problem when Stephanie gets off the bus from England and the soundtrack strikes up the actual theme music from "Braveheart" (or rather, a close facsimile). Do not mess with "Braveheart," thank you very much.

Anyway, in addition to securing spy training for herself, Stephanie also finds



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▲
Blake Lively stars in "The Rhythm Section," a movie that further degrades the spy genre.

financial benefactors in Suleman and Alia Kaif (Nasser Memarzia and Amira Ghazal-la)—the parents of the man targeted in the plane bombing.

And so, after a scant few months of training, it's off to Tangiers to pursue her revenge plans, all gung-ho to start mixing it up with professional terrorists. There she meets an ex-CIA mercenary (Sterling K. Brown) who knows how she can get to U-17, the terrorist behind the bombing.

Order Versus Chaos

So—since everything in modern culture and marketing caters to our addictions in order to sell more product—the ante must constantly be upped. Where we're currently at in terms of escalation is like Marty McFly in "Back to the Future" when he turns every volume dial in Doc Brown's lab up to 10, plugs in his guitar, stands in front of the Shrek-sized amplifier, hits a power chord—and blows himself through a wall.

But the Jason Bourne franchise already maxed out the spy genre adrenaline rush. So how do you turn that up a notch?

Well, actually, "The Rhythm Section" is not the first rerouting of the Bond spy genre locomotive onto new tracks. That was the recent "Red Sparrow," about the young, physically attractive Russian spies trained to be honey traps.

"The Rhythm Section" hitches its caboose to that narrative. From the sleek, highly trained operative played by Jennifer Lawrence to Blake Lively's no-makeup-wearing, bruised, strung-out, psychologically fragile, junkie prostitute. That's how you grit-ify and deglam another notch downward.

So what does it amount to? "The Rhythm Section" has less in common with "Atomic Blonde" (although it features a female assassin) than it does with Adam Sandler's

▼
Jude Law plays an ex-MI6 agent who teaches Blake Lively's character the spy ropes.



recent "Uncut Gems"—namely, barely manageable chaos.

Stephanie's trained a couple of months (which makes her an uncut gem of sorts), and now she's going to take on pros? She has miles of heart but rudimentary (at best) hand-to-hand, gunfighting, and combat driving skills. What does that bring to the table, this state of being a neophyte in the spy-and-special-operations arena? She can't yet impose her will, so it's all ragged, seat-of-the-pants mayhem-survival; she could die at any moment, which raises the stakes in a certain way. It makes it all the more raw and dangerous. And therefore stressful.

Blake Lively's cinematic stock in trade is getting herself severely harmed.

Like I said about "Uncut Gems," with its portrayal of a hapless character negotiating a minefield full of nonstop explosions—do you really want that stress? There's something comforting in watching Jason Bourne prevail over the chaos, and not just surviving it by sheer luck.

So that's a preference. I prefer highly skilled Jason Bourne's chaos management over no-skills Stephanie Patrick's chaos survival, employing nonstop, vince-worthy close calls. I like to relish the karmic retribution meted out by a master of behind-whipping. But that's just me.

Has She Come a Long Way?

It occurs to me that Blake Lively's cinematic stock in trade is getting herself severely harmed. The gross and gratuitous "Savages" was hard to watch, and while the lovely Lively in a peach-colored bikini is eminently watchable, she spent the majority of "The Shallows" (about sharks) dealing with lots of bodily harm and wincing and groaning. "The Rhythm Section" is no different, even borrowing heavily from the horror genre at one point.

This "upgraded" take on the spy genre substitutes raw emotional pain, hollow-eyed-but-twitchy inner vacatness, personal stakes, vulnerability to extreme wounding, and bruisingly realistic mayhem for the following type of ancient, James Bondian, arched-brow nonsense:

'Live And Let Die' (1973)

(007 unzips Miss Caruso's dress with the magnet in his watch):
Miss Caruso: "Such a delicate touch."
Bond: "Sheer magnetism, darling."

As the old Virginia Slims cigarette ads used to say, "You've come a long way, baby," and from a feminist POV, that's progress. And I agree that Bond, such as he was, had to go. But I personally exited "The Rhythm Section" feeling harmed in my soul, and like Marty McFly—blown through a wall.

FILM REVIEW

The Man Who Took Down the Sicilian Mafia

IAN KANE

Turncoat, snitch, squealer, fink, pentito, stoolie—in underworld circles there are many devious types of characters, but there are no roles that are more maligned than that of the rat.

Through the years, cinema has depicted many an underworld tale, with those told about the Italian Mafia being some of the most popular. And rightfully so. There's something vicariously enjoyable about watching bad people gradually destroy themselves. It's a guilty pleasure, so to speak.

The Sicilian Mafia, also known as "La Cosa Nostra," had a highly regimented structure that was based on the Roman military, with captains, lieutenants, foot soldiers, and the like.

The film's taut script has an almost volcanic subtextual vibe.

"Omertà" was a code of silence that one would have to swear to abide by, which meant that betraying one's associates would basically be akin to signing a death warrant.

But what if the betrayer wasn't dispensed with? What if he were not only to live but also testify against his criminal brethren?

A Mafia Turncoat

Well-established Italian director Marco Bellocchio has the answers to these questions, and more. His new Mafia film "The Traitor" is about a real-life snitch within La

Cosa Nostra.

Tommaso Buscetta (played with vigor by Pierfrancesco Favino: "World War Z," "Angels & Demons") starts as a small-time Mafia associate in Palermo, Sicily, who deals mainly in small-time criminal activities. Through the years, he becomes a full mob member.

And through the years, the Sicilian Mafia gets involved in drug smuggling, which, needless to say, is very lucrative for the organization. It also becomes very deadly.

With higher stakes come higher body counts: The film shows the beginning of the Second Mafia War in the early 1980s, which was instigated by the "Boss of Bosses," Salvatore Riina, head of the Sicilian Mafia. The mob begins murdering not only members of the state government but also the family members and friends of various underworld figures. This unmitigated violence continues for years, and we see how Buscetta falls out of love with the mob after several members of his own family are killed.

Buscetta becomes so disenchanted that he agrees to inform on the Mafia's activities to the Italian authorities, specifically uber-righteous, anti-Mafia judge Giovanni Falcone (Fausto Russo Alesi). With the infamous mobster-turned-informant's help, the authorities are able to indict almost 500 Mafiosi during the precedent-setting Maxi Trial, held in Palermo. Many of the gangsters are eventually convicted.

The Verdict: A Very Good Film

Whereas in most Mafia films, the courtroom drama is saved for the



last bit of the film, here it's all front and center.

The film is mainly focused on Buscetta as he testifies against his former criminal colleagues. Of course, the mob wants the man dead, and there is an almost palpable sense of unease—a feeling as if Buscetta could be taken out at any point during the film's rather lengthy runtime.

This constant state of dread, combined with the fiery dialogue of mobsters who make their extreme animosity toward Buscetta clear, gives the film's taut script an almost volcanic subtextual vibe. It's as if there's something constantly boiling just beneath the surface, just waiting to explode.

Of course (no spoilers), some very bad things do indeed happen to some very good men, and the violence is so extreme that sometimes it almost seems cartoonishly absurd, as if what we're watching is more of a black comedy.

Yet the film is expertly shot and the courtroom drama real. The

▲ Pierfrancesco Favino (L) and Fabrizio Ferracane as part of the Mafia, in "The Traitor."

'The Traitor'

Director
Marco Bellocchio

Starring
Pierfrancesco Favino, Luigi Lo Cascio, Fausto Russo Alesi

Running Time
2 hours, 25 minutes

Rated
R

Release Date
Jan. 31

★★★★☆

affectations of the cast are also on point, as are the wardrobe and accouterments that accurately reflect the time.

A portrait of Buscetta is well-constructed, and we learn that he is not only highly charismatic but also quite the ladies' man. (In real life, he had several wives and numerous children with different ladies.) He's a flawed individual of complexity and contradictions; sometimes you can see the abject evil that he's capable of, and at other times, his compassion and warmth.

Bellocchio's film (he also wrote the screenplay along with co-writer Valia Santella) is anything but black and white with many layers of nuance.

"The Traitor" is an outstanding cinematic experience that shows audiences what happens when highly skilled filmmakers coalesce with a fantastic cast.

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

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