THE EPOCH TIMES HEERE A HEERE

After surviving abortion attempts and enduring a painful childhood, Archer turned tragedy into triumph.

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The Best Way to Start: Super Small

BARBARA DANZA

Habits play an interesting and powerful role in our lives. Once established, they become almost automatic behavior. They are hard to break and seemingly even harder to start.

The kinds of habits we want to institute are, of course, the good kind—the ones that support a healthy, happy, thriving life. Exercising regularly, saving money, keeping a tidy home, eating well, engaging in creative pursuits, devoting time to priorities, reducing screen time, and nurturing relationships are all examples of habits people commonly wish to establish.

James Clear, the author of "Atomic Habits," touts the power of "tiny changes." He says that aiming to be just 1 percent better every day can "add up to something significant." Small choices make a big difference over time, he argues. "If you get one percent better each day for one year, you'll end up thirty-seven times better by the time you're done," he explains.

Another habit expert, Charles Duhigg author of "The Power of Habit," says we should celebrate and reward ourselves for what he calls "small wins."

What makes a win small? Instead of trying to establish the habit of working out every day, for example, what if the first change was instead to put on your sneakers before you left your bedroom each morning. The latter sounds doable, and indeed doesn't require any exercise at all, but it counts as a win and may be the beginning of the habit you're looking for.

Once you've got your sneakers on each morning, perhaps the next habit could be to go to the gym. You don't have to work out, you just show up. Showing up counts as a win. If you decide you may as well work out since you're there, great. If you turn around and go to the ice cream shop instead, you've still won and you've made progress.

We tend to devalue such small changes. The examples above seem rather silly. You're not doing anything, right? They have value, however, and over time can lead to sustainable habits that last.

What changes are you hoping to make in your life? What small steps can you break

If you get one percent better each day for one year, you'll end up thirty-seven times better by the time you're done.

James Clear, author, 'Atomic Habits'



Start with small wins; if your goal is to exercise more, make it a goal to put on your sneakers. Perhaps

the next goal can be

to go to the gym.

those new habits into so that you can start prised just how big a dent you can make in very small?

Saving Money

If saving money is a priority for you, rather than choosing a large amount each week that would be a challenge to set aside, save a very small amount. Set up your online bank to automatically transfer \$5 to your savings account each week. Such an action requires no further action, and may hardly feel like a material loss, but you'll watch that tiny amount accumulate over time.

Perhaps soon you'll be enticed to increase that amount or consider investing your money to earn more. The idea of saving \$5 may have sounded futile in the beginning, but it can come to be seen as a turning point in your life.

Tidying Up

If your home is an embarrassment or in a state you're unhappy with, it can be challenging not to be overwhelmed at the thought of cleaning it all up. Rather than aiming to clean the whole mess, aim to tidy for 10 minutes each day. Set the timer on your phone or your microwave, and tidy as quickly as you can for 10 minutes. When the 10 minutes are up, you're done. Celebrate your win. You may be quite sur10 minutes. Do it again tomorrow.

Eating

Perhaps you'd like to improve your eating habits. Determine the crux of your dilemma. Perhaps you eat out very often and find making healthy choices a challenge. Perhaps you don't have enough time to go food shopping and so grab fast food more often than you'd care to admit. Perhaps you snack excessively after dinner, late into the night.

Break down the problem and identify the beginning of a solution with a tiny step. What if instead of trying to find time to go to the grocery store, you placed an online order that included healthy food and snack choices? What if you simply ate an apple in lieu of a sugary sweet? What if you reduced the amount of sugar in your coffee from two lumps to one? Start small. Celebrate your win.

It is said that we overestimate what we can do in a day, but underestimate what we can accomplish in a year. Know that even the tiniest change, if done consistently over time, can lead to big results.

Start small. Celebrate the tiniest amount of progress. Keep at it. Stay consistent. You can do it.

An Adams Family Valentine

ALAN WAKIM

Valentine's Day is once again upon us, and for loved ones who find themselves separated by distance, there's never been a better time to be alive. We can jump on a plane and visit the ones we love within 24 hours. Cell phones, emails, text messages, FaceTime, WhatsApp, Messenger, and other apps allow us to instantly connect with someone anywhere in the world. We are very fortunate to have this instant access that allows us to view and talk in real time.

In the 18th century, John and Abigail Adams didn't have such luxuries. These two lovers communicated the old-fashioned way: quill pen, ink, and paper sent via snail mail. From 1762 until 1801, both wrote approximately 1,000 letters to each other from the time they courted until the year he ended his political career as the American president; 1,160 of those letters survived and can be enjoyed by the public today.

Pet names were common between the two. It allowed for playfulness during their serious discussions: Miss Adorable, My Dr., and To the great Goddess Diana. Abigail once wrote to John in 1763:

"And there is a tye more binding than Humanity, and stronger than Friendship, which makes us anxious for the happiness and welfare of those to whom it binds us. It makes their [Misfortunes], Sorrows and afflictions, our own. Unite these, and there is a threefold cord—by this cord I am not ashamed to own myself bound, nor do I [believe] that you are wholly free from it. [Judge you then] for your Diana has she not this day [had sufficient] cause for pain and anxiety of mind?

She bids me [tell] you that Seneca, for the sake of his Paulina was careful and tender of his health. The health and happiness of Seneca she says was not dearer to his Paulina, than that of Lysander to his Diana."

John once ended a letter with:

"Yours,

Jonathan'

He settled with Lysander for himself. She called herself Diana, but later adopted the



"Abigail Smith Adams" by Gilbert Stuart, 1810-1815.

name Portia, the woman married to Julius Caesar's most famous assassin: Marcus Junius Brutus.

When John served in Philadelphia and in Europe during the Revolutionary War, the time apart brought loneliness to both. Yet, they managed to maintain their happy marriage, despite the difficulties that came with such a long separation, with the frequent letters that brought them each much comfort. John often spoke of difficulties, the pox and pestilence. On July 3, he wrote about independence:

"The Second Day of July 1776, will be the most memorable Epocha, in the History of America.

I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated, by succeeding Generations, as the great anniversary Festival. It ought to be commemorated, as the Day of Deliverance by solemn Acts of Devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with Pomp and Parade, with Shews, Games, Sports, Guns, Bells, Bonfires and Illuminations from one End of this Continent to the other from this Time

Abigail wrote about the fear Bostonians felt of a possible return of the British or the difficulties of maintaining a home without a husband's assistance. They discussed the kids, fellow congressional delegates, financing the

forward forever more."



Portrait of John Adams by Gilbert Stuart, 1810-1815.

nascent nation, fighting a war, and supplying the home with the resources and money available to them at the time. Abigail would say:

"I have wrote to you 7 different times, but of late my Heart so much misgave me that I knew not how to hold my pen, and the distracting thought of not knowing where to find you withheld my Hand. Do not fail of writing to me by every way and opportunity you hear of, if Letters are sent to any other State directed to the president of

congress I shall soon get them. I shall wait with impatience till I receive some tidings from the well known hand of my dearest Friend. O When, When will it arrive."

In March 1778, Abigail showed more emotion to her absent husband:

"Tis a little more than 3 weeks since the dearest of Friends and tenderest of Husbands left his solitary partner, and quitted all the fond endearments of domestick felicity for the dangers of the Sea, exposed perhaps to the attack of a Hostile foe ..."

In June, Abigail became quite anxious:

"My Dearest Friend Six Months have already elapsed since I heard a syllable from you or my dear Son, and five since I have had one sing opportunity of conveying a line to you."

My Dear Portia letters were not enough. Both felt anguish as they wished for more and better ways to feel closer while they lived apart. Fortunately for them, the war didn't last forever. Eventually, hostilities ended and the two were reunited in Europe.

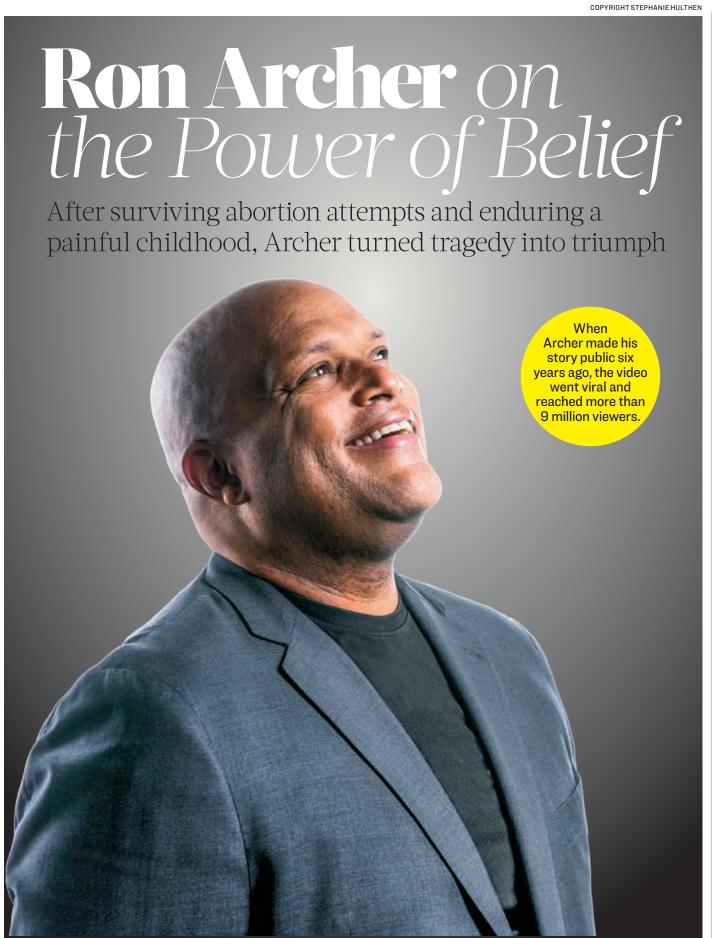
The writing ceased when John moved back home after his presidency came to an end in 1801. Afterward, they shared their lives together until her death in 1818. During that time, John managed to reconcile with Thomas Jefferson a few years before Abigail's death.

From 1762 until 1801, both wrote approximately 1,000 letters to each other from the time they courted until the year he ended his political career as the American president.

The life of John and Abigail Adams is a true love story, a symbiotic relationship that lasted over 55 years. She was his confidante and intellectual equal. He was her proxy at the Continental Congress since women were absent from the debates and discussions. Two lovers who were dear friends, and it showed in their correspondence: "My dear Friend ... Forever yours, Portia."

With today's fast technologies, couples who struggle with communicating with their partners may look to John and Abigail for inspiration. If the Adams can wait several months to send and receive, we, in this great era of communication, are in a better position to express love to the special Valentine we love without the long wait.

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



CHANNALY PHILIPP

s a pastor and inspirational speaker, Ron Archer talks for a living-to crowds, to NFL players, to business executives. Yet L it wasn't that long ago that he ed telling his own stor "Too much shame," he said.

"Shame is a powerful prison. And there was so much shame with my mom and myself and how things happened. You just learn the four principles, 'Don't talk, don't trust, don't feel, and pretend nothing ever happened'—and hope that it'll go away. "But, as we all know, it becomes a corpse in the closet that stinks up your entire life."

Opening Up

The turning point came when he was doing some executive coaching for a bank. He was speaking with a man who was abused as a child. The abuse had affected his entire life, to the point where he wanted to end his life. Nobody knew his story, not even his wife, even as it was causing intimacy issues in their relationship.

He and Archer talked for a while, going through psychological theories. Nothing helped—until finally, Archer said to him, "You know, I understand where you are." "No," the man replied. "People don't understand."

For the first time, Archer opened up to him and shared his own story—and he saw the man's rapid transformation and saw him going from "point A to point Z." He realized that "No. 1, 'I'm not by myself,' No. 2, it can be dealt with, No. 3, you can actually take this pain and make it power."

"You can take this wound and garner wisdom. You can take the tragedy and be triumphant," he said. "They're nice catch phrases, but they're real."

Six years ago, Archer made his story public; a video went viral and reached more than 9 million viewers.

Unwanted

In his early years, Archer was as unwanted as anyone could ever be. In the video, he describes how he was a "trick baby," born to a poor teen mother, who was forced by her pimp to attempt to abort him.

"Nobody wants the baby, no hope, no future. 'Kill it,' was the word," Archer said in the video.

Various abortion attempts were unsuc-

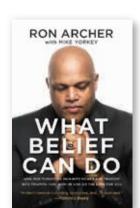
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I want to change broken hearts. I want people to know there's hope.

Ron Archer, speaker and leadership trainer

His world had been ruled

by 'ghetto economics, simple as that. There was no place for faith or church.



"What Belief Can Do" by Ron Archer with Mike Yorkey (Salem Books, \$16.99).

cessful, and Archer bore the physical consequences; born two months premature, he was beset with multiple issues, including having no pancreas and an underdeveloped bladder.

His childhood was rough. At home, his stepfather was physically abusive; the babysitter who would watch him-a madam who hated men-would take a broom and stick it "where the sun don't shine," as he put it.

He was overweight. He stuttered. At school, he was mercilessly bullied. At night, to cope, he would bang his head on the wall until he fell asleep. He just wanted to die.

At age 10, Archer found his mother's gun, aimed it at his own head, and pulled the trigger. It didn't work. Again, he tried and it didn't work. He felt some relief. Perhaps it wasn't

A Teacher's Belief

meant to be.

Archer was far from doing well in school. But a teacher, one Mrs. Spears, got wind of his stuttering issue. She gave him lessons and helped him.

It started with "lee-lee, la-la, lo-lo." Then, "At dawn, the don went down." As he grew more comfortable, tongue

twisters were introduced: Peter Piper; Sally who sold seashells by the seashore, and so on.

Archer remembered repeating them so much that he memorized them; and instead of falling asleep by banging his head on the wall every night, it was to the cadence of these tongue twisters that he went to sleep.

Mrs. Spears did something else for Archer: She assured him that he would be great and that he had a destiny to fulfill. And she opened up a world of faith to him that until then was foreign.

His world had been ruled by "ghetto economics," simple as that. There was no place for faith or church.

"We didn't like church. ... When your family's involved in questionable activities, the last thing we want you to do is be involved with confessing and people might go to jail. ... My family didn't trust anybody but themselves," Archer said.

Mrs. Spears told him stories from the Bible; he came to see that imperfect, broken people were called to do great things, men like Paul and Abraham. He recognized some of their dubious behaviors straight from his neighborhood.

She also showed him a verse from Jer-

emiah 1:4-5 that upended his inner world. Archer said, "In essence, that one Scripture says, 'Ronaldo, it doesn't matter who your parents are. It doesn't matter how you were conceived. It doesn't matter how you were born.' God says, 'I'm your parent, your father, and I planted you in that particular situation for a divine assignment.

"The promises of God—it was my oxygen, it was my air, it was my hope, it was my light, it was my truth. It was my father, it was my mother. ... It's all I had to build me up."

The belief that he was meant for a special purpose was a powerful anchor.

"It changed everything," he said. "It gave me a belief in something greater than me, greater than my current situation.'

Archer believed it so much that it turned his life around. Through practice, his stutter disappeared. He began to excel academically. In high school, he became the first black student body president at a predominantly white, wealthy Catholic school.

He wanted to make life better for his mother and for his family. But he knew he'd never change them through words alone. The bottom line was everything for his family, so when he started doing well, academically and financially, they said to him, "Whatever you touch turns to gold."

And that started to change their lives; at 16, Archer started preaching, and they would come listen to him.

Going Home

Archer has lived and worked around the world. Now, he's back home, in Cleveland, all of 10 minutes from where he grew up.

It's there at the Leadership Restoration Center at Places of H.O.P.E. that Archer brings everything he's learned over the years to welcome people—women in crisis, people experiencing burnout—to be "restored, renewed, resuscitated."

And then there is the Mrs. Spears Center—the training room where her example serves as a model. She saw him become a pastor and grow up to be successful. She would say to him, "I told you, 'God don't make no junk.'"

There's a line of hers that he uses all the time: "God uses greatly those who have been wounded very deeply."

"She's with me all the time," Archer said. "There's always a quote or a thought or a memory."

As he tells his story through his video, or through his powerful new book, "What Belief Can Do," his story evokes reactions such as, "I thought I had problems!" or "What am I complaining for?"

For many, it's an inspiring wake-up ca Archer wants to change the world: "I want to change broken hearts. I want people to know there's hope."

Rebuilding Men

At the top of his mind is how to help men. He thinks of the rarely mentioned suicide epidemic ravaging middle-aged white men in the United States. According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, white males made up almost 70 percent of suicide deaths in 2017-with the suicide rate being highest among middle-aged white men. Western rural states are hit especially hard.

Masculinity has been demonized, he said. Men's jobs are becoming outdated. For their physical pains, they are prescribed addictive drugs. Their marriages are failing, and their children are turning against them, calling them "old-fashioned" and "irrelevant."

They are unwanted.

Archer is also concerned about fatherlessness, pointing out that 72 percent of black children born in the United States are born out of wedlock and are raised in single-parent homes.

Meanwhile "80 percent of social illsteen pregnancy, drug addiction, high school dropout rates, incarceration, and gang affiliation—are caused directly by kids growing up in a fatherless home. Look at that recipe," he said.

He addresses these issues and more in the next book he's writing, called "One Man," based on the idea that "God has always used one man to change the world"—think of Noah or Moses. The subtitle is "You are that man."

"Every man ... is born with a divine mission," Archer said. Through his years of working with people, and from his own experience, he knows what it takes to repair and restore a man.

"When you build a man up with authentic truth, you look at him and find his strengths," he said. "When you are present, when you are attentive, when you are affirming, when you are consistent, when you are committed, transformation takes place." That's the power of belief.

HOW TO BUILD A STRONGER MARRIAGE: Learn Your Spouse's Love Language

JUNE FAKKERT

ur first Valentine's Day as a married couple, my husband learned the hard way that gifts are not my love language. Instead of being pleased by the sundry tokens he purchased, I was actually upset because they weren't things I particularly wanted or needed and thus deemed them a waste of money. Yes, ouch.

Fast forward seven years, and I now realize that where he comes from, gifts are a very important way to express affection. And thanks to understanding love languages, I can tell him confidently that a simple hug will make me feel much more cherished than a gift.

Often a person assumes they know the primary love language of their spouse or partner, but they really don't, and essentially their efforts are missing each other.

Gary Chapman, author, 'The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts'

So as Valentine's Day approaches, I would encourage you to learn your spouse's love language—not just to make the holiday extra special, but also to help build a stronger bond with him or her.

The concept of love languages was introduced by psycholo- of 12 years of notes showed gist Dr. Gary Chapman decades the results fell into five catego. After reviewing years gories and I later called them of clinical notes, he noticed the five love languages. that not feeling loved by one's spouse was a big problem for **THE EPOCH TIMES**: In your

some couples—and this was happening in marriages even when both parties said they were doing everything they could to express their love for their partner.

What he discovered is that there are five distinct ways people feel loved: through physical touch, verbal affirmation, spending quality time together, doing acts of service, and yes, for some people, gifts.

A majority of people most feel loved primarily through one language. So if your spouse is not tuned into yours, you may not feel their affection keenly. You can learn your love lan-

guage by taking the quiz on his website, 5LoveLanguages. com. Chapman also has a book on the topic, "The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts."

Also note that your children may have a different love language than you, so it may be worth your while to understand theirs after you get to know your spouse's.

I asked Dr. Chapman to explain more about the love languages:

THE EPOCH TIMES: You discovered that people have these five love languages after looking at your own notes. What prompted you to review them?

GARY CHAPMAN: After many years of listening to couples who came to me for counseling, I began to realize there was a pattern to their complaints and concerns. I asked myself, "What is a person looking for when they say they don't feel loved by their spouse or partner?" My study



Dr. Gary Chapman

Gifts are one of the five love languages that Dr. Chapman uncovered after reviewing years' worth of notes.



practice, how common is misunderstanding a spouse's love language at the root of marital discord? **DR. CHAPMAN:** It is not uncommon for a person to misunderstand their spouse's primary love language. Most often it is because they are expressing love in their primary love language. If that isn't the other person's love language, and most likely it isn't, then they aren't feeling the love that's intended for them.

THE EPOCH TIMES: Any common mistakes people make when they learn about the love languages and try to implement them? **DR. CHAPMAN:** Often a person assumes they know the primary love language of their spouse or partner, but they really don't, and essentially their efforts are missing each other. Making time to take the quiz and sharing the results with each other is how to begin having a healthy relationship.

THE EPOCH TIMES: How do you figure out your spouse's love language if they won't take the quiz? DR. CHAPMAN: If a spouse won't take the love language quiz I recommend you listen to the things they complain about most often. For instance, if they say things like, "You never help me" they are asking for Acts of Service, or, "You never tell me that you love me or like the way I look," they are asking for Words of Affirmation. Once you assess what it is they're asking for, then begin to speak that love language to them and see what happens.

THE EPOCH TIMES: Can you

DR. CHAPMAN: A woman came to my office asking for help because her marriage had gotten to the point where they were planning to seek a divorce. After spending time listening to her story I suggested she read "The Five Love Languages" and learn what her husband's primary love language is and begin to apply to their daily lives. She was reluctant to try, feeling hopeless, and I encouraged her to give it a try for a few weeks. She came back after three weeks of trying with a big grin on her face, saying she never would have believed he would respond to her efforts to show him love, but he did and the emotional climate in their relationship was beginning to get better. Not overnight, and there was a lot of work yet to do but she was hopeful and willing to continue

share a success story?

showing him love. A number of years later I saw the couple at a local restaurant and was amazed to hear how they were excited about the love languages, and they shared with me that was the reason their marriage was turned around and headed in the right direction.

THE EPOCH TIMES: Anything else we should know? **DR. CHAPMAN:** I'm often asked if speaking the love languages is a form of manipulation and I say, "Yes, if you're not sincere." No one wants to be taken for granted or manipulated.

My recommendation is to learn about each love language and begin to speak them fluently just as you would a foreign language. Take time to learn how to express love by speaking the primary love language of the other person so they will feel genuinely loved and affirmed. You'll be glad you did.

10 Tips for Men to Survive Valentine's Day

JEFF MINICK

Valentine's Day: The holiday that men fear and women adore.

Recently, I was speaking with my brother about Valentine's Day. He recounted that several years ago he suggested to his wife of 40 years that they ignore Valentine's Day, telling her that the day "was for the young and they were old." I will leave to your imagination how these comments went down with his wife. Doug was explaining her reaction, but I was laughing too hard to hear most of what he said.

Why is it that we guys, or at least many of us, dislike Valentine's Day? And why do so many women find the Feast of Love so special?

Certainly the traditional Valentine's Day gifts lean female: heart-covered cards, bouquets of flowers, boxes of candy, even those candy hearts with messages like "Be Mine" or "Crazy 4U." For some guys, Valentine's Day is like a chick flick, only they're starring in the movie, all too often playing the part of the bumbling boyfriend or husband who is clueless about romance. Women think of Valentine's Day as "Sleepless in Seattle"; men view it as more akin to parachuting behind German lines in "The Dirty Dozen."

During my years of marriage, I was on occasion one of the many guys shambling shame-faced

on February 14, flowers in one hand, card in the other. We'd pay the checkout clerk, head into the parking lot, sit in our cars writing something affectionate on the card, and go home to wives or girlfriends who knew as soon as we walked through the door that we'd stopped at the grocery store. Anathema.

Men, it doesn't have to be this way, take it from an old guy. Here are some tips to help you enjoy, or at least endure, Valentine's Day without feeling like a jamoke:

1. Keep Mum

I don't mean the species of flower. Unless your significant other also dislikes Valentine's Day, keep your negative feelings to yourself. Never, for example, say the whole thing was created by Hallmark in collaboration with growers of roses and makers of chocolate.

2. Appreciate History

Valentine's Day has its roots in Ancient Rome. By your participation, you are honoring history and maintaining tradition. "Omnia vincit amor": love conquers all, as those ancients used to say. Make it your Valentine's Day motto.

3. Shop Before Valentine's Day

Card, flowers, and gifts. When you arrive home February 13, tell the lady in your life you picked up the flowers a day early, and ask for through the grocery store line a vase. Be sure to let her see the

other packages and bags under Hire a babysitter. Make a reservayour arm. Remember: Early, early, early. She'll not only be flattered, but amazed by your forethought.

4. Love by Delivery

If your loved one works outside of the home, call a florist and have the flowers (preferably roses) delivered to her place of employment. You will score points both for the flowers and for calling public attention to your love for her.

5. Plan the Evening

Make sure her calendar is clear.



When you arrive home February 13, tell the lady in your life you picked up the flowers a day early, and ask for a vase. Remember: Early, early, early.

tion at a restaurant. Valentine's Day is a busy day for restaurants, so if you dislike crowds and want privacy, pick a weekend night near Valentine's Day.

6. Remember: 'The Key to a Woman's Heart Is an Unexpected Gift at an

Unexpected Time' This is a line from the movie "Finding Forrester." Now, Valentine's Day makes it difficult to deliver on the "unexpected time" part of the formula, but it's not impossible. Think outside the box on a gift. Skip the chocolates and buy her some jewelry or a beautiful scarf. Take her to the ballet or present her with a gift certificate for a beauty spa. Just make sure to give her something that will leave more of a memory than candy wrappers or dead roses.

7. Avoid Practical Gifts

You may want a gym membership or a tool kit from her, all well and good. But if you give the lady an exercise bike or a Cuisinart mixer, no matter how pricey, the day will end badly. A gallows or a firing squad might be preferable to the fate in store for you.

8. Make It Personal

Of course, buy the Valentine's card and add a personal message, but then write her a separate note, preferably by hand. Here's where

you tell her what she means to you, how much you appreciate all she does, how much you love her. Your prose doesn't have to be flowery, or even well-written, but it must come from the heart. Sincerity trumps bogus pomposity every time.

9. Celebrate

Instead of enduring or disparaging Valentine's Day, why not have some fun? You must mark the occasion anyway, so why not whoop it up? Make the evening an extravaganza for the woman you love and for yourself. Here's a great excuse to dine at that Thai restaurant you've wanted to try, or to visit that brewery you both enjoy. Invite some friends to your house or apartment, and throw a party.

10. Crown That Lady Queen for the Day That's about it.

February 14th is the Feast of Love. Make it so.

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. This article was originally published on IntellectualTakeout.org



Gestures of Appreciation: It's the Little Things That Count

JEFF MINICK

igmund Freud once stated, somewhat plaintively, "What does a woman want?"

When I once included that line in an article, a female reader suggested I write a column about what men wanted. More specifically, she raised the question, "What gestures make men feel appreciated?" Good question. Let's find out.

Preliminaries

Before setting out on this adventure, I decided to limit even more narrowly the boundaries of my inquiry. The Army lieutenant who receives an unexpected promotion to captain for his bravery on a battlefield is appreciative. Ditto for that guy who puts in 12 hours a day, 5 days a week in the office, and receives a hefty raise and a prodigious Christmas bonus.

No-Valentine's Day is fast approaching, and so I decided to limit the question to married men or men in romantic relationships. What gestures from the women in their lives make men feel appreciated?

I began my search for answers by cracking open my laptop. In "10 Things Men Want From Their Wives," Sheri Stritof offered an excellent summation of ideas I'd found on other sites. Important to men, Stritof writes, are such things as understanding, respect, support, and affection, and she gives some specific concrete examples and advice demonstrating how women can make their men feel more loved and appreciated.

That Sheri Stritof was female caused me to reorient my investigation. Originally, I had thought of approaching only males in my survey. But what would females think of the question? What would they say were gestures of appreciation valued by the men in their lives?

Time to close down the computer and seek answers in the real world.

The Coffee Shop Survey

My search began at the Happy Creek Coffee Shop, where I know the staff and several of the customers. I made the rounds, explained my project, and received these responses.

Sharon, a cook and baker for the cafe, has been married for nearly 20 years. She told me, "I think it's the little things men appreciate. Like when I make a pot of coffee and bring a cup to my husband when he's on his laptop. It's a sign I love him." Alex, unmarried and a 20-something

barista, emphasized that men liked women to spend "quality time" with them.

Unlike his two fellow employees, Jeremy, again young and unmarried, had to ponder the question for a moment. He then reported that when he is on a date, he feels appreciated when the woman volunteers to pick up the check. He rarely lets her pay, but the offer makes him feel that she is enjoying his company.

Annie, a mother and wife, fired off a list of ways wives can show their husbands appreciation. "Make him lunch and take it to his workplace. Thank him in front of the kids for taking the family to supper or on a vacation. Encourage him to have a guys' night out. Do something with him he wants to do, like seeing a certain movie, even if it's not your cup of tea."

Like Jeremy, and unlike the women, my friend John, a regular at the cafe, and a husband and father, had to mull over the

Penelope kisses me every time she leaves the house. And I love when we're watching television and she puts her head on my shoulder.



6

Bob

question before coming up with an answer. "That's a tough one," he said. "Mostly it just has to do with the overall relationship." He paused, thought again, and then added: "When I've had a tough day, Lisa reminds me of the importance of the work I do. I appreciate the support."

The Quest by Phone

Next, I picked up the telephone. A call to my sister and her husband brought some sweet responses. Penelope, a nurse, thought that Bob, who is retired, appreciated the little treats she brought him from the grocery store—"Snickers Bars or sherbet"—and holding hands. Like Jeremy and John, Bob's first response was "That's a tough question." (This initial hesitancy seems to be a guy thing, maybe because few people ask us such questions.) Finally, he said, "Penelope kisses me every time she leaves the house. And I love when we're watching television and she puts her head on my shoulder."

"I don't need presents," said my brother Doug, a retired chemist. Of his wife of nearly 40 years, he said, "When Rosanne gives me a hug and says 'I love you'-well, hat goes a long way with me."

My sister Becky, a banker and married for over 40 years, told me, "Tom likes when we're sitting together watching television, and I put my hand on his knee."

A Last Gift

Now for a personal note: In May of 2004, I called my wife for some information needed for my homeschooling classes. The literature class was waiting for me, and our conversation was hurried. As I was getting off the phone to race into the classroom, I heard Kris say, "I love you."

Those were the last words she would ever speak to me. When I returned home, I found her collapsed and unconscious on our bedroom floor. She died five days later of an aneurysm of the brain. That "I love you" remains her last great

gift to me.

Small Is Beautiful

So what can we gather from my informal investigation? What gestures from women make us men feel appreciated?

Sometimes we do treasure extravagant gifts-an unexpected weekend away with the woman we love, that widescreen television we've wanted for years, a surprise birthday party at a restaurant with friends and family. Who's going to turn down a romantic night out with the woman we love, away from the kids, just the two of us? As we can see, however, it's the little

things that matter most to men, the sweet, daily intimacies that make them feel appreciated: a hug, a touch of the fingers,

> a kiss, an affectionate glance, encouragement about our work, a bottle of wine shared on the deck at sunset. Sometimes it's as simple as saying "I love you."

And it is these small gestures of appreciation that should make every day a Valentine's Day.

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.

It's the little things that matter most to men, the sweet, daily intimacies that make them feel appreciated.

BARBARA DANZA OK, fellas. Here it is! Finally, the black-andwhite, definitive guide to the question you

guys have been asking for, literally, ages. What do women want? I don't know why we women have always been so secretive about this in the first place. I guess we were hoping you'd figure it out. (We do that a lot.)

The Way to a

Woman's Heart

Well, no more guessing. You want to know what women want?

They want you to make the reservations. There! I said it. Oh, and they want you to manage the reservations, too.

So, when you arrive at the restaurant, or you're checking in at the theater or hotel or whatever it is—take the lead. Don't make her go over there while you stand in the background, helpless. Give your name, pull out your tickets, sign the form, just-as comedian Sebastian Maniscalco once put it—"handle it."

They want you to hold the door for them. Oh, you think that's too old-fashioned? How's that been working for ya?

Look, when it comes to the intricacies of behaving like a gentleman, society has lost its way. If you've never been taught that, for example, ladies go first-through a doorway, into an elevator, into a life raft-it's not entirely your fault.

But ... now you know. So, figure it out. Make chivalry a habit. You have a great opportunity to stand out among the pack if you get this right.

They want you to notice. Notice that they're wearing a new outfit, notice that they cleaned up while you were out, notice that they are working hard at something important to them, notice that they are overwhelmed and could use some help, notice that they are worried, happy, sad, excited, etc. Just notice and say so.

They want you to provide. (Gasp!) It's true. Regardless of what year it is and what their career aspirations are, they want you to be able to provide for them and your potential family together.

It should go without saying that women can provide for themselves, but they want the option. Do you know how many mothers wish they could trade their impressive career to stay at home with their children? Not all of them do, but I would bet pretty close to all of them would like the option.

They want you to be strong. I'm not talking about muscle strength (though that doesn't hurt). I'm talking about strength of character. Women want men to be solid, upstanding, and able to handle any challenge that comes their way

They want to feel protected. They want a "rock" to depend on when the going gets tough. They want to know that, no matter what, you're there and you're looking out for all the danger that could come this way.

They want you to know what you want. What gives your life meaning? What is your purpose in the world? What are your core values? It'd be good if you have that sorted out or at least are making progress toward that end.

Women want to support you in your aims, cheer you on, celebrate your successes, comfort you in your failures, and see you aim for your highest potential. Be true to yourself and share your dream with her. They want you to push them.

I don't mean literally. Don't do that. I mean figuratively push them outside of their comfort zone. Together, embrace adventure and take risks.

They want you to make them better. If you think about it, you probably want them to make you better, too. The natural, complementary relationship between men and women is a beautiful thing to behold. When properly balanced, each challenge and elevate the other.

They want lifetime commitment.

Ultimately, they want marriage and, in marriage, to have zero doubts that the commitment you've made is for a lifetime. It's at the moment of marriage that they literally hand to you their entire lives and trust you fully to honor, cherish, and protect that gift. They want you to be totally reliable and unwavering in your vow of forever.



chivalry a habit. You have a great opportunity to stand out among the pack if you get this right.

Make



The Other Side: How a Near-Death Experience Changed a Woman's Life

ANDREW THOMAS

Tricia Barker was just a 21-year-old college student at The University of Texas when she was involved in a head-on collision car accident. As surgeons worked diligently to save her life, she flatlined for two and a half minutes.

In college, she struggled with sion, which was largely a re sult of her childhood trauma. Her mother was both emotionally and physically abusive, and her father was a narcissistic alcoholic.

"My parents did not love each other at all. All that I saw between the two of them was hatred, and I had no model for what a healthy relationship was," Barker explained.

As surgeons worked diligently to save her life, she flatlined for two and a half minutes.

Near-Death Experience During her senior year of college, Barker was driving to a 10K race when she collided with another car head-on as she went through an intersection. Initially, she was conscious and realized she could move. The last thing she remembered before she lost consciousness was being lifted into the ambulance on the way to the hospital.

As doctors worked to save her life, she succumbed to her internal injuries, and her heart stopped. Then, Barker found herself having an out-of-body experience; she left her body and found herself looking down on it. She was agnostic at the time, and despite the circumstances, the experience was a pleasant surprise.

"... I was so happy that this spiritual form continues on-that there's something essential about me and about everyone, something eternal, that continues on after death," Barker said.

She watched the surgeons, and then she noticed two large beams of light at the end of the operating table, which she now refers to as angels. She remembers the angel telling her that she would live and would be able to walk again despite her catastrophic injuries. Then her whole body illuminated as the surgeons continued to work to save her. When the heart monitor flatlined, her spirit left the hospital and she felt a sense of unity with the people of Austin.

Barker found herself in the night

sky and began receiving messages from a higher being. One of the messages was: "Love is all that matters." Initially, she was a bit skeptical. Then, she was told to be like a child and to connect with nature.

"These messages were meant, I guess, to make an impression on my soul," Barker explained.

At a certain point, a light started coming toward her. The higher being told her to look into people's hearts, to not judge others, and to see the good in people.

Finally, Barker felt she had entered a realm with flowing grass as her five-year-old self. She encountered her grandfather who had passed away, but he appeared younger. Then he looked at her and

Dear Gen Z: Learn From Millennial Mistakes and Say No to Student Loan Debt

BRITTANY HUNTER

Gen Z is growing up fast. With the older end of the "Zoomer" generation now in their early- to mid-20s, many are finishing their undergraduate degrees and moving on to grad programs before trying their luck in the workforce. Others are just beginning their college careers.

According to the Pew Research Center, the post-millennial generation is on track to becoming the most educated yet. But with such a heavy emphasis on higher education, one has to wonder how the current student loan crisis will affect this demographic.

Millennials are all too familiar with this crisis, as massive student loan debt has been their generation's signature burden to bear. But as more Gen Zers come of age and begin contemplating how they will pay for college, they would be wise to learn from the mistakes of millennials and think twice before borrowing money to pay for school.

The Millennial Burden

The student loan debt catastrophe has reached epic propor-

tions, now totaling over \$1.6 trillion. With more than 44 million Americans struggling to pay off this balance, student loans have become one of the largest culprits of consumer debt today.

Millennials are currently responsible for \$497.6 billion of our nation's total student loan debt. Of those who took out loans between 2010-2012, only 51 percent have been able to make any progress in paying off their balances. The financial strain of this debt is even more apparent when you consider its 11 percent default rate—the highest of any debt category.

This massive financial burden has prevented many millennials from achieving the same economic comfort as their parents and grandparents. Strapped with high monthly payments, fewer millennials are able to own homes, start families, create savings, and become financially independent and debt-free. Some have even been forced to live with their parents while they attempt to pay off their balances.

This is probably why so many millennials have taken on two jobs or utilized the gig economy in order to make ends meet.



The seriousness of the situation has become a major talking point in our national dialogue.

Student loan debt has become such a large burden, a recent study of 1,000 undergraduate and 1,000 postgraduate degree holders found that 39 percent said they would gladly spend a week in jail if it meant they could erase their student loan debt.

The seriousness of the situation has become a major talking point in our national dialogue, and every major presidential candidate, and politician for that matter, has something to contribute to the conversation.

Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, and freshman congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have each advocated for student loan forgiveness, which many believe to be the only way to solve the crisis.

Truth be told, the economic and political realities of implementing such a program are supremely unfeasible. It's also immoral. As economist Antony Davies says, "'Forgiving' student debt really means forcing people who didn't go to college to pay for those who did."

But the fact remains that student loans are strangling many young Americans and preventing them from getting ahead and earning their slice of the American dream. Millennials and Gen Xers have

already dug themselves into a hole. But Gen Z can break the cycle and learn from their mistakes.

The first step in preventing the next generation from following down this same path is making sure Gen Z knows exactly what they are getting into when they take out loans and what other options are available to them.

Delinquent Student Loans: A Horror Story

Not all debt is created equal. If, for example, you were to open a new credit card account, accrue massive amounts of debt, and then stop making payments, your credit score would most certainly plummet, and you would have to deal with the subsequent consequences.

But aside from taking you to civil court, where you would work to settle your debt, there is not a whole lot the credit card companies can do to you that would impact your personal life. Your



Tricia Barker had an out-of-body experience as doctors tried to save her life.

asked if she wanted to continue toward the light. She replied yes, and her spirit form flew closer and closer to what she now considers God. She could hear the words of the people who were praying for her and could feel their prayers.

"I felt safe and free, and just an atomic bomb of love was going off inside of me. There was so much energy I couldn't even contain it all. I just knew that I'm fine the way I am, that I'm loved, and evervone is loved, and if we could all tap into that we would be so much happier in our day-to-day interactions," Barker recalled.

Barker almost didn't want to return to her body when she heard a deep voice that told her to look down. She saw a river with souls. Some were covered with light and others were covered in darkness. God then told her that she would live, and teach and remind people to connect to their light and be lights in this world.

Back to Life

Before she knew it, Barker found herself in the recovery room in the hospital. Initially, she found it difficult to connect to her physical body. As the nurse asked Barker questions, she found herself referring to herself in the third person. Then the pain hit, and she knew for certain that she was back. She asked for a notebook and a pen. and wrote down as much as she could remember about her out-of body experience.

When Barker went home, she began reading about near-death experiences and other spiritual literature. After she healed from her injuries. Barker began teaching English literature in Austin before moving to South Korea to teach English as a second language. Barker had always had a passion

for creative writing, and her neardeath experience would ultimately influence her writing. After Barker was interviewed by National Geographic, she felt compelled to write a memoir about her experience.

"There are plenty of people who have brought near-death experiences into mainstream America. but I wanted to bring it into writing classes and writing about spirituality." Barker said.

Barker, now 48, lives in Fort Worth. Texas. where she teaches creative writing.

Barker is the author of "Angels in the OR: What Dying Taught Me About Healing, Survival, and Transformation." Through her experience, Barker discovered that there is a lot of suffering in the world and that a lot of that pain comes from focusing too much on oneself. Barker wanted to convey through her book the importance of being of service to others, to be more like a child to enjoy life, and the healing power of nature.

While she was recovering in a full-body cast and then learned how to walk again, she discovered how meditation and eating well could assist in the healing process.

"I would spend hours in meditation connecting with that healing light, and I know it assisted in helping my body," Barker said.

"I would encourage people to, if they've not heard a near-death experience story before—so many of us have had them at this point—that if you don't resonate with my story, there are people from all walks of life, all different professions, from neurosurgeons to mechanics, so the language is different depending on the person and their personality, but I would say spend some time looking at them because you might resonate with someone." Barker said.

Elon Musk Wants Talent, Not Diplomas

KERRY MCDONALD

Elon Musk says skills matter more than diplomas. The founder and CEO of corporate innovation giants Tesla and SpaceX tweeted on Feb. 2 that he is hiring for his artificial intelligence group at Tesla and wants to recruit the most talented people he can find. Talent, to Musk, means "deep understanding" of artificial intelligence and the ability to pass a "hardcore coding test," but it doesn't necessarily include degrees and diplomas.

⁴A PhD is definitely not required," Musk wrote. "Don't care if you even graduated high school."

Musk went on to say on Sunday that "educational background is irrelevant":

Musk Didn't Like School

It's not surprising that Musk would emphasize ability and knowledge over institutional credentials. Other Silicon Valley technology companies, like Google and Apple, no longer require employees to have a college degree. But Musk also had a personal dissatisfaction with his schooling, saying in a 2015 interview: "I hated going to school when I was a kid. It was torture."

A billionaire inventor, Musk decided to build a better educational program for his own children and opened his experimental school, Ad Astra, on SpaceX's Los Angeles campus. He was dissatisfied with the elite private schools they were attending and thought education, even at purportedly "good" schools, could be much improved. In an interview about Ad Astra, Musk

said: "The regular schools weren't doing the things that I thought should be done. So I thought, well, let's see what we can do." Ad Astra, which means "to the stars,"

offers a hands-on, passion-driven learning environment that defies the coercion inherent in most conventional schooling, public or private. It has no grade levels, an emergent, technology-focused curriculum, and no mandatory classes. As Fortune reports, "There are no grades given to students at the school and if the children don't like a particular class they're taking, they can simply opt out."

Schooling as Signaling

Despite a culture and economy now focused around technology and innovation, most conventional schooling is widely inessential 21st-century work. Stuck in a 19th-century curriculum and instruction model, today's schools are anything but modern.

The trouble is that schooling is more about signaling than learning, so the catalysts to change its basic structure and approach are lacking. It might not matter in the real world that you mastered middle school French, but moving successfully along the schooling conveyor belt offers a *on FEE.org*

signal to potential employers. Economist Brvan Caplan writes about this signaling effect in his book "The Case Against Education." He also explains how the quest for more signals, regardless of how hollow they may be, is leading to "credential inflation," or the pursuit of more diplomas for occupations that really don't require them. Writing in The Atlantic, Caplan says:

"From kindergarten on, students spend thousands of hours studying subjects irrelevant to the modern labor market. Why do English classes focus on literature and poetry instead of business and technical writing? Why do advanced-math classes bother with proofs almost no student can follow? When will the typical student use history? Trigonometry? Art? Music? Physics? Latin? The class clown who snarks "What does this have to do with real life?" is onto something."

More Signal Options Beyond Schooling Fortunately, there are now many other ways beyond conventional schooling to gain skills and knowledge and signal your value to potential employers like Musk. More than 400 "coding bootcamps" are reported to exist around the world, helping people to master in-demand programming and software development skills. The online coding school, Lambda School, which has raised nearly \$50 million in venture capital funding since its launch in 2017, has a fascinating business model focused on income share agreements. It is free to attend Lambda, but the company takes a percentage of its graduates' earnings once they land a hightech job. If the student doesn't land a job, she doesn't pay. Perhaps not surprisingly, it is estimated that Lambda is receiving over 1,000 applications a week from interested students. Other alternatives to college are sprouting, and apprenticeship programs like Praxis continue to be sought-after.

Entrepreneurs like Musk recognize what it takes to succeed in the innovation era, and it has little to do with conventional schooling. Discovering passions, pursuing personal goals, and developing essential skills to build on those passions and achieve those goals has never been easier than it is today with abundant resources and tools literally at our fingertips.

Musk and Tesla may be known for their visionary work in creating autonomous vehicles, but it's autonomous humans with capable of helping young people develop the agency, creativity, and opportunity to the knowledge and skills they need to do achieve their full potential that are the real

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employer would not find out, your wages would not be garnished, and your career itself would not be placed in jeopardy.

Student loan debt, on the other hand, is a different kind of beast. As soon as you miss your monthly payment, your account becomes delinquent. If you continue to miss payments for 270 days—about nine months— you will default on your loans. In addition to your missed payments being reported to all the major credit bureaus and your credit score tanking, the federal government can and will garnish a percentage of your wages.

But this hellish ordeal does not end there.

Once your alma mater finds out you have defaulted, it can choose to withhold your transcripts until you get current on your payments. Until your account is back in good standing, your yearly tax returns, if you are fortunate to receive them, will be withheld from you, as well.

Unlike other debt, which can be erased by filing for bankruptcy, it is exceedingly rare for student loan debt to be considered eligible for dismissal through this process—though that might soon be changing thanks to a recent New York court case.

As if all this wasn't bad enough, any certifications you earned can be suspended. For occupations that require licenses, which account for about 23 percent of U.S. jobs, the government can revoke these permits, rendering you unable to do the job you went to school to do and thus unable to pay your loans back.

You might think this will never happen to you, but it is the predicament many millennials are currently facing. And to put the student loan default rate into perspective, it is four times higher than the delinquency rates for credit cards and residential mortgages.

College is supposed to set young adults up for success. But for too many, student loans have greatly inhibited their quality of life and their careers.

Gen Z, however, doesn't have to repeat these mistakes.

What Does the Future Hold

for Gen Z? A new study conducted by the organization Handshake, which surveyed more than 1,000 college students between the ages of 16 and 24 years old, shed some light on how the student loan crisis is shaping up for Gen Z.

The study estimates that 73 per-

cent of Gen-Z students will graduate with student loan debt. The research also found that 8 percent of Gen Zers will likely owe less than \$25,000, while 23.7 percent will have anywhere from \$25,000 to under \$50,000 in loans. Only about 3.5 percent of Gen Z graduates are expected to owe over six figures.

To put the student loan default rate into perspective, it is four times higher than the delinquency rates for credit cards and residential mortgages.

Of the men surveyed, 40 percent said they felt confident they

would be able to pay off their loans in under five years, as opposed to the 25 percent of female respondents who said they felt the same. While that might seem feasible to these students now, the truth is we don't know what the economy or the job market will be like in the next several years, so nothing is guaranteed. If millennials have taught us anything, it's that paying off these

loans is not as easy as it might seem. So what else can be done? While it could be argued that the whole higher education sys-

tem needs an overhaul, for now, there are options available to young adults that do not involve accumulating massive amounts of debt.

College is the right choice for many, but it's not the only choice. Apprenticeships are currently on the rise in the U.S. and offer participants the opportunity to learn a practical skill while getting hands-on and real-life experience. Instead of paying high tuition costs, apprenticeships allow you to earn while you learn.

If after the apprenticeship is complete, you decide you want to go to a traditional college, you now have the means to pay tuition without having to take out loans.

Another option is to opt for a community college, where tuition is less expensive, and take courses slowly while you work a part-time job. It might take a few vears longer, but you will save yourself years of student loan payments.

The uncomfortable truth of the matter is that many college

degrees will never be worth the \$50,000 debt you went into in order to get your diploma. If the point of college is to prepare you for your future career, it's important for Gen Z to carefully consider what path will lead them toward a prosperous and fulfilling one.

Luckily, Gen Z appears to be more financially savvy than millennials. The credit bureau TransUnion released a new study that looked at the credit profiles of Gen Zers. The research suggests that those who have already come of age are having an easier time paying off their debt and have higher credit scores than millennials did at their age. If this trend continues, we might not have to be as concerned for the up and coming generation.

The future is bright for Gen Z, but it can be even brighter if they heed the warnings of previous generations and stay away from the pitfalls of student loans.

Brittany Hunter is a senior writer for the Foundation for Economic Education. Addition ally, she is a co-host of Beltway Banthas, a podcast that combines Star Wars and politics. This article was originally published on FEE.org

REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

Suffering and Sincerity in Bonnat's 'Job'

ERIC BESS

recently saw Léon Bonnat's painting "Job," which powerfully represents the suffering and spirituality of Job. I L decided to visit Job's story in the Bible, and I came to deeply consider my relationship to my own sufferings.

Léon Bonnat

Léon Bonnat was a French academic painter during the 19th and early 20th centuries. He traveled to Spain to study Spanish Baroque art under Federico Madrazo before returning to Paris to study painting at the École des Beaux-Arts, the national school of art in France.

Instruction at the École, however, had become stagnant and abstract. Instructors were no longer teaching methods for creating art but were theorizing about art, and student work was suffering as a consequence.

According to art historian Alisa Luxenberg, "Bonnat saw three cancers within the academic system: partisanship, routine, and entitlement." Students were often selected to win competitions because of favoritism and persistence instead of talent; they became lazy and felt entitled in an environment that fostered absolute and unvaried instruction.

In 1863, a decree was implement ed to reform instruction at the École. Many of the faculty members resisted these reforms. But Bonnat, at this point a practicing artist, signed a letter to Napoleon III that supported the reforms. This signature created tensions between Bonnat and his colleagues.

The debates concerning the reforms were very tense. Artists were potentially sacrificing their future careers depending on what stance they took in relation to the reforms.

Later, Bonnat said this about signing the letter: "That blessed signature is in the process of causing me disagreements with all my friends. Where I only saw a question of transforming [the École's] studies, wholly to their benefit, they see an act of profound intrigue, and they associate me with people who want to destroy the Institut, the Rome prizes, freedom itself and, consequently, ... the death of art. It is very serious and I will have trouble getting out of it."

Despite the tensions between Bonnat and his colleagues, he later became a professor and director at the École.

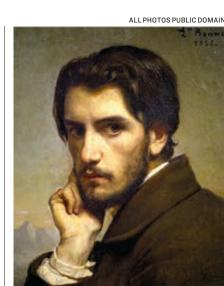
Interestingly, teaching caused Bonnat to question his original concerns with the instruction at the École. He came to reflect that perhaps being abandoned by his professor was not negligence at all.

On the contrary, it was likely part of the training. In reference to his atelier training, he stated:

"[Art instructor Cogniet] knew that one learns well only what one learns on one's own, in trying, in seeking. He thought that mutual learning is the most efficient teaching, and finally and above all, he did not want to impose on his students his way of seeing, of understanding, and interpreting life."

Bonnat endured professional hardships because he remained true to and sincere in his convictions. Yet he also was not dogmatic in his views but open to questioning them, and he came to believe that his greatest education in painting came not in the instruction that was provided but in the sincerity of one's own efforts.

In 1880, Bonnat completed his painting of Job, after the reforms of 1863 but before he became a professor at the École in 1888.



Self-portrait of Léon Bonnat, 1855, at the age of 22. Orsay Museum.

Job's Sufferings

Job is a biblical character of the Old Testament whose faith in God is tested due to great suffering caused by Satan. Job's story is paraphrased as follows from the Book of Job:

Job is a very successful and blameless man who shuns evil and worships God. God asks if Satan has seen Job's virtue and faith. Satan suggests that Job is virtuous and faithful only because he is successful; take away his success, and his virtue and faith will falter.

God, believing Satan to be wrong, allows Satan to take away Job's successes. In one day, Job loses his sheep, servants, and children to thieves or natural disas-

ters. Despite this, Job praises God. Satan returns to God and suggests that Job still praises God only because his body has not been harmed. Satan then causes Job to have horrible boils and skin sores. Job's wife asks him to renounce God and die. Job refuses and states the importance of accepting the good with the bad.

Three of Job's friends El Bildad, and Zophar arrive to comfort him. At this point, Job curses the day he was born and believes he is living only to increase his suffering. Each of his friends tells him that his suffering must be the consequence of sinful behavior, and each explains God's justice according to his own understanding.

Job, however, sure of his virtue, comes to question God's justice. He denounces his friends' accusations and demands to defend his virtue before God.

God reveals himself to Job and tells him that he, with his limitations, cannot understand the justice of God but must. nonetheless, trust God. Job agrees. God also tells the three friends that they were wrong about God and that Job was right. God was satisfied with Job, because Job is sincere with his questions and concerns. God restores Job's health, gives him twice as much property as he had before, new children, and a long life.

Bonnat's Depiction of Job

Bonnat depicted Job naked and alone on a background of darkness. He used baroque contrast of light and dark to illuminate the form of Job in front of the darkness. Job's head tilts toward the heavens with a pleading look of suffering on his face, and his hands are stretched in front of him with his palms up as if he is preparing to receive something.

Though the composition is a simple one with a single figure, Bonnat arranged the figure in one of the most compositionally stable shapes: a triangle. Job's head is the top of the triangle, his arms are the sides, and his legs are the bottom.

Why did Bonnat depict Job in the shape of a triangle? Why is Job depicted naked and alone? Why are his hands outstretched? What moment of Job's story did Bonnat depict?

An Interpretation I think Bonnat depicted the moment in which God reveals himself to Job. Job has called to God for a face-to-face meeting and God appears. Job receives God's message with his hands outstretched.

Job is naked and alone because sincerity and honesty are necessary in order to meet with God. Thus, Job is shown in his bare truth as he meets with God.

Maybe this is why Job's hands are outstretched with his palms up: It is only in his sincerity and honesty, in baring himself, that he is able to receive what God is to provide. Maybe the exposure of his palms is also an acceptance of trust in God's justice. This whole event is confusing and turbulent for Job, yet Bonnat depicted him in the shape of a stable triangle. Maybe, despite his sufferings and despite Satan's role in the story, Job's soul was always being taken care of by God. In this case, his sufferings may have appeared as unjust and therefore unstable. Is it possible that Job's sincere and honest approach to his sufferings allowed him a deeper trust in God, a more stable faith?

Enduring Great Suffering It is simply a fact of life that human existence goes hand-in-hand with suffering. Irrespective of wealth, class, race, or gender, we all suffer. How we deal with that suffering can define who we become as human beings.

It is tempting to want to blame our sufferings on others. It is often too convenient to say that "everything would be different if this one thing would change." Another temptation is to use our sufferings to elevate ourselves: I am better than others because I suffer more. Both of these positions can lead one away from God

What might it mean to approach our suffering sincerely and honestlv? What might it mean to lay ourselves bare? Before requesting to

Why is Job depicted naked and alone? Why are his hands outstretched? What moment of Job's story did Bonnat depict?

defend himself before God. Job first questions his own virtue and finds himself true to God's law. Maybe this act-this introspection-contains within it what it means to approach our sufferings sincerely and honestly; maybe we must be honest with ourselves about our actions and their consequences and ask God the questions that are deep in our minds and hearts.

Like Job, Bonnat had to stay true to what he believed—in this case, what he thought to be good for the arts in France-despite pressure from his colleagues. Bonnat stuck to his guns as a supporter of reform as a means to promote actual instruction at the École, but this threatened his friendships and career in the process.

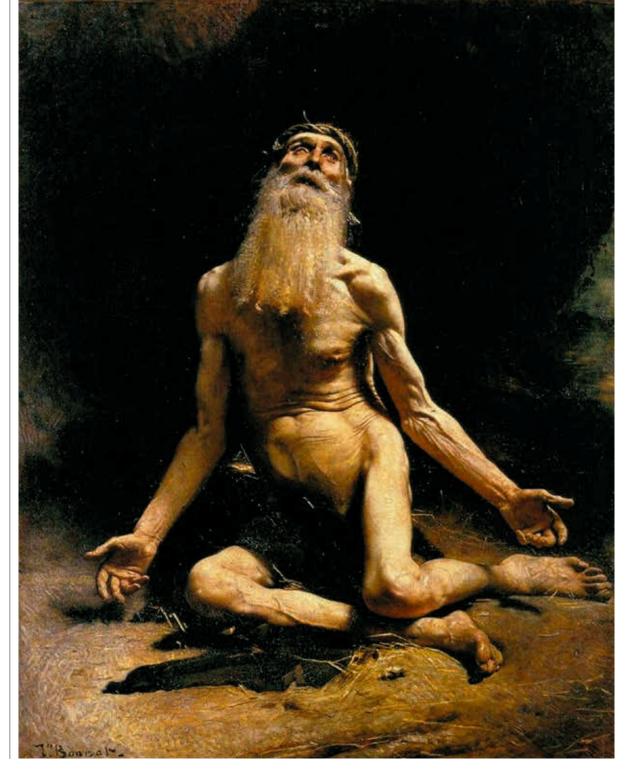
Despite this, however, he was eventually granted a professorship and directorship at the École. He was blessed through his sincere but plagued efforts, just as Job was later blessed after enduring his sufferings.

To me, Bonnat seemed more interested in sincerely helping the arts than in holding on to insincere views in order to save face, friendships, or his future. Job does the same in the presence of his friends: He approaches God sincerely and honestly, and God reveals himself to Job.

Moving forward, I will do my best to avoid blaming others for my suffering. I will also avoid elevating myself above others because of what I've suffered. There's always someone who has suffered more than I have. Instead, I will share my sufferings with God in an honest and open way so that I may be fortunate enough to experience his blessings. Hopefully, I will have the wisdom to question my assumptions and stay sincere in my heart and mind despite the temptations around me.

Art has an incredible ability to point to what can't be seen so that we may ask "What does this mean for me and for everyone who sees it?" "How has it influenced the past and how might it influence the future?" "What does it suggest about the human experience?" These are some of the questions we explore in our series Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart.

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



"Job," 1880, by Léon

Bonnat. Oil on canvas.

BOOK REVIEW: 'THE AMERICAN STORY'

What Made These Americans Great

Historians offer insights into our nation's leaders

LINDA WIEGENFELD

It's 2020. Another year, another decade. As we contemplate the future, we can always look to the past for inspiration. "The American Story: Conversations With Master Historians" by David M. Rubenstein is the perfect book to do so. In it. Rubenstein asks famous historians about the legacies of compelling people in American history. Rubenstein, a renowned finan-

cier and a pioneer of patriotic philanthropy (he's donated money to educate Americans about their history and heritage), is also the television host of "The David Rubenstein Show: Peer-to-Peer Conversations." On the show, he interviews leaders to discover their paths to success.

In 2013, Rubenstein decided that it would be a worthwhile exercise to interview accomplished historians about their books on great leaders in American history. The audiences were principally members of Congress, and they met at the Library of Congress.

Building on that idea, Rubenstein has selected some of his most intriguing interviews and presents them in what I think of as a reader's digest of American history. Together, the interviews offer a sampling of famous historical figures—each chapter devoted to a different author and a different historical figure—which will inspire you with an eagerness to learn more. It did for me.

Jack D. Warren Jr. on **George Washington**

Even though General Washington ing the Revolutionary War be was ted these evenings because that's determined to hang on. His battered army believed in him and followed him back across the icy Delaware to victories at Trenton and Princeton. Finally, in 1783 a treaty of peace was signed.

In the past, victorious generals typically became rulers for life not Washington. He resigned his commission and went home to Mount Vernon. When King George III heard this, he said, "If George Washington gives up power, as I hear he's going to, he's the greatest man in the world."

Later, when Washington was president, he could readily have had a third term and presumably serve as president until his death, but he chose the opposite course. He knew full well the legacy he was leaving, and it was not a monarchy.

David McCullough on

John Adams One of the bravest and most important acts of John Adams's life took place when no one would defend the British soldiers after the Boston Massacre. Adams took the job. He felt that they were entitled to representation because of his belief in the fairness of American law and justice. Yet he guessed that this act would destroy his political ambitions.

Instead, it worked in his favor. People saw his backbone. Over and over in offices that Adams held (including the presidency), he always did what he felt was right.

In one such example, as president, Adams kept us out of the war with France. The United States had no money, no army, and no navy to speak of. He understood the importance of this decision: "If I have anything on my gravestone that I should be remembered for, it's 'I kept us out of an unnecessary run immediately, but war,'" he later said.

Because of his decision, however, 34th president of the Adams lost the election of 1800 to

his own vice president, Thomas Iefferson.

Cokie Roberts on the

Founding Mothers Traditionally, writing on the Revolutionary War has focused on the accomplishments of men. Yet the founding mothers played crucial roles in the beginnings of the new nation despite their lacking independence in economic, political, and civic matters.

During the long winter months when the fighting in the Revolutionary War was basically at a standstill, Martha Washington was called upon by her husband to come to his winter encampment. She boosted the morale of her husband's troops by organizing other officers' wives and bringing clothes and food to camp. She was of enormous help with her husband's victories.

Abigail Adams served as the unofficial adviser to her husband. She and John Adams, the nation's second president, have been called "America's first power couple." When her husband was in the Continental Congress, she wrote him to "Remember the Ladies" when talking about human rights of the individual in forming the new nation.

Dollev Madison served as unofficial first lady to President Thomas Jefferson, who was a widower. Her enormous popularity as a hostess was essential. The young country was fragile and might not have survived the time's rampant partisanship and regionalism were it not for Madison. She set up a power center at the Secretary of State's house where both Federalists and Republicans could come, eat, drink wine, where all the trading and deals were made, and all the information was exchanged. Later, she became the official first lady as the wife of President Madison.

Jean Edward Smith on Eisenhower

Dwight D. Eisenhower has been seen by many as a gifted and experienced general, but not as a successful president. Rubenstein's interview reveals this impression to be false.

With his low-key leadership style, Eisenhower shrewdly steered America through crises in the 1950s that might have turned out much differently. He was disciplined, a hard worker, articulate, an excellent writer, and knew how to get things done. He was always able to make the decisions that a commander should make without waffling.

Most of all, he had a way with people. In the Army, he was able to draw the attention of three of the Army's stars: General Fox Conner, General John J. Pershing, and General Douglas MacArthur. They helped him get promoted.

As his career blossomed, Eisenhower was given command of Operation Torch—the invasion of North Africa—when President Roosevelt reluctantly acceded to Winston Churchill's insistence that Torch should take place before a cross-channel invasion of Europe. Later, on D-Day, June 6, 1944, Eisenhower commanded the Allied forces during the Normandy

invasion. After the war, both Democrats and Republicans wanted Eisenhower to run on their tickets since he wasn't defined by a particular ideology. He didn't in 1953 he became the United States.



George Washington.



Dwight D. Eisenhower.

As president, he made peace in Korea and thawed the Cold War. He took action to enforce Civil Rights legislation, balanced the budget, and helped to create the Interstate Highway System. He was willing to work with politicians of all stripes to create a consensus on many of the country's big issues.

be seen in his reaction to the National Security Council suggestion to aid the French in Vietnam by use of atomic bombs:

use those awful things against the Asians for the second time in ten years. My God."

Doris Kearns Goodwin on

Abraham Lincoln Today Abraham Lincoln is greatly honored, yet he barely got the Republican nomination.

Lincoln, knowing that he would never be the first choice of any of the delegates, brilliantly told his managlost more battles than he won dur- and behave civilly. No one boycot- ers: "Just tell everybody if they can't get their first love I'm there I'll be the second love." When William Seward missed securing the majority on the first ballot, people did turn to Lincoln because he hadn't attacked anyone.

Instead, he tried to work with his competitors, saying: "I'm the humblest of all of you. I need your support." When he became president, he invited his main competitors to join his cabinet.

Whenever Abraham Lincoln felt the urge to tell someone off, he wrote a "hot letter" wherein he would put his anger, but he would never send it. He would cool off and reflect on his thoughts.

Finally, Lincoln was able to inspire Americans to see themselves in a different way. Terms in the Gettysburg Address like "all men are created equal" and "government of the people, by the people, for the people" created a noble vision for America as important and relevant today as in the past.

Washington's perseverance and selflessness, John Adams's integrity, the first ladies' kindliness and support, Lincoln's humility, and Eisenhower's industriousness-these are qualities, when remembered, that can shape us to create a better today and a better tomorrow.

Linda Wiegenfeld is a retired *teacher with 45 years' experience* teaching children. She can be reached for comments or suggestions at LWiegenfeld@aol.com



"The American Story: **Conversations** With Master Historians" David M. Rubenstein Simon & Schuster 416 pages

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.



It's an experience of a lifetime, I would encourage anyone to come and see it ... The colors are breathtaking, the precision is immeasurable, I've never

seen anything like it ... You feel like you're living the experience, because the actors and the dancers execute everything with such precision, and such drama that it pulls you in ... I immediately connected with ... the fact that we're here for a purpose, but that life goes on after this world, and that's what I'm walking away with this evening.

CATHERINE SZERSZEN Ms. Kentucky Senior America 2016, at the William H. Mortensen Hall at The Bushnell Theatre in Hartford, Conn., on Feb. 8, 2020



It was a great mixture of action and ideas and spirituality and power, physical power ... The truth 5,000 years ago is ageless. And we age and dynasties

age, but it stays youthful, and is the same throughout. And the integrity and honesty and kindness, that doesn't grow old.

PETE MILLETT *museum director. at the* William H. Mortensen Hall at The Bushnell Theatre in Hartford, Conn., on Feb. 8, 2020



I noticed that there was such an honor and admiration of the divine, and that we were also, throughout this performance, honoring the divine within each other.

And I think that's something that really can be showcased throughout not only Chinese culture but all cultures across the globe. If we really honor and recognize each other's divinity, the more productive, creative, supportive and loving we can be as a people in general.

DEBORAH BURNS brand strategist, at the William H. Mortensen Hall at The Bushnell Theatre in Hartford, Conn., on Feb. 8, 2020



It's really quite breathtaking ... There's a lot of structured movement, which is what I like. Very structured

movement. It wouldn't work nearly as well as if they weren't as precise as their precision. Remarkable.

MIKE LECKRONE director of the University of Wisconsin Marching Band from 1969–2019, at the Overture Center for the Arts in Madison. Wis., on Feb. 5, 2020



It's fascinating. I think one of the most interesting things to me is that they're talking about the history before modern-day China, which

we assume is just communism and a lack of religion and a lack of understanding of any type of spirituality. But what's so fascinating about this history that they're talking about is that there is a lot of spirituality. There's a lot of these teachings that are much, much older than what we know about modernday communist China. And it's just such a rich history. It's amazing!

JEREMY PIERSON investor, at the William Saroyan Theatre in Fresno, Calif., on Feb. 6, 2020



Eisenhower's character can really

"You boys must be crazy. We can't

STYLE

Save Time and Money: Build the Ideal Capsule Wardrobe

Part 1 of 3: Decluttering your closet

MANY NGOM

Let's talk about structure, cut, budget, fun, and ... style. You may wonder what these words have in common. But from the title of this article, you can probably guess that I am inviting

you to undertake a most satisfying exercise to reshape your personal style and save you money: building a capsule wardrobe for this new season.

With a capsule wardrobe, items should easily mix

and match

It may sound fancy but most of all, it will be rewarding. Let's dive in, shall we?



The ultimate goal of a capsule wardrobe is to buy less but to buy better.

PERSONAL FINANCE Seniors Deal With the Harsh Reality of Debt

NEW YORK—Allen Lomax knows how retirement is supposed to go: By your golden years, you should have paid off your house, built up a big pot of savings, and be able to face the years ahead without fear. The future is not quite shaping

up like that for him. Decades ago, the 69-year-old from Sylva, North Carolina, took out about \$130,000 in federal loans for grad school. His hopes of eventually wiping that bill clean were dashed when he lost his well-paying job in his late 50s; the debt ballooned to \$170,000, and stayed with him even after he declared bankruptcy.

Now semi-retired and on Social Security, "there's no way that money will be ever be repaid," Lomax said.

Lomax is hardly alone in his plight of being past 50 and in a deep financial hole.

The median debt for older Americans shot up 400 percent between 1989 and 2016, according to the Federal Reserve. But you do not often hear about it, perhaps because of emotional factors like shame and embarrassment.

Paying off debt is a financial priority for 4 out of 10 retirees, according to a survey by the Transamerica Center for Retirement Studies. That includes 29 percent



The best advice is one that most will not want to hear: Work longer. But it is inevitable for many.

grappling with credit-card debt, 17 percent still paying off a mortgage, 11 percent dealing with other consumer debt like medical bills or student loans, and some coping with a combination.

"There has been a steady rise in the ratio of debt-to-income, indicating that older households are becoming more vulnerable to income shocks later in life," said Olivia Mitchell, a professor at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and executive director at the Pension Research Council.

Mitchell cited a few factors that were exacerbating the problem, and one is the run-up in housing prices in recent decades, which has made it more challenging to secure affordable mortgages. Medical expenses are another culprit.

Financial planner Jennifer Weber of Lake Success, New York, cites a client who endured a back injury and multiple surgeries in his late 50s, saddling him with bills and forcing him to cut back on his work. Despite having disability insurance, he still ended up \$100,000 in debt as retirement loomed.

And a final, surprising debt factor for this advanced age group: student loans. As of 2018, Americans over 50 owed \$260 billion in student loans, according to the Federal Reserve.

Since this type of debt typically cannot be discharged in bankruptcy, it can easily haunt you for a very long time—just as it is doing with Allen Lomax.

A Way Out

The best advice is one that most will not want to hear: Work longer. But it is inevitable for many. Once you call it a day

on your career, you have to deal with remaining debt by drawing down your savings, making it more likely the money will eventually run out.

An added bonus of working a few more years is that the longer vou delay taking Social Security, the higher your monthly payout will be.

Perhaps the biggest enemy of a secure financial future is darkness and secrecy. When it comes to debt, you cannot address what you do not confront, or admit to a spouse or life partner.

"We had a client whose husband racked up about \$50,000 in credit-card debt without the wife's knowledge, five years before they were ready to retire," said Tess Zigo, a financial planner in Lisle, Illinois. "We discussed the different options like 401(k) loans, and they ended up working with a debt consolidation company to lower their monthly payments."

As for Allen Lomax, he does what he can. He works as an adjunct professor, raises awareness about the debt issue through organizations like Student Loan Justice, and is grateful that income-based repayment plans have prevented his situation from getting even graver.

Also, he will not pass on his debts to his heirs, because any remaining balance will get discharged upon his death.

"It could have been worse if I had not stayed on top of it, and let it default altogether," Lomax said. "I try to keep it out of my mind, but it constantly hangs over my head. The only advice I have for others is 'stay out of debt, and don't take out student loans.'

By Chris Taylor From Reuters



What Is a Capsule Wardrobe?

It is a mini-collection of 25–50 pieces of clothing that are timeless and that can easily be mixed and matched with each other. The ultimate goal of a capsule wardrobe is to buy less but to buy better.

In this three-part series, I will walk you through the process step by step, from decluttering your closet to putting together your ideal wardrobe.

The Proper Way to

Declutter Your Closet This process can be overwhelming. How to sort the clothes? And how to organize your thoughts to get through this task? We're not all Marie Kondo, but we can use a bit of her wisdom to make this very important step of the process a little smoother.

Pick a day when you'll have time because the task will be tedious. Make sure to have good snacks and good music, and just dive into it! First, get rid of everything you don't need.

The Old Stuff

These are the old clothes, worn out with holes, discolored, maybe ripped, but you love them because they are so comfortable. Too bad; they must go, and besides, you deserve better clothes. And don't forget your favorite football team's sweatshirt, with the logo so faded it doesn't even show anymore. Or the white T-shirt with distinct vellowish underarm marks. Don't feel bad, and let them go. Keep one or two pieces for house cleaning but no more than that.

I Bet You've Never

Worn Them Yes, I am referring to the type of clothes that you bought on impulse, even though they ended up not being your style. And the ones that you bought on sale thinking you got such a good deal but that turned out to be poor-quality. Give them away—maybe you have a friend who can fit in them, or simply give them to charity.

You Watched the Oscars, Didn't You?

Let's be honest, this event makes us dream in so many ways: "Oh, I wish I had that body!" or "Wow, if I could get that type of dress for my wedding anniversary, that would be great!"

And say you finally splurged on a super nice red-carpet dress, four years ago—and you're still waiting for the right occasion to wear it.

You've convinced yourself that it was a good buy, but was it really? It's been years, and it is obviously not your personal style ... Just sell it and make some money out of it.

Regift It

So your husband surpassed himself and bought you that beautiful blouse from Ted Baker, except that the pattern is not your style and it doesn't fit. But you tell yourself, "But he made the effort, and when I'll lose the weight, I'll wear it." Or, "my mother-in-law knitted that sweater for me but I look like a sausage in it!"

What to do with these gifts? Be firm in your mind, let go of the emotion, and find them a new home. And maybe during a conversation with your husband or mother-in-law, you could perhaps let them know that a book or a gift certificate to the spa would be most welcome.

In My Mind, I Am Still 22 ... And that is a great motto to keep in mind all the time: feel young, free, and beautiful. Except that the mind gets it but for some reason, the belly, the thighs, the arms, and the double chin didn't seem to get the memo!

At 22, you might have been size 4 or maybe 6 or 8, but today, let's face it, ladies, we have delivered babies, we stand at work for hours. We've gone through a lot of stress in life, and our bodies have been affected—and that's fine because it's normal to go through these phases of life. So let's accept the new size—be it 10, 12, or 14, and get rid of those size 4 jeans and that size 2 dress you've kept for years.

These Can Be Saved but ... "I love these pants but I need to fix its hem." Does this sound familiar? I am so guilty of this especially because I

sew, so I have no excuse! But unless I fix that hem or add that button to that coat, they are useless. The same also holds true for clothes that need to be sent out to the dry cleaner. If you

feel you don't have time to fix these kinds of clothes, just give them away. If you waited that long to fix them, you probably don't need them.

After going through all these steps, your closet should feel empty and light, and that is a good thing. Decluttering the most important part of the process. Next week, let's build around what you have. And when each morning, you ask yourself what you're going to wear, I promise the answer will be quick and easy.



By Aidan Danza, age 13

Beavers are semi-aquatic but they actually eat the bark, leaves, and branches of trees and shrubs. Since the lodge has water entrances, and their ponds freeze over in winter, beavers have to cache a large supply of food near the entrance of

> starving. Their dams have a mixed effect on humans. They do itat for fish anu roads and homes, and their felling of trees can sometimes take out power lines.



ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

They chew on the bark at the base of the tree until the tree is weak enough to be felled by the wind.



While human carpenters work with a variety of specialized tools, beavers create their abodes with only their teeth and paws. They start with a tree, which they weaken enough to fall into the slow-flowing water they want to dam. They fell the tree by chewing on the bark at the base of the tree until the tree is weak enough to be felled by the wind.

Next, beavers strengthen the dam and close any gaps the tree may leave by

inside. When the beaver is done, it is extremely difficult to tell that there is a felled tree holding the dam up.

Beavers make dams to create ponds, which are a good home for them. They also make houses for themselves out of sticks and branches called lodges. There are normally two entrances to a lodge, both of which are underwater. Even though the entrances are underwater, the lodge is built so that the living quarters are above water level. Beavers live in extended families, consisting of the first pair, their offspring (called kits)

from previous years, their current kits, and all the other family members that might exist in beaver society

BEAVER LIFE

their lodge in winter to keep fron

animals, but they can also flood

Down

1 Romance (3)

3 Male admirer (4)

4 Bestows (8)

8 Knack (4)

13 Hug (7)

2 Valentine's Day gift (7)

10 Get carried away (8)

14 "Finding Nemo" turtle (5)

12 Hallmark gift (4)

15 Boy with a bow (5)

16 Bat an eye? (5)

eavers are

North America's

They live in forested lakes,

ponds, rivers, and streams.

lodges they tend to develop

land somewhat like what

humans do: They change

their surroundings to fit

their needs.

Beavers create

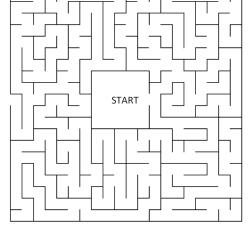
their abodes

with only their

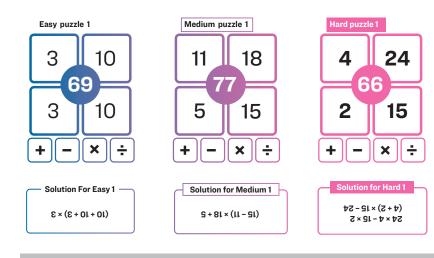
teeth and paws.

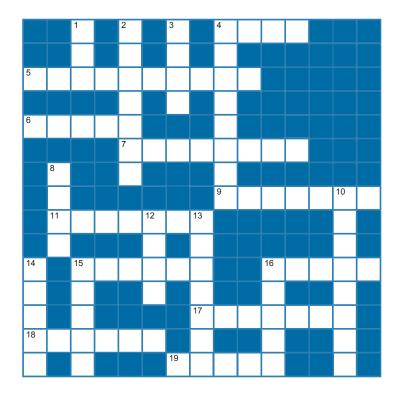
largest rodent.

With their dams and



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



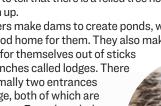




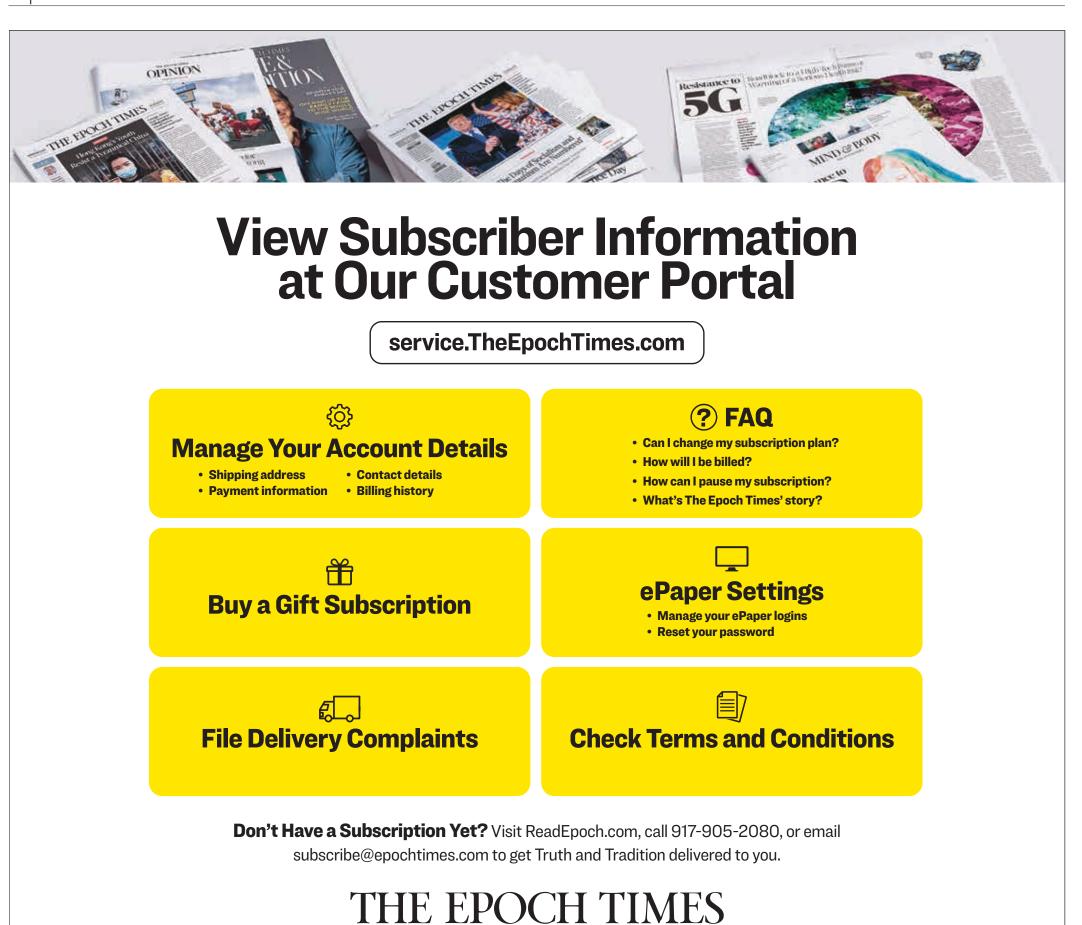
Across 4 Ode or haiku (4)

5 You might give or get them on Valentine's Day (10)

- 6 Really, really like (5)
- Some comedies on Broadway (8)
- **9** In love (7)
- **11** Future spouse (7)
- 15 Young angel? (6)
- **16** Heartthrob (5)
- **17** Secret person (7)
- **18** Wooer (6)
- **19** Shape of a box of chocolates? (5)



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT: BEAVER putting sticks, grass, and other plant material



TRUTH AND TRADITION



TRUTH and **TRADITION**

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Pioneer Keturah Belknap in "Not an Idle Minute," 2019, by Heide Presse. Oil on linen panel; 30 inches by 22 inches.

FINE ARTS

Painting American History Journal by Journal

Artist Heide Presse shares her history paintings



Artist Heide Presse paints mid-19th-century Americans as true to life as she can, from her studio in Tampa, Fla.

LORRAINE FERRIER

rtist Heide Presse paints mid-19th-century American life as authentically as she can. Farmers, homesteaders, and pioneers are a few of the folk who are captured on canvas, taken from firsthand historical accounts. In her paintings, women read Bibles, sew quilts, or tend children; and men work the land, herd cattle, and drive wagons. Presse's paintings are full of color, playful light, and sometimes dust, as America's past comes to life through her canvas.

She starts painting only after an often lengthy process of research that enables her to depict a reallife event or scene as true to the past as possible, Presse explained by phone. Through years of research, she has built up not only a fine knowledge of the time but also a collection of period needlework that she makes and uses as props in her paintings.

In her 20s, while studying fine art and graphic design at college, Presse visited colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, where her eyes were opened to the world of historical reenactments. Little did she know then that 20 years on, she herself would reference historical reenactments so strongly in her art.

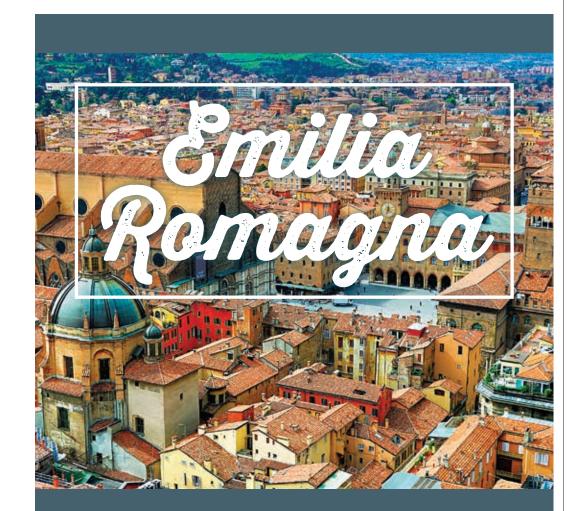
Continued on Page 16



TRUTH and **TRADITION**

A NEWSPAPER ABRAHAM WOULD READ

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IS THE REASON YOU GO TO ITALY

CULTURE • FOOD & WINE • CARS • WELLNESS

Emilia Romagna is a region in northern Italy, extending from the Apennine mountains to the Po river in the north. Its rich culture has constructed much of what Italy is loved for -refined cities, cars, rich gastronomy, and wellness. Find out what you missed the last time you went to Italy:



POETRY

HOLY WORDS: Poetry, Vocation, AND Sacred

JEFF MINICK

n the last millennium, and even earlier, poets of the West have devoted reams of verse to an exploration and celebration of their Christian faith. Dante, Milton, Spenser, Blake, the Americans Anne Bradstreet and Emily Dickinson, John Newton, Christina Rossetti, Francis Thompson, G.K. Chesterton, and T.S. Eliot: These and many other poets wrote verses centered on religion and worship.

And then there are the poets whose paper and pen walked hand in hand with their religious vocations.



A line engraving of Hildegard von Bingen by W. Marshall. Iconographic Collections, Wellcome Collection.

The Nun and the Monk Famous visionary and Benedictine

nun St. Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179)

wrote verse as well as prose. Here is her tribute to God, "The Love of All":

- Love overflows into all
- Glorious from the ocean's depths beyond the farthest star, Bounteous in loving all creation;
- For to the King most high Love has given her kiss of peace.

Like Hildegard, mendicant monk St. Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) tied the wonders of nature to the Almighty. In his beautiful piece "The Canticle of the Sun," Francis praises "my Lord" for gifts like "Brother Wind," "Sister Moon," and "Brother Fire." Francis also wrote "Prayer for Peace," a poem recited and sung even today.

Many readers will be familiar with these words; for those who have no acquaintance, let me do the introductions:

Lord, make me an instrument of your

peace. Where there is hatred let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light;

Where there is sadness, joy.

Divine Master,

- Grant that I may seek not so much to be consoled as to console;
- To be understood as to understand; To be loved as to love;
- For it is in giving that we receive; It is in pardoning that we are par-
- doned, And it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen.

Metaphysical Poets

In "Flowers of Heaven: One Thousand Years of Christian Verse," Joseph Pearce writes of Robert Southwell (1561–1595) that "in his short and dramatic life he wrote some of the finest religious poetry in the English language."

Caught up in religious struggles of his day-England was becoming Anglican, and the court and Parliament suppressed Catholicism—Southwell left his native land for France and Italy, and became a Jesuit priest. Returning to England to serve his fellow Catho-

lics, he was arrested, imprisoned in the Tower of London, and after three vears of torture and degradation was executed.

Many of Southwell's poems, most of which he composed during his six years as an underground priest, are too lengthy to include here, but here is a compressed version from the Poetry Foundation of "The Burning Babe," a poem much admired by Ben Jonson:

As I in hoary winter's night stood shivering in the snow, Surpris'd I was with sudden heat which

made my heart to glow; And lifting up a fearful eye to view what fire was near,

A pretty Babe all burning bright did in the air appear; Who, scorched with excessive heat,

such floods of tears did shed As though his floods should quench his flames which with his tears were fed. "Alas!" quoth he, "but newly born, in fiery heats I fry,

Yet none approach to warm their hearts or feel my fire but I!

My faultless breast the furnace is, the fuel wounding thorns, Love is the fire, and sighs the smoke,

the ashes shame and scorns; The fuel Justice layeth on, and Mercy blows the coals,

The metal in this furnace wrought are men's defiled souls,

For which, as now on fire I am to work them to their good, So will I melt into a bath to wash them

in my blood." With this he vanish'd out of sight and

swiftly shrunk away, And straight I called unto mind that it was Christmas day.

John Donne (1573-1631), George Herbert (1593–1633), and Richard Crashaw (1613–1649) were all three men of the cloth whose metaphysical poetry has won praise down through the centuries. Donne died as dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London; Herbert was an Anglican priest in a small parish. Richard Crashaw, an Anglican clergyman, converted to Catholicism, fled England, and spent the rest of his brief life in Europe.

Dappled Things

One other poet needs inclusion in this all-too-brief and most incomplete of lists. Like the poets of the English Reformation, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889) suffered for his religious views, having not only converted to Catholicism but becoming a priest as well, a move that left him estranged from many friends and family members. And like Hildegard and Francis, Hopkins celebrated the sacred by what he discovered in nature in verses like "God's Grandeur," "A Kingfisher Catches Fire," and especially, in "Pied Beauty":

Glory be to God for dappled things— For skies of couple-color as a brinded cow; For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;

Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;

Landscape plotted and pieced-fold, fallow, and plow;

And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim

All things counter, original, spare, strange;

Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?) With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle,

dim; He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change;

By now, some readers may be wondering, "Yes, yes, Jeff Minick. We take your point. Some writers who pursued reli-

Praise him.



Sir Roger Scruton, writer and philosopher at Princeton University in New Jersey on April 3, 2017.

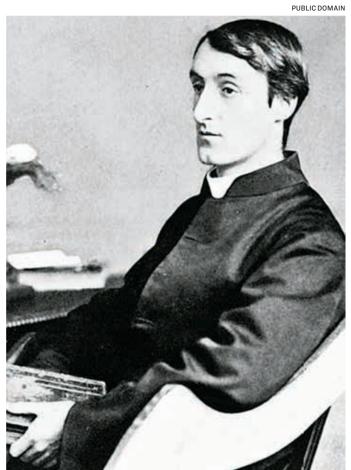
gious vocations produced some worthy poetry."

To See Beyond What We See But my conclusion will reach beyond

that observation. A friend of mine believes that modern artists have lost touch with the sacred purpose of art. She and I have batted this idea around several times, and though I am heavily read in modern writers, I am more and more inclined to agree with her.

toration of the Sacred," delivered at dermining this sacramental view of a Catholic Art Guild Conference in 2017 in Chicago, philosopher Roger Scruton spoke of the idea of beauty and the sacred in all the arts. Long a critic of modernity, particularly of our architecture, near the end of his talk Scruton remarked: "This is one of the problems we're living through. People don't seem to accept that there is any other way of understanding things than the scientific way, and this leads to scientism, which is a kind of systematic misunderstanding of the human world." He then advocates teaching the Without the transcendental, without idea of the sacred and the beautiful to the sacred, without beauty, are we not our children.

who embraced a religious vocation as the Rock:" well as those who followed other paths, acknowledged in their verse that something—a power, a force, a deity, if you will-lies beyond what we can feel, hear, touch, and see. Even Hopkins, who lived



Gerard Manley Hopkins, in a photo taken before 1889, was an English poet, Roman Catholic convert, and Jesuit priest.

in the Industrial Age when theories like In his address "Beauty and the Res- communism and evolution were unlife, possessed the eyes to look beyond physical reality and point his readers to a higher realm.

In discussing Giovanni Bellini's painting of a Madonna and child during the address mentioned above. Scruton states that "the real artist wants us to look beyond what we see." Have we, and our artists, lost that ability to look beyond what we can see, to perceive, as did our ancestors, the great mystery behind our physical world? If so, does that loss of vision diminish us as human beings? in danger of becoming the creatures de-The poets mentioned above, those scribed by T.S. Eliot in "Choruses From

> And the wind shall say: "Here were decent Godless people: Their only monument the asphalt road And a thousand lost golf balls?"



The monk and poet St. Francis of Assisi as the painter Cigoli depicted him in the late 1590s. Hermitage Museum

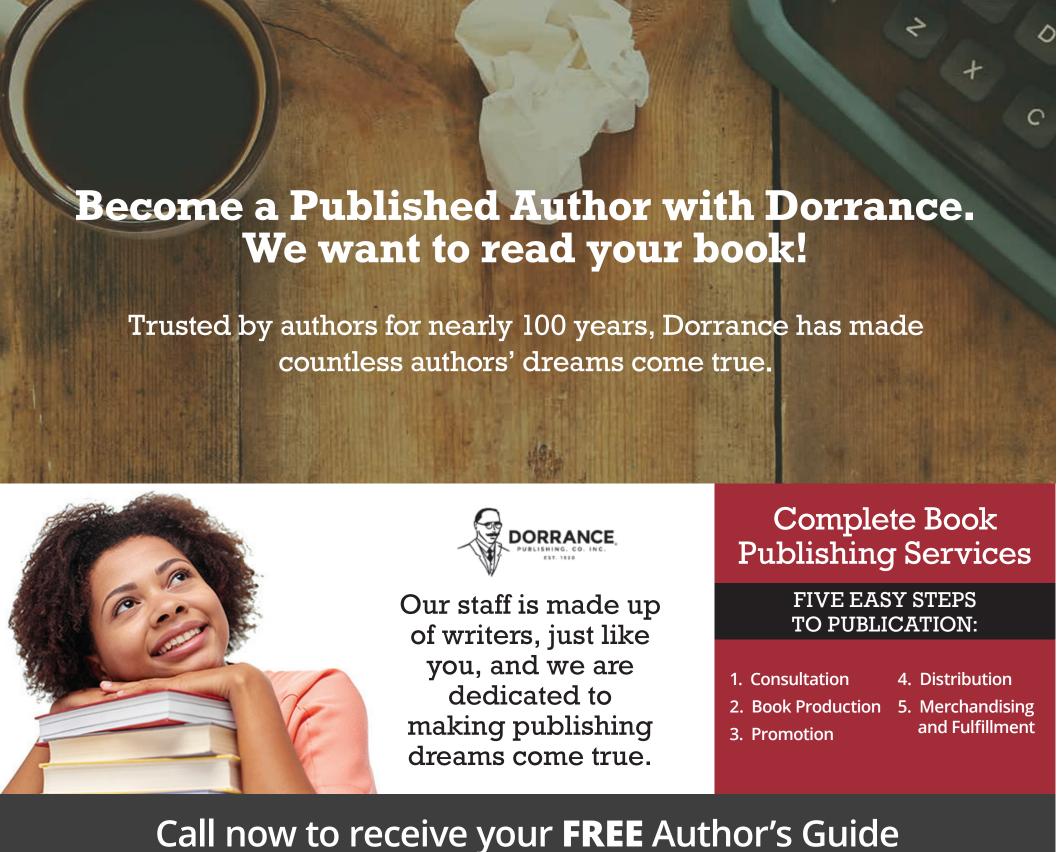
Unless otherwise noted, all poems are from Joseph Pearce's book "Flowers of Heaven: One Thousand Years of Christian Verse."

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.

66

People don't seem to accept that there is any other way of understanding things than the scientific way.

Roger Scruton, philosopher



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FINE ARTS

Painting American History Journal by Journal

Artist Heide Presse shares her history paintings

Continued from Page 13

Today, Presse is an acclaimed artist nationally, with a busy schedule of gallery and museum exhibitions including "Quest for the West" at the Eiteljorg Museum in Indianapolis and "Buffalo Bill Art Show and Sale" at the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming, among others. Between these commitments, she's been working on a personal project—to paint the lives of the people who opened up the West in the early years of the westward trail movement, the late 1840s and early 1850s. She believes these trailblazers were the ones who took the most risk.

Here, she shares that project and how she paints "living history" while staying true to America's past.

THE EPOCH TIMES: How did you begin to paint history paintings? HEIDE PRESSE: I always had an interest in history. If you look back at my older work, you can see a thread of it. But I didn't get really serious about it until the early 2000s, when I was asked to contribute paintings for a corporate commission, which had to feature historic situations in Virginia. I had to create paintings dating from George Washington's time all the way through to the Civil War.

I would go to historical reenactments and living history museums, and I would just paint subjects that interested me. At the time, I didn't have a thorough understanding of the details of period clothing.

I started to really dive into this historical world and learned how to conduct research for the corporate commission; I realized that I had to learn this all myself. I couldn't trust other people to be accurate with their period clothing. I learned that if I wanted my paintings to be right, then I needed to understand what was right. So I started what was to be about a 10-year journey, finding my own historical reenactor sources.

I had some wonderful people who took me under their wing because they liked what I was trying to do with my art: people who have degrees in historic costuming, museum curators, and really good historical reenactors, for example. They helped me learn a great deal. I learned how to do period sewing and how to study original clothing like bonnets from them, for example.



Keturah Belknap in the doorway of her family home in Oregon, in "Home Is at the End of the Trail," 2017, by Heide Presse. Oil on linen panel; 36 inches by 27 inches.

I like sewing, so it was not a hardship for me; it was actually quite enjoyable. I have made my own bonnet patterns after studying original bonnets, but I mostly use patterns drafted by historic costumers. I've sewn a variety of garments, and I also purchase accurate reproductions, so that I have enough clothing to dress people at

my home studio when I need to. I am not an expert in any of this by any means, but I learned enough. When I was first starting to learn

the history, I actually had clothing made for myself and went to a really top-notch reenactment in the Shenandoah Valley on a farm. Because I wanted to understand

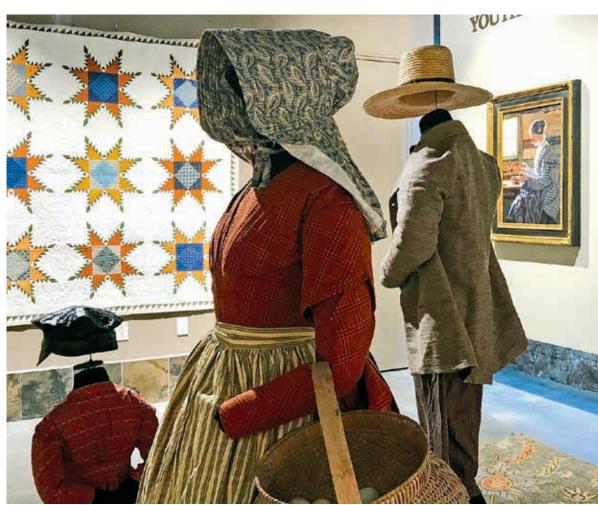
how to dress women, I needed to do it myself. And that was a good thing because I understand what it feels like to wear the clothes, and it just gave me a good understanding and grounding.

But my best-case scenario and what I seek out first when I'm planning a painting is to photograph historic interpreters who know

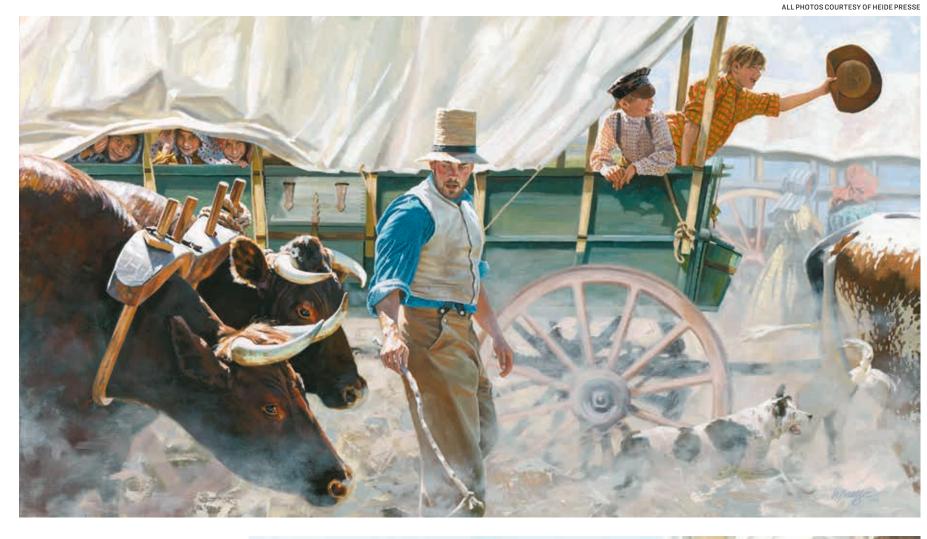
(Left) Heide Presse's mid-19th-century props in her exhibition at the Steamboat Art Museum, in Colorado, in 2019. Presse sewed the bonnet by hand.

(Right) Heide Presse's 2019 exhibition, "We Set Our Faces Westward...One Woman's Journey 1839-1848," at the Steamboat Art Museum in Steamboat Springs, Colo. The exhibition introduced her creative process on the project, which will be completed around 2022.









God just poured all these opportunities into my lap to get this done.

Heide Presse, artist







Tender family moments in Heide Presse's "We Set Our Faces Westward... One Woman's Journey 1839–1848" project sketchbook.

what they're doing. And they have the period clothing, and it's lived in, and they look like history.

THE EPOCH TIMES: Part of researching your paintings involves reading 19th-century journals. How do these influence your paintings? MRS. PRESSE: When I was working on the corporate commission pieces, I was always going to historic sites or doing research and visiting museums to get references for those paintings. Every time I would go to those places, I would always explore the bookstore, and I started picking up books that contained journals.

I love reading journals because if I am trying to get into the heads of people I want to depict in my painting, I feel the best way to do it is to read their own words. It's the best way for me to put myself into their shoes, so to speak. And also, when I went through this process of learning how to research, of course, one of the first things I learned is to find primary documentation first, so I was always looking for that sort of thing.

One time, I picked up this book that contained journals written mostly by women as they traveled the trails west, and I was just hooked. I started reading all these journals. And for the first time, it gave me an understanding of getting into the wagon and spending several months relocating. Before, I had this kind of romanticized image in my mind, and I didn't really think that much about it. But the

situation was far more complex, as you can imagine. So that led me to where I am today.

THE EPOCH TIMES: Please tell us about your current project "We Set Our Faces Westward...One Woman's Journey 1839–1848." MRS. PRESSE: Since that first book that I picked up that contained several journals, I've read a lot of journals and, of course, I get ideas for paintings

But there was this one particular journal (it's not a very long journal, really), but the woman who wrote it, Keturah Belknap, was just incredibly descriptive about how she did things and most journals are not. In the case of the Oregon Trail or California Trail, they mostly talk about how many miles they traveled, if they had good water, good grass, and they talked about landmarks along the way. They pretty much traveled all the same trails, so it's the same thing over and over. So if you read a bunch of those journals, they can be a bit redundant.

But Belknap's journal just stood out because she talked about how she did things, everyday things, and that's what fascinates me. In 1840, she wrote:

"Now it is spring and we have got a few sheep on the shares and they are sheared. All this winter I have been spinning flax and tow to make some summer clothes. I have not spent an idle minute. "Now the wool must be taken

from the sheep's bag, washed,

picked, and sent to the carding machine and made into rolls. Then it must be spun, colored, and wove to have it ready for next winter."

So I started to get this vision of doing a series of paintings depicting the life of one person who went through this process.

Belknap and her husband were newlyweds in their early 20s, who went from Ohio to Iowa to homestead in 1839. Half of my project covers the time that they homesteaded in Iowa from 1839 to 1847, so I am basically painting a picture of everyday life during that period. Then the other half of the project is their journey from Iowa to Oregon in the covered wagon. Belknap and her immediate family went to Oregon from Iowa in 1848.

In 1847, when the gold rush began in California, the gold rush stories started to hit the publications in the Northeast and everywhere, and people started migrating to the West. And that started a big change for this country.

I think so many people kept journals during the trip because they knew they were making history.

Belknap just resonated with me. I was just fascinated by her feistiness and everything she went through, and the way she described in such detail how she did every little thing. She also had a very deep Christian faith and spoke of it frequently. It's also a huge presence in many of the journals that I read, because those people generally had a really deep faith.

The only thing Belknap didn't really talk about is that she happened to be pregnant and gave birth on the trail. It's interesting that they never talked about really personal things like being pregnant. You never find out that they were pregnant on the whole trip until the baby is born. But that's the way it was.

The first thing I had to do was to find a young woman who was going to be my model. I was at a historical reenactors' conference in Pennslyvania where anyone who wants to learn about the mid-1800s goes to understand the culture, dress, and all that stuff. I knew there would be a lot of good reenactors there, so I was hoping to find somebody. There was

a young woman there who was an acquaintance of mine. I didn't know her well, but she's an outstanding reenactor and she sews most of her own clothing. She lives in New York, in the western part of New York state.

So I talked to her and I thought, "How in the world am I realistically going to do this living in Florida?" Once I sat down and had the conversation with her, it was like God just poured all these opportunities into my lap to get this done. It was amazing. Because at that time she happened to work for Genesee Country Village and Museum, which is a really good living history museum in New York state that is set-up as a village of 68 historic structures, the majority of which fit into the timeframe of what I needed for my project. All I had to do was to fly up to New York and go to this village, and she pretty much opened the doors to almost everything I needed, including introducing me to other top-notch historical reenactors.

One of the most lucky finds was someone to pose as her husband, the man in the story. At the time, I really did not know much about men's impressions or have much knowledge of agriculture in that period. She introduced me to a young fellow who worked in the agriculture program at this living history museum where they have heritage breed animals, including the shorthorn Milking Devon oxen. There, they plow the land, grow and harvest crops, and all in the period manner.

For about three years, I would visit the museum a couple of times a year and spend several days there. So that just parlayed into the most perfect situation for me. That's where I got a lot of my reference material.

I'm just always astounded at how lucky I am. These are incredibly talented individuals who know how to create history, and they agree to pose for me. Because the painting is only going to be as good as the subject, and some of this stuff I can't just make up, I have to have a good reference. And I need to understand what I'm painting.

This article has been edited for clarity and brevity.

The transcription of the Keturah Belknap diary comes from the Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections at the Washington State University Libraries in Pullman, Wash.

To find out more about *Heide Presse's work,* visit HeidePresse.com



We Would Have Lost Paradise Too

JANI ALLAN

EW YORK—From the opening exchange between Satan and Beelzebub, Tom Dulack's script captivates. Dulack's take on "Paradise Lost" proves that human nature never changes, and that John Milton's work, perhaps even more than that of Shakespeare, is as relevant as it was when he wrote it.

Milton's "Paradise Lost," which was published in 1667 is arguably the greatest work in the English language. The great English writer Samuel Johnson ranked the epic poem about Lucifer's rebellion, banishment from heaven, and temptation of Eve as "amongst the highest productions of the human mind.

Who would dare attempt to interpret this monolith as a witty, pithy, modern stage production that runs for only one hundred minutes?

Fellowship for Performing Arts (FPA) would. The nonprofit New York City-based company founded by Max McLean, who is also the artistic director, that's who.

Heaven and Hell

On the Saturday I went to the matinee, I sat next to a sophisticated Long Island theatergoer who sees at least three productions a week. She wasn't there for the Christian message, and it didn't bother her that Milton's epic work was about original sin. It was the production

value and acting that interested her. We gazed at the stage set in approval. John Narun's projection design features, as a backdrop, a replica of Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam" from the Sistine Chapel ceiling. There are flowers and bowers of trees and a soundtrack of birdsong. Two small trees parenthesize the stage; the one, of course, is the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil.

When the house is plunged into darkness, the audience is assaulted by—skewered on—lighting and sound. Smoke swirls in a sinister fashion from boiling lakes. There are blasts of trumpets and snatches of Baroque-sounding choirs. From Mephistopheles? The set designer Harry Feiner transmogrifies the scene from an idyll to a hell.

As though a clapperboard has come down, there is Stygian blackness, an almighty crash of thunder and lightning. Any fillings in one's teeth are rattled. Slowly we see a figure emerge—Lucifer. He is wearing a scorched and stained World War I British Army officer uniform. Red epaulettes and decorations are tattered; still he has a kind of awful charisma.

Then our eyes are drawn to his sidekick Beelzebub. Beelzebub, built like a fire hydrant, is a Joe Pesci character. He wears the battledress of a Roman legionnaire. One of his wings appears to have been amputated. He rips it off and collapses. They have been falling for nine days through darkness and chaos.

There is a silence like a waterlogged boat.

Finally, "You said it would be easy," Beelzebub says accusatorily. "This is not my idea of easy. Jesus!"

"Don't you ever say that name again! Do you hear? Never again!" roars Lucifer. So begins the dialogue of a failed leader and his disgruntled min-

ion. The acting and direction of the production are congruent with the quirky and, in flashes, brilliant script.

Offering a Counterpoint View

Max McLean, founder and artistic director, writes in the program notes: "Given that we live in a culture whose primary grand narrative is that there is no grand narrative and that people are increasingly dismissive of Christianity, FPA's mission is to put forth a vision of Christianity through artistic expression that is imaginative, multilayered, and convicting so that it offers a counterpoint to the prevailing worldview."

Art and the theater give us a little more wiggle room to say things within an engaging theatrical experience that otherwise could not be said.

FPA has cannily selected works and themes from great authors that are nuanced, multilayered, and relatable to audiences from all faiths or none at all.

One seasoned critic writing for the Times Square Chronicles, who describes himself as a "Jewish atheist," declared that "FPA's stuff is worthwhile seeing, discussing, and even recommending."

Our Essential Natures Haven't Changed

Tom Dulack, who is an award-winning playwright, novelist, and professor at the University of Connect-

'Paradise Lost'

Theatre Row 410 W. 42nd St., New York Tickets 212-239-6200 or Telecharge.com **Running Time** 1 hour, 40 minutes (no intermission) **Closes** March 1

David Andrew

Macdonald as Lucifer (L)

and Mel Johnson Jr. as

the angel Gabriel; behind

them, Marina Shay and

Robbie Simpson are

Eve and Adam.

icut, along with director Michael Parva, has transformed this epic into an accessible, astonishingly relevant story of Lucifer's rebellion and the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Critics may carp that Dulack's play lacks the poetry, as well as those elements that made this epic controversial in the 17th century: rejection of the divine right of kings, rejection of divorce, and so on.

Such criticism is nonsense. Milton's blank verse cannot be parlaved into witty dialogue. (Who of us has even read the entire work?) Instead. Dulack has the characters speak in the current vernacular and sets out to explore a less-ven-

tilated aspect of the Fall of Man. Why, given all the gifts she had in the Garden of Eden, did Eve take the route she did and disobey, despite an intuition that her decision would have catastrophic conseauences.

Dulack's thoroughly contemporary understanding of humankind is timeless and truthful. The excellent cast of Tony nominees and Broadway veterans bring foibles and flaws to the fore.

David Andrew Macdonald as Lucifer has a résumé like hallmarked caviar. Shakespearean in his training, his TV credits include a decade as Edmund Winslow in "Guiding Light." Lou Liberatore, who plays Beelzebub, is also in possession of a dense and impressive résumé, as is Mel Johnson Jr. who plays Gabriel.

Robbie Simpson and Marina Shay are Adam and Eve. Their relationship dance mirrors what transpires between a young man and a young woman who are newly in love. Eve is mind-wateringly pretty, and Gabriel warns Adam: "Her beauty must not become a snare to befuddle your clear thinking."



Of course it does.

Eve's character is Everywoman. Fickle, bossy, cajoling, willful, and narcissistic.

When she goes through her "Poor Lucifer (she prefers not to call him Satan), surely the Almighty could forgive him," etc., etc., Dulack might be writing for those whose compassion is worn on their sleeves but not in their hearts. This is certainly timely.

Alison Fraser (Sin) is a two-time Tony Award nominee She delivers a wry and witty performance. She looks like Magenta of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show." With hair like exploded armchair springs and horsehair coiling down to her waist, she is tightly corseted and wears a skirt adorned with what appear to be entrails and snakes.

She appears on stage riding a motor scooter and tooting a noisy klaxon. She is hugely amusing, though her crudity infuriates Lucifer, who has been tasked by rebellious angels with seducing the (almost) virginal Eve.

"You go back to hell empty-handed and they will cast you out!" Sin predicts. "They will appoint Ballzebub in your place. You who would not bend your knee to the Messiah will spend eternity on your knees kowtowing to that imbecile! And I will personally make sure you don't draw a single breath without wishing that the Almighty had not created you in the first place!" When Beelzebub calls Sin on a

battlefield phone, he says: "Rebel Station 1 calling Rebel Station 2. Do you read me? Do you read me?"

Sin answers: "Rebel Station 2 to Rebel Station 1. Yeah, I read you Bouillabaisse. Yeah, you're coming in strong and clear."

Beelzebub asks, "Is that you?" Sin's response is "Yeah, it's me Boobaloo. You were expecting maybe a third person of the Trinity?"

A Breath of Fresh Air

These portrayals of good and evil are invigorating. After all, conservative, someone said recently, is the new punk.

Add to that a general zeitgeist in which those who believe in a god, any god, are generally the objects of contempt-a small miracle, no bigger than the fist of Elijah's hand—is to be seen in FPA.

Jani Allan is a journalist, columnist, writer, and broadcaster.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF WARNER BROS

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

Don't Let Them Prey on Your Daughters

MARK JACKSON

o, "Birds of Prey." Right-let me start off with a couple of compliments. It's a quite fun, if often stomach-turning, dark MCU (Marvel Comic Universe) comic-book movie.

Why is it fun to watch? Because the very Australian superstar Margot Robbie can do a Brooklyn accent better than most American actresses, has the requisite bubbly personality, cheekbones, and owns Harley Quinn the way Ryan Reynolds owns Deadpool. OK, that's it, I'm done—let the trashing begin. But first ... the synopsis.

The Synopsis

In the dark and twisted city of Gotham (which we know is basically super-nasty 1970s and '80s New York City, writ large), there lives one Harley Quinn. She used to be a nice girl.

She had a Ph.D. and was once a psychiatrist at Arkham Asylum who had, as one of her patients, that green-haired madman, the Joker. Then she fell in love with him, broke him out of Arkham, and to prove her undying love, immersed herself in the same toxic chemical bath he did.

So now she looks like a punk version of a 1970s Dallas Cowboys cheerleader. She's got baseball-bat fight skills that put Bruce Lee to shame.

She's basically an alcoholic and an unabashed foodie relisher of greasy-spoon fare that would turn you and me into blimps overnight. Why us and not her? She's a superhero. Or maybe a supervillain like her ex-bf. I'm giving her the benefit of the doubt. I think she turned bad for love. A virulently codependent love, that is.

Harley referred to her psychotic ex as "J-Puddin"; she's quite funny, fearless, and adorable. She gives her giant pet hyena smoochies and cuddles. But make no mistake—she'll kill you dead if you make her drop her excess-oil-dripping, Philly cheesesteak-egg-extra-hotsauce-breakfastsammidge in the street.

We knew this too-cute psychopath was going to be back, eventually, because of Margot Robbie's performance. So, is it better than its mothership movie "Suicide Squad?" Oh yeah. But what does that even mean?

Oh wait, I'm not done synopsi-fying yet: Harley got dumped by Jared Leto's dragqueen-y, green-y Joker. She does breakuprecovery things: She bawls on her couch while snarfing down a whole tube of yellow Cheez Whiz, she buys said hyena, and she blows up the toxic chemical plant that was her and her boyfriend's favorite trysting place. Her heart healed, she's now "empowered" and "emancipated."

Our girl would like to just get on with her



Noah Schnapp plays Jo Lalande, a shepherd turned hero, in "Waiting for Anya."

FILM REVIEW Director Ben Cookson's **Inspirational** New World War II Film

IAN KANE

Often, World War II films depict the savagery of war and can be pretty blooddrenched affairs as combatants duke it out with rifles, planes, ships, and lots

of bombs. However, once in a while that war comes into focus for filmmakers who take chances and roll the dice with lesser-known stories. "Waiting for Anya" is one such film. Based on actual World

'Birds of Prey' Director

Cathy Yan Starring

Margot Robbie, Rosie Perez, Mary Elizabeth Winstead, Jurnee Smollett-Bell. Ewan McGregor, Ella Jay Basco Chris Messina, Ali Wong Rated

Running Time 1 hour, 49 minutes **Release Date** Feb. 7





Margot Robbie as Harley Quinn in "Birds of Prey."

here? Teen girls,

War II events, British author, playwright, and poet Michael Morpurgo turned them into a children's book. This film version was adapted for the screen by co-writers Ben Cookson and Toby Torlesse. Cookson also di-

rected the movie. The main narrative is centered around the humble residents of a small town in France called Lescun, not far from the beautiful vistas of the Pyrenees mountains. Unfortunately, for the inhabitants, a detachment of Nazi soldiers has been tasked with occupying the idyllic village. Jo Lalande (Noah Schnapp, "Abe," 2019) is a young shepherd and the film's protagonist. Early on in the film, Jo meets a Jewish fellow named Benjamin (Frederick Schmidt, 2019's "Angel Has Fallen"), who tells a rather tragic story.

When the Germans initially began rounding up Jewish people from the cities, towns, and villages scattered across France, Benjamin spirited his daughter, the titular Anya, away. Both father and daughter had agreed to link back up in Lescun toward the end of the war, but Anya still hasn't returned, hence the title of the movie.

Waiting for his daughter has been fraught with danger, since the German soldiers are constantly hunting down Jewish people.

In the meantime, Benjamin and a few townsfolk have been risking their lives to help Jews escape France and seek freedom in Spain. A good-hearted and relatively fearless youngster, Jo joins the small group and begins smuggling food out of one of the town's markets and into the hands of hungry refugees.

Others within this brave group include an older widow named Horcada (Anjelica Huston), as well as grizzled World War I veteran Henri (Jean Reno).

When Jo's family discovers that he's been aiding the refugees and with the

'Waiting for Anya' Director

Ben Cookson

Starring Anjelica Huston, Jean Reno, Noah Schnapp Rated

PG-13 **Running Time**

1 hour, 49 minutes **Release Date** Feb. 7

 \star \star \star \star

help of the local church, they unify in helping out whenever they can. Things become hair-raising when the Germans become suspicious that things in the small town might not entirely be as they appear.

The film is paced well and, under Cookson's direction, gorgeous, with many shots of the rolling fields and dense woods of the southwestern edge of France. I really enjoyed how cinematographer Gerry Vasbenter took his time with his shots—actually filmed on location in the

mallet, and assorted rifle butts.

The Birds of Prey: (L-R) Rosie Perez, Mary Elizabeth Winstead, Margot Robbie, Ella Jay Basco,

and Jurnee Smollett-Bell in "Birds of Prey."

life, such as it is, but there's just one little

problem: When she was J-Puddin's gun

moll, she was untouchable. The hordes

of shadowy characters that people Go-

tham's odious underworld couldn't touch

her for fear of the Joker's wrath. Now, sud-

denly, she's very touchable. And being the

stumble-drunk drinker she is, that means

touchable in the Harvey Weinstein sense.

Harley Quinn is Roman Sionis, aka, The Black

Hand (Ewan McGregor). He's a smarmy, vel-

vet-wearing, sleazebag criminal mastermind

who devolves into a rage-aholic enfant terri-

ble when he doesn't immediately get his way.

If he doesn't like you, he'll have his goon

Victor Zsasz (Chris Messina) slice your

face off. That is sooo much fun to watch.

The Birds of Prey are a girl gang from

the "Batman" comics, which until now

has never included Harley Quinn. It was

Robbie's idea to have Quinn join forces

with them and add the character Renee

Montoya, played by Rosie Perez, for the more

moral, cop perspective. Also she wanted to

add a mentor situation like the one in "Léon:

The Professional," hence the Cassandra

The Birds of Prey are Jurnee Smollett-Bell

as Black Canary, a professional nightclub

singer who has, in addition to superheroic

Huntress (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) basi-

cally just shoots a crossbow and gets upset at

jokes about her self-appointed hero handle.

Winstead can't quite handle the deadpan

Lastly, Ella Jay Basco plays teenage pick-

pocket Cassandra Cain, who swallows a

giant diamond that Roman Sionis wants.

Harley, who acts as Cassandra's deranged

humor required for the nerdy character.

role, the youngest character, came to be.

The Birds

hatter stuff

One major bad guy who wants a piece of

What we've got here is a dark, twisted fairytale of a psychotic, beautiful, addicted, murderous, childlike, amoral, immoral waif, who bashes heads and blows cops away with confetti-filled beanbag guns at close range. A veritable Harlequin-esque (Harlequin, Harley Quinn-get it?), Coney-Island-type fun house of a movie.

It's been said that Harley Quinn stands for female emancipation, like, from the Joker's, you know, patriarchy. Emancipated to do what? Swear nonstop, and steal, is what. She robs a grocery store, claiming that "paying is for suckers." And we find we like all her vehement mayhem. Why? Because Ewan McGregor's Black Hand is so sadistic when torturing women and children that we need to be able to feel joy when the Birds of Prey even the score in like fashion.

The excess, if "cartoonish," violence might have a positive message if Harley and her girls figured out that by meting out eye-foran-eye retribution, the oppressed immediately morphs into the oppressor. But that's grownup stuff. Who's the target audience here? Teen girls, presumably. But it's rated R, which means that teens, tweens, and prepubescents will be lapping this nasty fare up surreptitiously on laptops under the covers at pajama parties and sleepovers when the parents have retired.

fight skills, a supernormal voice that can There are no morals anywhere in sight, unless you count keeping a hyena trapped in a tiny New York apartment as an act of kindness. (Maybe it was a rescue hyena.)

I should lighten up, you say? Noooo, not today. This movie is such a boiling froglittle girls are going to see cute, murderous Harley Quinn and think all this nonsense is quite OK. I will not lighten up today.

If grown women want to cheer men getting whacked in a variety of ways: getting their knees broken, groins smashed—and my personal favorite, beards set on firethat's their prerogative. But parents should put some effort into avoiding having Harley Quinn and the Birds of Prey become role models for impressionable, young girls.

> Pyrenees-and he successfully captured the sense of "magical storytelling" that the original author, Morpurgo, is known for.

> The acting is likewise a joy to witness, with standout performances by cinema stalwarts Huston and Reno, as well as relative newcomer Schnapp. Through their depictions of the townsfolk, you really sense the palpable danger.

And because it's based on a true story, you also sense how desperate these heroic figures must have been in real life.

"Waiting for Anya" is a wellput-together film that portrays a ragtag group of people who, through their selfless acts, are able to help those in need. Although melodramatic in spots, it offers an inspiring, good-hearted, and relatively family-friendly cinematic experience.

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

Who's the

target audience

presumably.

mentor, offers a choice to get that diamond back out of Cassandra: laxative or knife. **Bang for Your Buck?** You will most assuredly get a bang for your buck. Many bangs with a baseball bat, a

THEATER REVIEW

RUSSIAN MASTERS' WORKS Brought to the Stage

DIANA BARTH

EW YORK—Can short stories morph into theatrical entities? British playwright and actor Miles Malleson has theatricalized two short stories by great Russian authors Anton Chekhov and Leo Tolstoy. These are now being presented by the Mint Theater at its Off-Broadway venue in Manhattan.

By Chekhov

First up of this dual bill is "The Artist," adapted by Malleson from Chekhov's "An Artist's Story," in which painter Nicov (Alexander Sokovikov) is seen practicing his art in the garden of a country house somewhere in Russia.

Nicov is interrupted by a lovely young neighbor, Genya (Anna Lentz), who waxes enthusiastically about the landscape on Nicov's easel. Moved by her charm, the painter offers the painting to her as a gift.

Genya's older sister Lidia (Brittany Anikka Liu) has a negative attitude toward art, considering it a useless pursuit. Strict and disciplined, she is self-supporting as a teacher, and devotes herself to social causes: helping the poor and seeing to it that the town's schools and hospitals are kept functioning smoothly.

The girls' mother (Katie Firth) leaves the running of their household to the dominant Lidia. Byelkurov (J. Paul Nicholas), owner of the nearby house where Nicov is staying, sometimes appears and spars intellectually with Nicov.



It becomes clear that Nicov and

While Nicov and Lidia spout

their opposing views, it's clear

that these two major characters

are spokespeople for Chekhov's

own political and social views. So

we have a fascinating look into his

Chekhov (1860–1904), during

his brief 44-year lifetime, wrote

an astonishing multitude of short

stories and many notable plays,

including the masterful quartet

of "The Seagull," "Uncle Vanya,"

"The Three Sisters," and "The

Cherry Orchard." Yet he found

time to perform his duties as a

Under Jonathan Bank's astute

direction, the cast performs ably.

A particular plus is the presence

of Alexander Sokovikov, an au-

thentic Russian actor, graduated

from Moscow's Russian Academy

concerns.

medical doctor.

of Theatre Arts.

By Tolstoy

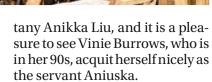
Genya are strongly drawn to one another and make plans to be together. Fate—or Lidia—(and Chekhov) intervene. The play's ending is abrupt and startling. The next play "Michael," adapted from Leo Tolstoy's "What Men Live By," is in the style of an allegory. A poor peasant shoemaker,

A poor peasant shoemaker, Simon (J. Paul Nicholas), takes home with him a naked man he has discovered on the road. Simon's wife Matryona (Katie Firth) at first objects to this deed, but she soon relents out of sympathy for the man, called Michael (Malik Reed).

Michael proves to be a godsend (in more ways than one, as we will discover). He is a master shoemaker and attracts a lot of business, making the couple prosperous.

It turns out that Michael is being punished, apparently by a higher power. However, odd events occur that enable him to redeem himself, and he can return to his rightful home—which is not of this earth.

Alexander Sokovikov plays a Russian noble who needs new boots, and Anna Lentz is his servant. A Woman is played by Brit-



Sound designer Jane Shaw, a longtime colleague of Mint artistic director Jonathan Bank, acquits herself well here in her directorial debut.

Tolstoy lived to the ripe old age of 82 (1828–1910). He wrote a great number of short stories, some plays, and some novels. Arguably, he is best celebrated for his masterly novels "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina," both known to millions via cinematic and televised versions. He is lauded for the Christian views that permeate his works.

Recommended for lovers of Chekhov and Tolstoy, and for anyone who views the theater as a place to think, as well as to be entertained.

Diana Barth writes for various theater publications, including "New Millennium." For information visit diabarth99@gmail.com 1. Alexander Sokovikov and Brittany Anikka Liu play characters with opposite ideals in "The Artist," an adaptation of a short story by Anton Chekhov.

2. (L–R) Katie Firth, Vinie Burrows, J. Paul Nicholas, and Malik Reed in "Michael," part of the Mint Theater's world premiere of "Chekhov/Tolstoy Love Stories."

Recommended for lovers of Chekhov and Tolstoy, and for anyone who views the theater as a place to think.

Theater

Mint Theater, Theatre Row 410 W. 42nd St., New York

Tickets 212-239-6200 or Telecharge.com

Running Time 1 hour, 30 minutes (no intermission) Closes

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