

# THE EPOCH TIMES LIFE & TRADITION

Pettitt tells women: 'It's OK to want to be a good wife. It's OK to want to make your husband happy, and it's definitely OK to stand up and preserve the sanctity of marriage.'

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# The Fork in the Road: Making Tough Decisions

JEFF MINICK

Unless we are victims of decidophobia—and yes, that's the name of a psychological condition for those who fear making decisions—most of us have little trouble selecting a possible course of action when the results are inconsequential. We opt for Palmolive over Dove for washing our dishes, or vice versa; we take the gray scarf rather than the red one from the store rack; we choose a movie from Redbox we've previously viewed rather than select a new one because it's a "comfort food" kind of night.

Then there are the big choices, the commitments that will turn our lives upside down.

**What to Do?**

Recently, an outfit I admire offered me the job of a lifetime—or at least, of my recent lifetime. The position would give me the opportunity to work with people I like and respect, to mentor college students, and to earn far more money than I now do. Even to be considered for this post was a high honor for me.

On the other hand, the last two years had brought me satisfaction and joy in my work. After spending some long months in a miserable purgatory I myself had created, I had found more outlets for my articles and was settled into a happy routine of writing, editing, and sending out five or six pieces a week. In addition, if I accepted the position, I would have to live three months of every year in a faraway city.

The pressure of a deadline made my decision-making even tougher. I received the offer on Thursday, and the two kind women describing the position by phone needed an answer by Monday, if not sooner.

As she said her goodbyes, one of my interviewers told me to "think and pray" about what to do. She left out the word agonize. That condition I supplied myself.

**Choices: Nice and Not-So-Nice** Most of us treasure opportunity, but life-changing choices and decisions can make for a harrowing ordeal. You're offered a lucrative job in Pennsylvania, but you have lived 20 years surrounded by family and friends in Virginia. Do you take your wife and children and hie yourself off to the north, or do you turn down the offer and struggle on where you are?

How about that woman you think you love? Do you ask her to marry you, or do you shamble on in your relationship, always unsure, always questioning whether you really love her?

**Some Tips** Google "making decisions" and you'll find scores of online sites with advice on how to make choices. The number



KARL FREDRICKSON/UNPLASH

**Most of us treasure opportunity, but life-changing choices and decisions can make for a harrowing ordeal.**



Make a list of the consequences of your decision and then consider the positives and negatives.

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of these advisers alone indicates we human beings struggle with choice and change.

Here, for what it's worth, are the steps I took in deciding my future.

**Consider your initial reactions to the choice before you.** If your boss calls and offers you a promotion, and you dance around the apartment after putting down the phone, that delight is a sign of acceptance. If that guy you love wants to put a ring on your finger, and your heart leaps for joy, go for it. On the other hand, if that call from the boss or the proposal leaves you sitting on the porch at sunset with a glass of wine in your hand and doubt in your heart, it's time for some deeper contemplation.

**Get as much information as possible.** Ask for details. The details of how I have lived my life these past two years are crystal clear to me, but the details behind the offer as originally extended to me were vague. This lack of information was not the fault of those interviewing me, but my own for failing to ask more questions. A follow-up call and half an hour of conversation helped clarify my responsibilities in the job offered to me.

**Make a list of the consequences of your decision.** Can you handle the additional responsibilities that accompany your promotion? Are you ready for marriage and all that it entails? Do you have what it takes to upend your life, move to a faraway city, and work with strangers? Or are you happier where you are? Draw up a list of positives and negatives, as I did, and then study what you have written.

**Talk to friends and family.** Get on the

phone and see how others react to your possibilities. Really listen to them. Answer their questions, share your doubts and your dreams, and take in their responses. Later, you can return to that porch with your glass of wine and ponder the advice they offered.

**Weigh the consequences.** Think long-term. This step is important. Look at the costs as well as the benefits of your choices. If the offer of a job involves moving from New Orleans to Kansas City, ask yourself where you would be happier. If you decide to leave a steady job in a financial planning firm to become an independent realtor, ask yourself if you have the oomph and self-motivation to succeed in this drastic change of employment.

**Abide by your decision.** Once you've made up your mind, don't spend time second-guessing yourself as to the choice you made. It's wasted effort. Live by what you have decided, unless the situation becomes unbearable. If you move to Kansas City and find yourself miserable after six months, then speak to your employers and ask for a change. If you marry that guy, and your lives together have hit a rough patch, then address the issue with your husband and try to make that marriage better.

**Wrestling With Myself**

In my own case, I walked through all of these steps. I looked at my initial reaction to the offer and realized I was doubtful rather than joyful. I made that follow-up call to obtain more information. I worked out a list of the positives and negatives. I spoke with two friends and emailed a family member, all of whom reacted differently to my news. I weighed the consequences—more money but far less time for my writing, a new adventure but fewer opportunities to visit with my grandchildren.

**The Outcome**

I turned down the offer. When I made this decision, an immense feeling of relief washed over me, which I accepted as a sign that I had taken the right path, however alluring the other path had appeared. In this particular fork-in-the-road moment, I had made the best decision for me and probably for my prospective employers. onward.

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# Alena Pettitt

## A Voice for Traditional Housewives

CHANNALY PHILIPP

The danger posed by a marmalade-making, vacuum-wickling housewife apparently can't be overstated—at least that's the impression you might get if you were to scan headlines in U.K. media in the past couple of months.

When the BBC interviewed Alena Pettitt, a 34-year-old housewife from Gloucestershire, England, about what being a traditional wife means to her, the headline read "#TradWife: Submitting to My Husband Like It's 1959."

Despite the eye-catching headline, the coverage was fairly neutral: Pettitt spoke about her life and values as a housewife. Media reactions were swift; housewives who spoke up in favor of their lifestyles and traditional values were denigrated as "extremists" and as being "as misogynistic as men," in one editorial published by the Independent; in The Guardian, links were drawn to the alt-right movement, with a final note that admitted that being a happy housewife did not equate to being a Nazi, but claimed nevertheless, "it's time to dial down a notch, tradwives, for your own sake."

So, what's all this sound and snark about? Well, to elaborate on Pettitt's case, the mom and housewife runs a website called The Darling Academy, which delves into British lifestyle—good manners, homemaking tips (an entry on "Pressing Matters" is all about proper ironing), and old-fashioned recipes.

Her Instagram feed gives a peek into her life: flowers beautifully arranged in a vase in anticipation of spring; relishing a cup of Earl Grey tea and procrastinating before doing her least favorite chore, mopping; scones, cream, and jam (all so English!). It's a snapshot of a warm home and the activities that go into its upkeep.

On her website, Pettitt writes: "It's OK to want to be a good wife. It's OK to want to make your husband happy, and it's definitely OK to stand up and preserve the sanctity of marriage. 1809, 1909, 1959, 2020—it's all the same. Women haven't changed—society's narrative has, but they too often spin lies to make us feel bad about living 'differently' from the norm."

She got the message very young that being a housewife wasn't exactly encouraged.

**Different Messages**

Pettitt points out that around age 11 or so, girls playing with dolls or at homemaking activities are expected to drop all of this. Contrast this to the experience of boys, who might stick with their love of race cars, video games, carpentry, or other masculine hobbies well into adulthood.

"That's because this is where expectations start coming in. For girls these days, their childhood toys are often replaced with the pursuit of fame, beauty, and popularity, Pettitt said. And, of course, career expectations.

"I was only ever celebrated when I spoke about ambition—workplace ambition," she recalled. "It really was a sense of feeling ashamed for who I was, and being shamed for who I was, as well."

She said that for 10 years, because of societal expectations, she suppressed her femininity and her desire to be a housewife, as she took on a career in marketing.

"It was survival mode for me," she said. She worked in the beauty industry, in which the environment could be especially toxic and competitive.

It came too much. She took off a year from work. During this time, she looked after the home, while her now-husband provided. They both loved the arrangement: she wasn't stressed anymore, having the time to look after the home and after him. As they took on complementary roles, the stress and fighting in their marriage turned to fun and flirting.

"He's better at making money and slaying dragons, and I'm a better cook, making small talk in the playground, and I actually enjoy the ironing—it's a win-win. Plus, I adore that man! Why wouldn't I want to spoil him?" Pettitt wrote on her website.

But others saw it differently. "The outside world would shame us because, you know, I was [seen as] a freeloader and taking advantage of him, and he was foolish for supporting me. We still get that,

funny enough," she said. Now that her son is 7 and in school, she is expected to "go back to work"—that is, work as they see it.

"If I was going, for example, to the family next door and doing their housework and their cooking and being paid for it, that's valid," she said.

"We celebrate all of these women that are making great achievements in the working world and give them awards. But if I want to encourage women to be better homemakers ... to be more efficient—because when they do that, they feel in control and have more sense of pride in the job—I'm apparently sending us back to the 1950s.

"We're living in a world now where people hate the idea of homemaking, or homemakers, or housewives. There is a real prejudice towards that."

Once ashamed, Pettitt won't be bullied for her choice now. She believes it's her calling to help women who were like her 10 years ago. In finding her voice—drawing attention, and sometimes ire, when speaking about all things housewifely—she has given confidence to other women who are, or who wish to be, homemakers or housewives.

"I'm raising my child myself and I'm creating this loving, nested environment where people come in and I get praised on my hospitality skills and making people feel welcome. And I love it," she said.

**Confidence for Women, Hope for Men**

Many women have told her, "You have finally given me confidence in what I'm doing, and you are the only person who has validated what I'm doing."

Husbands, too, are writing in. "I've had husbands email me on saying that their wives saw me on TV, and they've been depressed because they feel so devalued. But it was a glimmer of hope for them," Pettitt said.

But perhaps the most surprising group of people to write in with supportive emails is young, single men—men who want to be providers, who say they want nothing more than to have a family and to find a woman who feels similarly about homemaking and raising children.

"They have hope again" to find a traditional wife—and have even asked her to set them up on dates, she said.

**Darling Academy**

For women who are seeking to rediscover or reclaim their femininity, Pettitt advised finding and surrounding themselves with like-minded ladies. In a past age, women might have found female mentors in their own communities, but that's not always possible. Enter: the online world.

"That's the beauty of the age that we're living in, because you might not find it on your doorstep and in your community. But you can find it online, which is exactly what I've had to do, because there's no one who is like me in my social circle," Pettitt said.

Then comes a period of self-discovery. "You need to really make decisions for yourself and search your heart about how you want to approach things: Am I really happy wearing this type of clothing? Am I really happy with this style of dating? Am I really happy with the way I present myself? And then it's self-improvement. So it's books, and it's courses. You have to put aside any fear because there will be criticism. But there's criticism for anything you do in life, but it's liberating when you finally live as you are."

Pettitt also runs a YouTube channel, a Facebook page, and now a private Facebook group of about 700 women from all around the world, at different stages in their relationships. Unlike some online groups of traditional housewives, it has no religious or political bent.

Recently, a young mother asked to join, but told Pettitt she didn't think she would get accepted because of her goth style. Pettitt wasn't judgmental about it; she found it modest, just with darker colors than her own, a Morticia Addams to her Doris Day.

"How you look doesn't qualify you as a homemaker and a traditional housewife. It's about the position of your heart," she said.

**The Romance of It All**

Pettitt describes her home life as a fairy tale—"in the sense of, I've got my lovely little nest



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**"I'm creating this loving, nested environment where people come in and I get praised on my hospitality skills and making people feel welcome. And I love it."**

Alena Pettitt



Pettitt's Darling Academy offers tips on all aspects of homemaking, including relationships.



Pettitt about to go on the Jeremy Vine Show on BBC Radio 2.

[where] I put flowers in jars and pump up cushions." And more than anything else, she gets to focus on the people she loves the most in the whole world.

The other day, she made marmalade, which she normally buys. Her family found it lovely. "When I put that on the breakfast table, and I've made it myself, there's a real sense of achievement and a real sense of pride," she said. "Everything's full of love and attention."

She said she wouldn't change her life for the world. "To be 'empowered,' earning my own salary in a job that I'm really miserable in, in an office of 10 people that I couldn't care less about and a boss that shouts at me because I'm five minutes late? No, thank you."

Pettitt also said that as a result of managing her time well, she's been able to pursue her passion for writing. She has written "Ladies Like Us," a gentle guide on what it means to be a lady today, and "English Etiquette."

"They took a while to do, but I've actually managed to achieve a lifelong dream in the process of living another dream," she said.

Pettitt remembers that when she was growing up, her mom and most of her friends' moms were busy working. There was no time to spend as a family because her mother would get home so late.

"It's not like she had one job. She actually had two, because we haven't laid aside homemaking and housework," she said. "I remember seeing my mom spend the entire weekend doing the housework."

The message these days that you can be anything and do anything is sold as empowerment, power, and happiness, Pettitt said. But not everyone harbors corporate ambitions.

"My husband and I, our ambition is to have a small home that has no mortgage, and free time to spend with one another and indulge in our hobbies. We are kind of urban homesteaders at the moment, but we would love a smallholding [a small farm]. And that's it. You know, we don't want to rule the world."

Based in the Cotswolds, U.K., Pettitt encourages women to be better homemakers, inspiring them through advice on housekeeping, marriage and family, and traditions—many of them English-based, such as cream tea.

## The Key to Contentment, According to Wisdom of the Past

BARBARA DANZA

"If only \_\_\_\_, then I'd be happy." Did your mind fill in that blank when you read it? Perhaps, it was "I lost 20 pounds," "I made more money," "I had a nicer house," "I met my soulmate," "I was prettier/taller/skinnyer/more fit," or "I liked my job."

The "if only" mindset keeps you stranded in life's perpetual waiting room. You sit there waiting for the life you want to show up. In the meantime, life goes on—seemingly passing you by as your mind is elsewhere.

What if you didn't have to wait for your "if only" scenario to materialize to be happy? What if one "if only" leads to another, with satisfaction nowhere in sight? The truth is, your life is happening right now, and you can find joy in it if you so choose.

It's common to hang on to "if only." People have been doing so for ages, and some of the best thinkers throughout time have

shared their ideas on the matter. Let's take a look at what those sages said. "It isn't what you have or who you are or where you are or what you are doing that makes you happy. It's what you think about it." —*Dale Carnegie*

Fundamentally, the "if only" mindset is just that—a mindset. Having goals and aims in life is, of course, great, but you can enjoy the journey to achieving them and the life in between as well. Look for the good in your life now and make note of, as Carnegie puts it, "how you think about it."

"Because one believes in oneself, one doesn't try to convince others. Because one is content with oneself, one doesn't need others' approval. Because one accepts oneself, the whole world accepts

him or her." —*Lao Tzu*  
Often, we feel discontent because we aren't getting the feedback, the acceptance, or the praise we yearn for from others. True contentment, though, comes from within. What if you let go of the need for eternal validation?  
"For after all, the best thing one can do when it is raining is let it rain." —*Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*  
Inherent in "if only" is a sense of control over our circumstances. Of course, we aren't in control of everything and can only control ourselves. What's more, we aren't omniscient. Perhaps a better fate than our imagined "if only" awaits us.

Allow room in your life for the unknown and learn to roll with the ups and downs as they come.

"He who is not contented with what he has would not be contented with what he would like to have." —*Socrates*  
Perhaps, you've experienced achieving a goal in the past, one you had said "if only" about. Once achieved, though, your happiness was temporary. You soon conjured a new threshold for "if only."

The key to contentment in life is finding it in the here and now. "The greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions, and not upon our circumstances." —*Martha Washington*

Happiness is rarely something that magically befalls us, but something we choose to experience. What are you choosing? "Wealth consists not in having great possessions, but in having few wants." —*Epictetus*  
It's easy to look around and find others who seem to have more and better fortunes. Of course, it's difficult to know the

true blessings or misfortunes others have experienced in life. More importantly, though, comparison, as they say, "is the thief of joy." Minimizing desires is the path to real good fortune.

"True contentment is a thing as active as agriculture. It is the power of getting out of any situation all that there is in it. It is arduous and it is rare." —*Gilbert K. Chesterton*

There is good to be found in everything. How much joy, wonder, beauty, and goodness might we encounter if we accepted the life that presents itself before us and simply aimed to extract from it as possible?  
"Be content with what you have; rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you." —*Lao Tzu*  
Your life is happening right now. "If only" you could appreciate it for how wondrous it actually is.

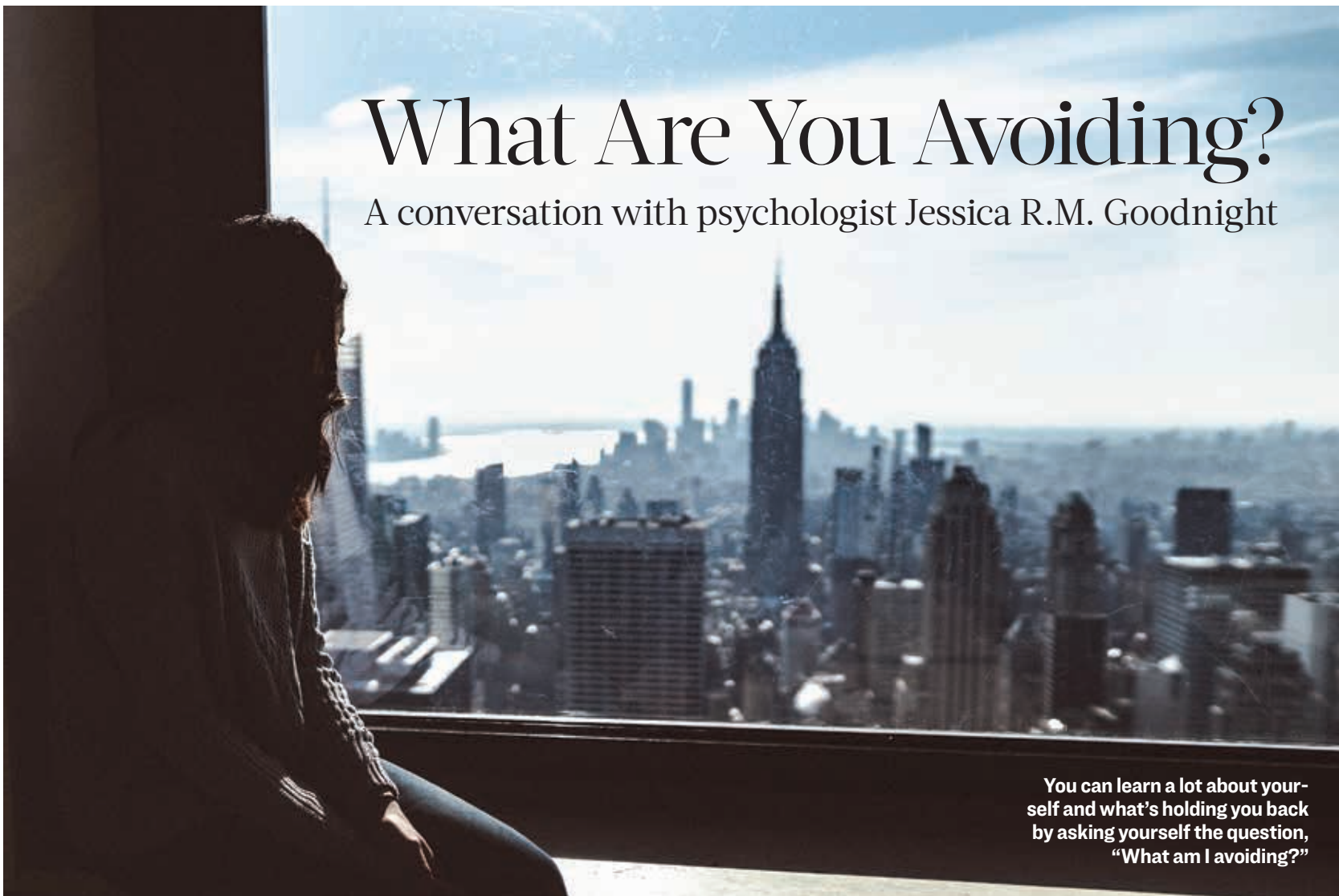
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# What Are You Avoiding?

A conversation with psychologist Jessica R.M. Goodnight



You can learn a lot about yourself and what's holding you back by asking yourself the question, "What am I avoiding?"

## BARBARA DANZA

Are there things you're avoiding in your life?

Perhaps, it's a pile of mail because a scary bill may be lurking in there. Perhaps, it's a conversation that you really should have with your spouse or a colleague. Perhaps, it's your email inbox, a repository of unfulfilled obligations and expectations. Perhaps, it's a goal you have that you're afraid to start, in case you might fail.

You can learn a lot about yourself and what's holding you back by asking yourself the question, "What am I avoiding?"

Once you determine you're avoiding something, how can you begin to break this habit of avoiding and stop putting off the things you should face?

I spoke to clinical psychologist Jessica R.M. Goodnight to better understand this coping mechanism of avoidance and how we can stem its influence in our lives. Here's what she said.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What is avoidance coping? Is it different from procrastination?

**DR. JESSICA GOODNIGHT:** Avoidance coping encompasses basically anything we do to avoid thinking or feeling something that might make us uncomfortable.

Procrastination is often a form of avoidance coping. But not always! It really depends on why we're procrastinating. Sometimes, we procrastinate because a task just isn't that interesting or doesn't fit with our values or goals, so we sort of twiddle our thumbs in pro-

test, knowingly or not. But often, procrastination has roots in fear and anxiety—fear of failure, fear of being evaluated by others, perfectionist standards—and we procrastinate because the task brings up those uncomfortable feelings.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** How common is the behavior of avoidance as a coping mechanism?

**DR. GOODNIGHT:** Extremely common. We all do it, to a greater or lesser extent. Avoidance is actually the normal way people act when we feel afraid; this tendency is literally necessary for our survival. Think about it—if we didn't run when we were scared, what would drive us to jump out of the way if faced with a moving car?

The problem is that we now apply the same survival mechanisms to situations that have much lower stakes, like a work presentation. Human biology hasn't caught up, so our emotions might treat the prospect of one bad presentation as if it were as dangerous as oncoming traffic.

People who have overcome the tendency to avoid have probably taught themselves how to "feel the fear and do it anyway."

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What are some common ways people use avoidance?

**DR. GOODNIGHT:** Distraction is probably the most common form of avoidance. Don't want to think about something? Easy, just scroll through social media or turn on the TV. Another common avoidance strategy—worrying. When we think and think and plan for the future and try to predict every possible bad outcome, we might be

Clinical psychologist Jessica R.M. Goodnight of the Anxiety and Trauma Clinic of Atlanta. COURTESY OF JESSICA R.M. GOODNIGHT



“**Distraction is probably the most common form of avoidance. Don't want to think about something? Easy, just scroll through social media or turn on the TV.**”

Jessica R.M. Goodnight

avoiding experiencing reality for what it is. All that preparation is like armor we build up in advance for a terrible future that might never—and probably won't—come. If we prepare appropriately and then just allow reality to be as it is, that might bring up some uncomfortable feelings, especially for chronic worriers or overplanners. Worrying makes us feel in control; this is an illusion.

But sometimes avoidant strategies are very simple—you just don't do things that make you feel bad. This form of avoidance is usually the one that wreaks the most havoc in life. If there are things you just can't do, that tends to be very life-limiting.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What are the potential consequences of avoidance?

**DR. GOODNIGHT:** There are many possible consequences of avoidance, but I would say there are two big ones. The first is that it can rob you of your own sense of how capable you are. If you tend to do a lot of avoidant coping, that can sometimes communicate to your brain, "I can't handle things" or even "I'm weak" or "I'm broken." So avoidance tends to really harm self-esteem.

The second thing is that avoidance often limits your freedom, especially if you are engaging in behavioral avoidance: not doing things that make you feel uncomfortable. Behavioral avoidance in some cases is like living inside an ever-shrinking box. Your options narrow.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** How can you recognize in yourself the tendency to avoid?

**DR. GOODNIGHT:** When you're trying to recognize avoidance, it's impor-

tant to first think about your values. Think: "If I wasn't afraid, what would I be doing? If it didn't make me uncomfortable, what changes would I want in my life?" Take some time with this question and try not to be hard on yourself; it's human nature to avoid discomfort. But, if your behavior doesn't match up with your personal values, you might be avoiding.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What are some practical ways to avoid avoiding?

**DR. GOODNIGHT:** I recommend the mantra, "May I be guided by my hopes and not my fears." For some people, simply having this intentionality can help you tackle avoidant tendencies.

If it's not so simple, start practicing awareness of your own drive toward avoidance. Mindfulness meditation often helps here. It doesn't need to be complicated—simply taking a daily shower where you try to be fully present the whole time might help you notice just how strong your tendency is to be "elsewhere" in your mind. You could also try one of the many mindfulness meditation apps. This should allow for better recognizing avoidance when it's happening.

You might start noticing, "Wow, I just turned on the TV because I didn't want to think about what happened today at work." The first step to stopping avoidance is noticing when it's happening, catching yourself in the act, and choosing a different path. This is a practice, not something that can be solved in a few days. Regular practice of mindfulness probably won't have much impact until you've been doing it for at least a few weeks.

Then, see if you can start slowly doing things that you care about, that you've been avoiding because of how they make you feel. Go a little at a time here, this is hard work. Start taking little risks, and see what happens. This is how fear is overcome.

If the avoided task is a big, complicated one, it might help to make a specific game plan. I really like SMART goals for this. Say you've been procrastinating on clearing your email inbox because it feels overwhelming. You might need to break it down into specific, actionable steps, such as "clear 20 emails from my inbox every day this month." Make each specific task slightly challenging, but totally doable.

I will say that there are plenty of people that might need professional assistance in overcoming avoidance, such as people with anxiety disorders, OCD, PTSD, and depression. In this case, I urge people to seek help from a therapist specializing in cognitive behavioral therapy—and if avoidance is driven by anxiety, make sure they practice exposure therapy. Exposure therapy is a way of overcoming avoidance with the guidance of a therapist, who helps you navigate this process if it's too complicated or emotionally intense to do on your own.

IRINA TORISUNOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK



Children learn and develop their behavior by watching others, especially their parents, and this includes screen use.

## Finding Quality, Screen-Free Time

A study of more than 6,000 children aged 8–13 found that more than one-third of children felt unimportant when their parents used a phone during meals, conversations, and during other family time. Children, whose parents are distracted by their phones during such family times, can feel like they are competing for attention, which can often result in them acting out because they feel sad, angry, and lonely.

Children thrive when they feel safe and receive the attention of their parents. Switching off and putting screens away during family time and time with children on their own is key for happy parenting, happy children, positive relationships, and strong connections.

Evidence suggests that being present (not distracted) leads to parents feeling the rewards from their immediate social environment. The same evidence suggests that the technology that intends to connect us can, ironically, undermine the connection with the most important people in our lives.

*Natalie Pearson is a senior research associate in physical activity and public health at Loughborough University in the U.K. This article was originally published on The Conversation.*

# Invisible Men: The Prisoners Among Us

ROBYN BECK/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



▲ The United States has the largest number of prisoners in the world; 2.3 million Americans are imprisoned in various facilities throughout the country, according to the Prison Policy Initiative. Above, Theo Lacy Facility, a county jail in Orange, Calif.

## JEFF MINICK

Mike came into the classroom, African-American, mid-30s and built like a guy who had played tackle on his high school football team. He kept eyeing me as I helped the other students. Finally, he raised his hand and asked me, "Where are you from?"

"Waynesville." It was the county seat, about five miles away.

"But where in Waynesville?"

"I own the bed and breakfast on Pigeon Street."

He laughed. "Man, I used to live in the stone house across the street."

I smiled back. "I thought you looked familiar."

"I robbed some houses on that street," he said. "But I never hit yours."

"Thank you, Mike," I told him.

## My Time in Prison

In the early 1990s, I taught Adult Basic Education at a minimum-security prison in Hazelwood, North Carolina. About a dozen prisoners met with me in a trailer behind their barracks on Monday and Tuesday evenings, where I would teach them math and reading, and they would teach me lessons gained from lives beyond my experience.

These men ranged from illiterates to those working toward a high school diploma via the GED. Mike was a member of the latter group, and eventually he did earn his diploma. Several years later, I ran into him and his family in the parking lot of a convenience store, where he told me he was now working as a welder and making good money. He had made a success of himself.

Bill was not so lucky.

He was in his 60s, wild-haired, grizzled, with a crazed glint in his eye, and came to classes only to get out of the barracks. Several times, to me or to the other prisoners, he made threats against his wife for reasons I never discerned.

A week after his release,

the police shot Bill dead in a chicken coop behind his wife's house.

**Conversations With Eric** Eric and I became acquainted. He was a drug dealer from Charlotte, rumored to have killed a man. Once when I was helping him with percentages, his face suddenly lit up. "I used to do this stuff all the time on the street."

"Well, good for you," I said.

"What did you do?"

"I dealt drugs," he said, as casually as someone else might say "I teach English literature."

Eric told me that while he was in jail awaiting trial, his mother—all these prisoners had a deep reverence for motherhood—visited him. "Son, son," she said, "I can't believe you were selling drugs."

"Mom," Eric said, "I bought you a nice house and a boat for myself, and I wasn't working. Where did you think the money was coming from?"

## Falling Down

Not all of these men were as bright as Mike and Eric. There was a boy of about 20, for instance, a skinny kid missing some teeth, who was imprisoned for child molestation and who spent most of his time in the classroom drawing trucks. Given his limited mental capacities and emotional state, society might have better served Steve by placing him in a mental institution.

William took the GED twice, failed miserably, and asked me what was wrong with him. Though I encouraged him to keep trying, I lacked the heart to tell him he lacked the mental skills to pass the test.

Morris had murdered his wife after he'd found her in bed with another man. He was the quietest of all the prisoners, and yes, I know this sounds weird, but he had a shy, gentle way about him and was quite likeable.

Here are some general impressions these men left on me.

**The Usual Suspects** Most of the inmates were

Caucasian. Hazelwood is in the Smoky Mountains, and mountains were not conducive to plantations and slaves. The state made an effort to place prisoners near their homes, hence the large number of whites versus African-Americans.

The majority of the inmates were there for drug-related offenses, either for dealing or possession.

And of the inmates who lacked even a basic education, almost to a man they told me they had liked school until third grade. Third grade with its greater demands in math—multiplication, division—reading, and writing had brought their schooling to a standstill.

As far as I could tell, all of these men came from impoverished homes, and few of them had any skills in the trades.

Many of them, particularly the younger ones, spoke fondly of their mothers, but none of them ever mentioned their fathers.

## The Bigger Picture

The United States has the largest number of prisoners in the world. At Prison Policy Initiative, Wendy Sawyer and Peter Wagner report that 2.3 million Americans are imprisoned in various

facilities throughout the United States. The statistics they cite offer some surprises, such as the fact that over 500,000 men and women occupy jail cells at any given time because they are too poor to make bail.

The good news is that incarceration rates, like crime rates, are falling in our country. Recently passed into law by our Congress and president, the First Step Act may help reduce these numbers even further and provide some training programs and other assistance to those leaving prison.

**As far as I could tell, all of these men came from impoverished homes, and few of them had any skills in the trades.**

Such programs will help, but in the long run, fixing our failed schools and our broken families and reviving moral principles in our people will matter most. A man raised in poverty

without a male model to emulate who can barely read and who has never learned a trade has little chance for success in this world. Forty percent of babies today are born outside of wedlock, and an article in U.S. News & World Report tells us that the 2019 National Assessment Education Project found that reading and math scores, never all that high, again fell this year.

The resurrection of the traditional family, improving our schools, and teaching virtue in any number of forums are the best antidotes against incarceration.

The Hazelwood prison is closed now, and the inmates I taught there are now 30 years older, or dead. But they live on in my memory, and I hope some of them, like Mike, left that place, became better men, caught a break, and made their way in the world.

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

# 'Technoference': Why We Should Be Worried About Parents' Screen Time

## NATALIE PEARSON

Many young people spend significantly more time using screens than is recommended by health professionals. Excessive screen time has been blamed for several ills, including obesity and poor mental health. To mitigate these negative effects, we need to understand the things that encourage children to spend lots of time in front of a screen.

Children learn and develop their behavior by watching others, especially their parents, and this includes screen use. In fact, the types of devices parents use and the length of time they use them for are the strongest predictors of their child's screen use and screen time. Parents also control the availability of screens and technology and set the rules on their use.

## Distractions Parenting

Although parents are responsible for setting the limits for their child's screen time, the demands of the modern world—and work and home-life duties—can make it difficult for parents to switch off and limit their own screen time. The constant connectivity that mobile phones allow makes it increasingly difficult to manage and can result in distracted parenting.

While it is thought that parents spend

more time with their children than in the past, the quality of the interactions is thought to have decreased. In a study from the United States, parents of children aged 5–18 reported spending slightly less quality time with their kids than they spend on their phones.

Sociologists, media theorists, and technology experts have argued that digital technology is distracting us, resulting in negative social and emotional consequences. While we know that parents' screen time influences their child's screen time, we know less about the consequences of distracted parenting because of screen time.

"Just a minute" is a common phrase heard by children, and many parents admit to spending too much time on their phone while with their children. The effects of such phrases have led social scientists to coin the word "technoference" to describe how technology interferes in social relationships, including the most important relationship of all: the one between parents and their children.

Parents' technoference can have negative consequences for babies and young children, including impaired emotional well-being, parents missing bids for attention, less positive interactions, poor child behavior, delayed language development, and an increase in child injuries.

## YOUR MONEY

# Money Moves You Can Make Instead of Panicking

**NEW YORK—**Spoiler alert: None of the useful things you can do about your money right now involve your 401(k). Financial advisers tend to caution long-term retirement investors to stay the course during times of high volatility, like now with financial markets slumping on worries over the coronavirus outbreak's impact on growth.

Their advice? Do not look at your statements. Do not turn off your next automatic contributions. Do not get out of the market, thinking you can get back in at the right time.

If you are anxious and keen to act, there are productive moves you could make other than stockpiling toilet paper for a possible quarantine or cashing out your investments.

**1. Save even more** High-yield savings accounts are something of a misnomer today, but an interest rate of 1.75 percent at an online bank is a lot better than the .01 percent that most of the major banks are offering on

no-fee accounts. It just takes a few clicks to open up an account.

Then take a few more minutes, go to your online payroll portal, and set up a direct transfer from every paycheck into that savings account. Within months, you will have a substantial emergency savings fund, which most Americans lack.

**Financial advisers tend to caution long-term retirement investors to stay the course during times of high volatility.**

"Everyone should check in with their finances and see what they can do better, even if it's a small step," said George Barany, director of America Saves, a non-profit division of the Consumer Federation of America.

**2. Refinance your mortgage** Look at your mortgage rate. If it is over 4 percent, you might be able to do better right now.

"Most anybody who bought a house in 2018 or first half of 2019 is in exactly that position," said Greg McBride, chief financial analyst at Bankrate.com.

Rates depend on the property and borrower's specifics, but you should be able to find a rate in the 3 percent range with no points.

**3. Finish your taxes** Studies show that loyalty to home and auto insurance companies does not actually pay off—the companies count on your complacency.

"Comparison shop and see what else is out there," said Bankrate's McBride. "Don't just get in the habit of paying the renewal. Particularly if you are seeing an increase, it's a ripe time."

When you are shopping those policies, keep in mind that if you put in the time to do the savings steps above, you might have the cash to pay the yearly premium

ward," said Pete Isberg, vice president of government relations at ADP, the payroll processor, because it more closely aligns with the tax form.

But it will take some time to fill it out, cautioned Jonathan Barber, senior vice president of tax policy and research at Ayco, a Goldman Sachs company.

"You need to sit down and go through it with your taxes and your paystub."

**4. Online shop, but to save** Studies show that loyalty to home and auto insurance companies does not actually pay off—the companies count on your complacency. "Comparison shop and see what else is out there," said Bankrate's McBride. "Don't just get in the habit of paying the renewal. Particularly if you are seeing an increase, it's a ripe time."

When you are shopping those policies, keep in mind that if you put in the time to do the savings steps above, you might have the cash to pay the yearly premium

all at once and save up to 5 percent. You can also usually score discounts for completing online learning modules for safe driving.

"That's time well-spent if you're sitting at home, with the added benefit that you end up being a better driver," added McBride.

**5. OK, one peek at retirement** Of course, when markets are going crazy, you want to look at your retirement account. One productive thing to do right now is to consider making a contribution to a Roth IRA account, where the growth will accumulate tax-free.

If you do so, consider where your account is housed. The market is being transformed by zero-commission trades. If you have investment accounts at institutions that are still charging you for trades, consider moving. Even though a fee like \$4.95 per transaction may sound cheap, free always sounds better.

*By Beth Pinsker  
From Reuters*



# How One Father Is Helping Families Struggling With Addiction

Steve M. Grant lost two sons to drug overdose

ANDREW THOMAS

Losing a child is a parent's worst nightmare. Steve M. Grant of Greenville, South Carolina, is 61 and tragically lost his two and only sons, both to drug overdoses. His oldest son Chris passed away when he was only 21 years old from a cocaine and methadone overdose. Only five years later, his youngest son Kelly died after a heroin overdose. Now, Grant is on a mission to help families with an adolescent or young adult who is struggling with addiction. He is the author of "Don't Forget Me: A Lifeline of Hope for Those Touched by Substance Abuse and Addiction."

I had the opportunity to speak with Grant about his story, and the advice he has for families with a young loved one who may be struggling with addiction.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What were your sons Chris and Kelly like growing up?

**STEVE M. GRANT:** Christopher was from day one very active—larger than a lot of his friends. He was kind of clumsy initially and then became a very good athlete. Kelly was un-athletic and small for his age, and then eventually grew very tall, but he was very calm, never gave you any trouble. Just a very, very good kid.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** How did they develop their addictions?

**MR. GRANT:** They took two very distinct paths. Christopher probably started using some sort of drug and alcohol, probably marijuana I would think, at about 14 years old. It progressed over an eight-year period until he died of a methadone and cocaine overdose when he was 21. Over time it was five rehabs, a boarding school—a lot of things went on in the middle trying to help him.

Kelly died of a heroin overdose, but it was very different. He was at college and he signed a record

deal and was in a band. Everything was going well, and then I found out about the June before he died that he was using heroin, which stunned me because he was afraid of his shadow—and to put a needle in his arm, I couldn't even fathom it.

He had passed out in a parking lot in June of 2010, and I got a hospital bill because he went to the emergency room. He told me that he had passed out from exhaustion because he just got back from this concert, South by Southwest, in Austin, Texas, driving all night. So it sounded plausible to me, but then a couple of months later one of the band members called and said that it was a heroin overdose.

When I found that out, I went out and got him at school and brought him home. It was the end of the school year anyway, and I drug tested him very often. He obviously was clean, but he went back to school and we had an agreement that he was going to go to rehab if he started using again—and he started using again. In October of that year, I went down and got him with the intention of taking him to a rehab facility in North Carolina, and along the way, we lost our leverage on that. He never went to rehab, and he died in December of a heroin overdose.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** How did their addictions affect family life?

**MR. GRANT:** It was very stressful. I started looking for different rehab facilities. It basically separated our family because it put me in with Christopher and it put my ex-wife with my other son Kelly. He didn't have this behavior, and his addiction was very short-term. It really separated us. We were not consistent anyway, which may have been some of the problems, but I had to take over for Christopher, and she took Kelly. Obviously it was very stressful on our marriage. We dreaded Friday nights when Chris would be out. We dreaded nights when he

didn't come home. Ultimately, we divorced after almost 25 years of marriage, which is about 45 days before Christopher died.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** How did you try to address their addictions?

**MR. GRANT:** We threw everything at Christopher's. I just didn't know what was out there. I think there are more services now than there ever was, but in 2005, I didn't know anyone who had died of a drug overdose. So the preceding years when we tried to help Christopher, again it was five rehabs, a boarding school, and hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent. He got better at times, but it was very short-lived. Every time he got back from a rehab and relapsed, the drug of choice got worse.

Kelly, we tried to address it with rehab when I found out, but he was 24 at the time. Chris was 15. You can take a 15-year-old kicking and screaming to rehab. A 24-year-old has to want to go, and can walk out at any time.

[With] Christopher, I do tell people that there's only one thing that I regret. I should have sent him to one of those programs where he's gone for about 18 months or two years—one of those wilderness programs or something like that because he really needed to be rewired. I tried to do that with one of those rehab trips, but he ran away from me down in Texas. I regret that I didn't try that sooner.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** How did you cope with the loss of Chris, and then Kelly five years later?

**MR. GRANT:** I have a great deal of faith, and I know I'm going to see my boys again someday. That helps me a great deal. With Christopher, I have to admit, after five rehabs, a lot of effort, I hate to say this, there was an expectation that he could die. I knew that I tried everything I could do to help him, and the rest was going to be up to him. I had a dark suit hanging in the closet for that day. Kelly's was such a surprise and it really hurt me. When I found Christopher he looked like he was sleeping. When I found Kelly he was curled up on the floor with a needle in his arm and vomit coming out of his mouth, and it was just tragic. I knew that he was capable of using heroin, but we saw each other almost every day so it was very difficult for him to use.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What are the steps a family member should take to try to help a loved one who is struggling with addiction?

**MR. GRANT:** Take it very seriously. Don't disregard the signs. People always ask me, "How do you know when someone's addicted?" I say if they're making decisions that are unusual, abnormal, or dangerous that they normally wouldn't make, and something's controlling their life, that's when you have to get serious, real serious. But you have to get serious before that. I get people who call me and say they found marijuana in their son's pocket or their daughter's purse. That doesn't mean that they have an addiction. That just means that they're using, and it's something you should take seriously.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What should family members not do when trying to help a loved one who is



Steve M. Grant with his sons Chris and Kelly when they were toddlers.

struggling with addiction? **MR. GRANT:** You want them to have as much latitude as they can, but obviously you don't want to alienate them. You want to keep them in that family unit as much as you can and make them a part of it because they already typically have low self-esteem, low self-worth, and you don't want to add to that as a family. I remember telling my son one time that I didn't understand who he was anymore, and that really hurt him. It is a disease, but you have to treat him like he's normal and make him continue to be a family member.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** How should a family member contend with the relapse of a loved one?

**MR. GRANT:** Every place I went and everything I read said you plan for relapse. I tell every parent that I talk to that you have to plan for relapse. It's a fact of life, and there's nothing bad about it. People feel disgraced, the ones who are really trying, they feel terrible about it, but it's a process.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** How can a family member support a loved one who is struggling with addiction?

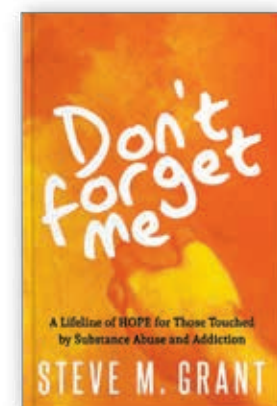
**MR. GRANT:** I think they can be there for them. We did a great support system on both our boys. They need emotional support, but at the same time, you can't forget that they have an addictive behavior. You've got to continue to build the trust, and keep your family unit together.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What motivated you to write your book?

**MR. GRANT:** I was actually motivated from a sales meeting when somebody asked me what my legacy was going to be when I left this life. I told them that I wanted to help adolescents and young adults who struggle with addiction, mental illness, and substance use. I had no idea I was going to say that. That was two weeks after Kelly died. Everybody kept telling me "You need to write a book," because it was unusual that both your only kids die, and they also took two very distinct paths to the same result. Keep in mind in 2005 I didn't know anybody who had died of a drug overdose, and I don't live under a rock here in Greenville. Then in 2010, when Kelly died I didn't know anyone other than his brother who died of a drug overdose. Now, it's a very big thing. People die every week. Across the country, they probably die every day of a drug overdose. When I saw that, I said this book has to happen now. It's got to be very timely.

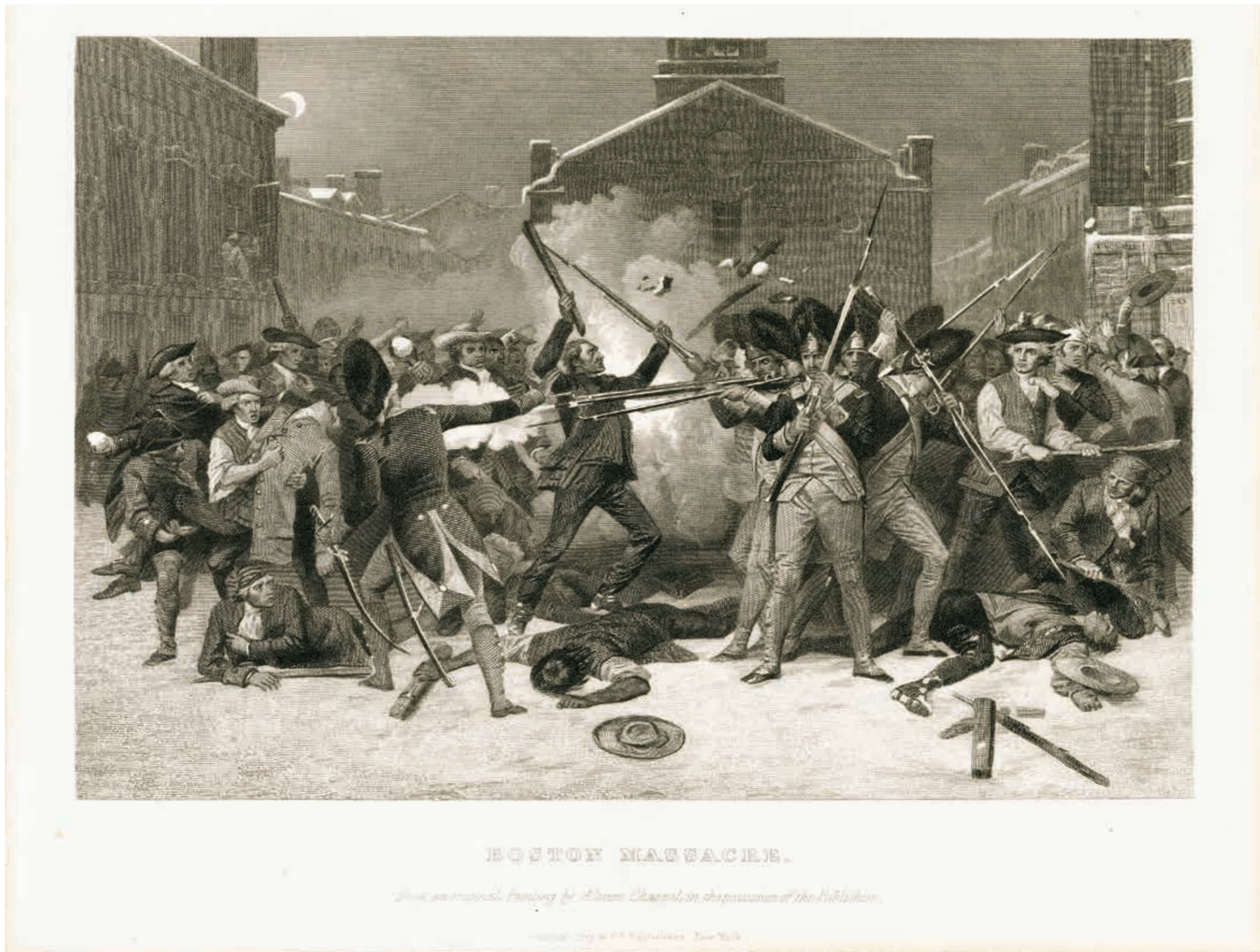
**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What do you hope readers—whether they're parents, treatment professionals, or someone struggling with addiction—take away from your book?

**MR. GRANT:** Most of it is that here's a very tragic story. Here's why it happened, and then afterward that there's hope for continuing. I meet a lot of people who had the tragedy that I had, and that book helps them because it says here's a guy that's still going, there's hope, you can continue your life, and maybe make even something good out of it like we've done.



(Above) "Don't Forget Me: A Lifeline of Hope for Those Touched by Substance Abuse and Addiction" by Steve M. Grant.

(Left) Kelly and Chris Grant.



"The Boston Massacre," an engraving after the painting by Alonzo Chappel.

## HISTORY

# The Consequences of Pushing People Too Far

Reflections on the anniversary of the Boston Massacre

ALAN WAKIM

British Redcoats occupied Boston on Oct. 1, 1768, to end the civil unrest that divided the city between patriots led by The Sons of Liberty, and Tory loyalists led by Gov. Francis Bernard, Lt. Gov. Thomas Hutchinson and his brother-in-law Andrew Oliver. Siding with the patriots were the North and South Side gangs, led Samuel Swift and Ebenezer Mackintosh, respectively. Mackintosh later participated in the Boston Tea Party.

At issue were taxes, duties, and mercantile policies imposed upon the American colonists by Britain's Parliament after the Seven Years' War (French and Indian War in North America). Because they lacked representation in Parliament, most colonists refused to abide by these new laws and responded with civil disobedience. Merchants purchased smuggled goods, and The Sons of Liberty organized boycotts of all British imports. This created problems on both sides. John Hancock had his sloop, the "Liberty," seized for smuggling in May 1768, and customs officials were beaten in response. Those who upheld the laws, including Hutchinson and Oliver, had their homes and offices ransacked, and their effigies burned. The chaos that ensued forced Gov. Bernard to contact London and request soldiers to help restore order.

A parade of mourners gathered together for what was at the time the largest funeral ever seen in North America. They carried the body of Christopher Seider from the Liberty Tree to the Old Granary Burying Ground. Phyllis Wheatley, a poet, black slave, and patriot, wrote a poem in young Seider's memory. She spelled his last name "Snider" as the grave marker and newspapers at the time did.

**Growing Tension**

Loyalists felt extreme pride as Englishmen and deeply resented the "ungrateful agitators" for stirring trouble. For them, obeying the king and his ministers was a small price to pay for being members of the British Empire. After the soldiers arrived, loyalists inflicted Victor's justice upon the patriots. This included the beating of prominent lawyer James Otis

Jr. Both sides organized vigilante mobs. After many months, patriots frustrated with the continued occupation, targeted soldiers with taunts and insults. In response to these hostilities aimed at them, the soldiers began acts of reprisals against all Bostonians, refusing to distinguish between the instigators and the innocent. British officers failed in their efforts to de-escalate the growing tensions on all sides.

On Feb. 22, 1770, customs officer Ebenezer Richardson, a known loyalist informer, defend-merchant Theophilus Lillie, who refused to join the boycott. Several patriots attacked Richardson after he destroyed one of their signs and chased him home. Stones were hurled through Richardson's window, striking his wife. He grabbed his musket, ran upstairs, fired into the crowd, and mortally wounded 11-year-old Christopher Seider. A teen named Samuel Gore was also hit but survived his injuries.

A nearby church bell rang as larger crowds gathered around Richardson's house. Carrying a cutlass to defend his trapped family, the unrepentant Richardson challenged the gathering lynch mob: "Damn their blood! I don't care what I've done." William Molineux persuaded his fellow patriots to march Richardson down to Faneuil Hall, where he was charged with the shooting of Seider before a justice of the peace.

A parade of mourners gathered together for what was at the time the largest funeral ever seen in North America. They carried the body of Christopher Seider from the Liberty Tree to the Old Granary Burying Ground. Phyllis Wheatley, a poet, black slave, and patriot, wrote a poem in young Seider's memory. She spelled his last name "Snider" as the grave marker and newspapers at the time did.

On the death of Mr Snider Murder'd by Richardson

In heavens eternal court it was decreed  
How the first martyr for the cause should bleed  
To clear the country of the hated brood  
He whet his courage for the common good...

**A Ticking Time Bomb**  
The volatility of the situation grew worse after Seider's death. The presence of so many vindictive soldiers playing an occupying role in a small city filled with contemptuous loyalists and resentful patriots who pushed each other toward violence inevitably turned Boston into a ticking time bomb. Those doing the pushing wanted blood, and they didn't have long to wait.

On the very cold night of March 5, less than two weeks after Seider's death, the mood was unmistakably combative as screaming protesters demanded the complete withdrawal of all British soldiers. Groups of patriots armed with clubs rang the church bells and marched through the city yelling, "Turn out! Town born, turn out!"

At the Liberty Tree, a reported 300 gathered in hopes of assaulting any soldier they stumbled upon. Many of the soldiers made no effort to avoid confrontation as they marched through the crowds, swinging their cutlasses at those who came near. A few soldiers threatened with aimed muskets as loyalists encouraged them to shoot. Packs of boys joined in and threw snowballs at the soldiers. Meanwhile, British officers and the Sons of Liberty were doing what they could to diffuse the situation and encouraged everyone to go home.

One unfortunate soldier caught in the middle was Pvt. Hugh White, a lone sentry stationed

at the Customs House on King Street near the Main Guard Barracks, and across from the Town House, the seat of the colonial government. Edward Garrick insulted Pvt. White's company commander for an unpaid wig. In response to the insults and accusation, Pvt. White beat Garrick with his musket and chased him away. This angered many of the witnesses, who now surrounded Pvt. White and called him, "Bloody back! Lousy rascal!"

Within minutes, scores of Bostonians carrying clubs and sticks joined in the ruckus. Pvt. White backed up to the door, loaded his musket and fixed his bayonet as he was hit with icicles and snowballs. The growing crowd screamed, "Kill him! Kill him! Fire! [...] You dare not fire!" Terrified, Pvt. White screamed for help.

With the church bells ringing and townspeople screaming at the soldier to fire, more Bostonians poured out into the streets, thinking there was a fire. At the main guardhouse nearby, Capt. Thomas Preston organized a relief party to rescue Pvt. White. The eight of them marched into what was now a packed, dense angry mob whose anger over the prolonged occupation of their city finally spilled over into a riot.

Capt. Preston pushed his way to Pvt. White as the people screamed, pressed in, and tossed snowballs and icicles at all his men, who by now loaded their muskets in full view of everyone. Richard Palmes and Henry Knox pleaded with Capt. Preston not to fire their weapons, lest they be torn apart by the frenzied mob that dared them to fire. A loyalist stood behind Preston's men, and begged them to fire.

Just then a club was thrown at Pvt. Hugh Montgomery and knocked him down. He got up and fired his weapon without being given the order from Capt.

Preston. His shot hit no one. The stunned crowd drew back in silence. Then, the other soldiers fired sporadically into the crowd. Samuel Gray was shot in the head. Crispus Attucks took two rounds in the chest. Some in the crowd thought the victims who fell dead were just fainting while others yelled for the people to advance on the soldiers. More shots were fired as James Caldwell and Patrick Carr were fatally struck. Samuel Maverick was running away when a bullet ricocheted and struck him in the chest. Six more were shot but survived. The anger, the pushing, the dares had finally reached a climax. When the smoke cleared, Capt. Preston surveyed the scene before him as men lay dead or dying in the snow-covered streets and fully understood the magnitude of what just took place.

Today the great nation created in large measure by the efforts and sacrifices of the Sons of Liberty faces similar hostilities, tempers, and intolerance between political foes seen 250 years ago. Whether it's antifa in Portland, alt-right in Charlottesville, a cop-killer in Dallas, a left-wing fanatic shooting Congressman Steve Scalise, or venomous fights between friends at dinner tables or on Facebook, Americans are divided, and the rifts continue to grow. Under similar conditions we as a people and nation face today, Spain fractured in 1936 and suffered three years of civil war. If we as Americans can't learn from history and live together amicably, we may find ourselves reliving the same nightmare.

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.





"Hercules Between Vice and Virtue," second half of 17th century, by Gérard de Lairese. Oil on Canvas, 44 inches by 71.2 inches. Louvre Museum, Paris.

REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

## A Herculean Choice: Virtue or Vice

ERIC BESS

I try to wake up every day and treat that day like a lifetime, like a microscopic version of life itself. I ask myself: "Born in the morning and dead at night, how will I live today? How can I make choices throughout the day that will allow me to sleep with peace and dignity in my heart?"

Recently stumbled across a painting by Gérard de Lairese titled "Hercules Between Vice and Virtue." De Lairese captured a pivotal moment in a day in Hercules's life. I also find myself confronting moments like this in my daily life.

**The story 'Choice of Hercules' was used by Socrates to instruct his disciples.**

Let's take a look at this specific moment in Hercules's story.

### The Myth of Hercules's Choice

The story "Choice of Hercules" was used by Socrates to instruct his disciples. It is believed to have been first written by Prodicus of Ceos but is now best known from Xenophon's "Memorabilia." Below is my summary of a translation by the 18th-century author Joseph Spence:

As a young man, Hercules decided to go into solitude to meditate on which path he would pursue: the path of virtue or vice.

While he was contemplating, two larger than life-sized women approached him. The first woman, dressed modestly, had a decent and modest air about her; she approached Hercules as nature had made her: unaffected and with dignity.

The second woman was softer and rounder. She had made her skin appear fairer and dressed to reveal her beauty. She paid close attention to the impression she made on others as she wished to be held in high regard.

The second woman hurried in front of the first to greet Hercules.

She attempted to persuade Hercules to take her path in life. She said she would make his life "most easy, and the most agreeable" and told him, "You shall taste all the Pleasure of Life in it; and be free from all its Cares and Troubles."

Hercules asked her name when she finished her speech. She responded, "The Name ... by which I am known among my Friends, is Happiness; but my Enemies, out of the great good Humour, are pleas'd to call me—Vice."

At this time, the first woman, Virtue, approached Hercules and gave her speech. She also wished

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION: FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL

## Remembering Kirk Douglas

Film review: 'A Letter to Three Wives' from 1949

TIFFANY BRANNAN

On Feb. 5, Kirk Douglas died at 103, leaving an impressive legacy in many fields, as well as 86 films. One of his early films, 1949's "A Letter to Three Wives," follows three couples in an unnamed American town. It reminds us that every marriage endures trials that only love, trust, and understanding can overcome.

The film is inspiring because it shows how these three couples form deeper bonds by conquering one woman's influence.

Deborah Bishop (Jeanne Crain), Rita Phipps (Ann Sothern), and Lora Mae Hollingsway (Linda Darnell) take a boat trip to a picnic. At the dock, they receive a letter from another woman in their social circle, Addie Ross. This divorcee is the town's most glamorous woman, whom the others resent because their husbands admire her. The letter declares that she has left town with one of their husbands but doesn't state which one. Throughout the day, each woman remembers incidents that might indicate her husband left with Addie.

Deborah remembers her first dance after marrying Brad Bishop (Jeffrey Lynn). They met in the Navy, but she felt like a gawky farm girl when meeting Brad's friends and

drank too many martinis. Although Rita tried to help, Deborah felt humiliated. After a few years of marriage, Deborah has become sophisticated, but she still fears that Brad prefers Addie, who always does "the right thing at the right time." Remembering her husband's surprise business trip that morning, she wonders if he ran away with his childhood sweetheart.

Rita recalls the pretentious dinner party she gave for her radio magnate employers (Florence Bates and Hobart Cavanaugh). With twins to support, the Phippses have struggled on the income George (Kirk Douglas) makes as a schoolteacher. Thus, Rita supplements their finances by writing radio programs at night.

Rita flattered the radio producers all evening, while George winced at the programs they insisted on playing. He didn't know that Rita had planned the evening to make him a radio editor. As she remembers their argument, she wonders if he left her for the woman who shares his "taste and discrimination," Addie.

Lora Mae, whose marriage is strained and full of bickering, remembers how she got her husband. She was a poor girl determined to marry up. When working in a department store, she began dating the wealthy owner, Porter Hollingsway

(Paul Douglas), who was casually attracted to her beauty. She made it clear that she wanted a man who would marry her and used every possible scheme to gain his interest, eventually earning a proposal. As Mrs. Hollingsway, she has wealth, position, and luxury. However, she has always felt that Porter considers her a gold-digger. She fears that he went with Addie, whom he has always admired for the class Lora Mae lacks.

There is nothing the wives can do but wait through the miserable day, remembering their marriages' faults. They won't know anything until evening, when they will discover which husband is absent. **One Cause of Dissension** We never see Addie Ross, but Celeste Holm provides her uncredited narration. We know her mostly from the onscreen characters' conversations. The three husbands admire her greatly, which makes their wives jealous.

Each man has a special connection to Addie. Brad was Addie's first love; Deborah thinks she is his ideal. Addie shares George's appreciation for fine

music and literature; she gives him a thoughtful gift while Rita forgets his birthday. Porter admires Addie's class; since Lora Mae first saw her picture on Porter's piano, she believed he would have married her if he thought he could have. Each wife resents Addie.

Although we never see Addie, her presence is tangible. She is mentioned or discussed in almost every scene; she is brought up abruptly in many conversations. When arguing with their husbands, both Deborah and Rita resentfully mention Addie. Each wife is so sure that her husband prefers Addie that each constantly thinks about Addie, compares herself to Addie, and assumes her husband does the same. This obsession creates strife between the spouses. The divorcee adds an uncomfortable dimension to the group, which only her departure can alleviate.

Calamity can sometimes make us realize how we are harming ourselves. Fearing her husband has left,



Kirk Douglas plays against type as a witty school teacher in "A Letter to Three Wives."

**It reminds us that every marriage endures trials that only love, trust, and understanding can overcome.**

### 'A Letter to Three Wives'

Director Joseph L. Mankiewicz

Starring Jeanne Crain, Linda Darnell, Ann Sothern, Kirk Douglas, and Paul Douglas

Running Time 1 hour, 43 minutes

Not Rated

Release Date Feb. 3, 1949 (USA)

★★★★★

Hercules to follow her ways and her path. She said:

"I shall not go about to deceive you with any flattering Speeches, as she [Vice] has done; but shall lay Things before you, according to their true Nature and the immutable Decrees of the Gods.

"Of all the real good Things that Heaven grants to Mortals, there is not any one that is to be attain'd without Application and Labour."

It was not long, however, before Vice interrupted her and told Hercules that she could show him a shorter way to happiness.

In response, Virtue scolded Vice, saying:

"Tis true, you were of a Celestial Origin; but were [you] not cast out of the Society of the Gods? And have you not, ever since, been rejected by all the most worthy Men, even upon Earth? ... On the contrary, My Conversation is with the Gods, and with good Men; and there is no good Work produc'd by either, without my Influence. I am respected above all Things, by the Gods themselves, and by all the best of Mortals."

Virtue finished her speech with the claim that all of her followers "look back with Comfort on their past Actions; and delight themselves in their present Employments. By my means, they are favour'd by the Gods; belov'd by their Friends; and honour'd by their Country: And when the appointed period of their Lives is come, they are not lost in a dishonourable Oblivion; but flourish in the Praises of Mankind, even to the latest Posterity."

It is no secret that Hercules chose Virtue's path and inspired many artists like de Lairese.

### Composing the Scene

De Lairese was a 17th-century painter during the Golden Age of Dutch painting. Initially, he was greatly influenced by Rembrandt, who painted his portrait. Later, before eventually going blind, de Lairese was influenced by the work of French neoclassical artists like Nicolas Poussin.

De Lairese employed more neoclassical elements in his painting "Hercules Between Vice and Virtue." For instance, he focused more on form than color, keeping color subdued. This allegorical painting uses classical themes and dress to depict Hercules's story.

De Lairese depicted five figures instead of three: one man and four women. The man, of course, is Hercules. To the left of Hercules is Vir-

tue. She looks at Hercules but points upward. She presents herself modestly and with dignity.

Behind the figure of Virtue is another woman, and she casts a sideways glance at Hercules. Her head is slightly tilted upward and she has a look of dignity on her face. She holds a dimly lit torch in her right hand.

To the right of Hercules is Vice. She is dressed promiscuously and attempts to seduce Hercules with caresses. She looks at Hercules with adoration. Over her shoulder is another, older woman who holds her finger to her mouth as if she's keeping a secret. The older woman looks out at us.

Hercules also looks directly at us and is the focal point of the painting. The two figures to the left look at Hercules whereas the two to the right lean toward him, which reinforces Hercules as the focal point. Also, the club that Hercules holds over his right shoulder and the path of his left arm create an "X" at his head. These compositional elements, along with the higher degree of contrast that describes Hercules's form, reinforce the presence of Hercules in the painting.

Can we decipher which path Hercules chose? Who are the other two women? Why does Hercules and the older woman look out at us? Why is Hercules the focal point?

### It's Our Choice Too

Hercules's body language reveals which path he chose. Hercules uses his left hand to keep Vice at a distance and slightly turns away from Vice toward Virtue. He holds his club in his hand to indicate that he is ready to confront any challenges that may come his way. Hercules does not choose the "easy" way of Vice.

I see the women behind Virtue and Vice as their true representations. In other words, Vice presents herself as something she is not in order to entice Hercules with immediate pleasure and comfort. Her true representation—the consequence of taking her path—is the opposite of what she offers, an offer that is enticing only if its result is kept secret. Is this why the older woman behind Vice—Vice's truth—looks at us with her finger to her mouth as if to ask us to keep her secret?

The secret is that Vice has made up something ugly—herself—to appear beautiful. Is this why Vice's true representation is that of an old woman?

The myth reveals this aspect of Vice as, at one point, Virtue calls

Vice's bluff when she says: "Such as do follow you, are robb'd of their Strength, when they are young; and are void of Wisdom, when they grow old. In their Youth they are bred up in Indolence, and all manner of Delicacy; and pass thro' their old Age with Difficulties and Distress."

Virtue's true representation, however, is presented with dignity and pride. The consequences of Virtue's way are ones of which we can be proud. No matter how difficult and dark things may become in our lives, Virtue is there to light our way, even if the light is dim. Is this why Virtue's true representation holds the torch in her hand?

Here, we also see a great contrast between virtue and vice: One illuminates our path for us, and the other obscures the truth of our path in secrecy.

But why, then, is Hercules the focal point? Why not depict either Virtue or Vice as the focus? Hercules shares something in common with us: He has to make tough decisions. He looks out at us as if to share this very common moment, a moment that requires us to exercise our freedom to choose the path of our lives.

In a way, he is also challenging us. He is showing us the path he took—the difficult path—and in his look toward us, he seems to ask: "Can you take the path less traveled, the difficult path, the path of Virtue?" So he not only shares a moment with us but also cautions us to deeply consider the consequences of our actions.

We all have the power to choose what we'll do with our days, with our lives. We have the option of choosing Virtue or Vice. Sometimes we will take a wrong step, but hopefully the story of Hercules and this painting by de Lairese will remind us to never give up the ways of Virtue.

*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).*



The three wives—Rita Phipps (Ann Sothern, L), Lora Mae Hollingsway (Linda Darnell, C), and Deborah Bishop (Jeanne Crain, R)—featured in the 1949 film "A Letter to Three Wives."



George (Kirk Douglas) and Rita Phipps (Ann Sothern).

ALL PHOTOS BY TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

each wife remembers her marital mistakes. The solutions are clear, if it isn't too late. The Bishops' marriage is hindered because Deborah feels inadequate, which makes her think that Brad compares her to Addie. She must replace her insecurity with trust. Rita is too busy and preoccupied with her writing to care for her husband and children. She must confront her employer and prioritize her family. Lora Mae says she has everything she wants, but all she really wants is Porter's love. During their marriage, she has come to love him deeply, yet she is afraid to say so. She must tell him how she feels in order to build a relationship based on more than money.

**A Different Kirk Douglas** As George Phipps, Kirk Douglas plays an unusual role, a likeable character. Although known for tough or intensely dramatic roles, Mr. Douglas convincingly played a genial, patient man. George describes himself as "a

slightly comic figure, an educated man." He is a schoolteacher, which is "even worse than being an intellectual."

Although other jobs pay more, George can't imagine doing anything else. He believes his calling is to open young minds. He defends grammar and good writing tirelessly. In our age of texting, fabricated words, and slang, his fight for proper English is poignant!

Kirk Douglas is thoroughly amusing as George Phipps. He wittily comments on every situation, sarcastically responds to Porter, and wryly pans radio. Mr. Douglas is unusually fun-loving as George but also serious. His intensity culminates in a biting reproach of radio after the dinner party. After the guests leave, he sensitively tells Rita that he must honor his beliefs. He also bemoans how she has changed. Before storming out, he declares, "I want my own wife back!" Now that Kirk Douglas is gone, few Golden Age actors are left. However,

he and the other stars who have flickered out are not forgotten. They and their talent will live forever through the wonderful films they made.

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

### Correction

The article "Raphael's Divine 'Acts of the Apostles' Tapestries for the Sistine Chapel," which appeared on Feb. 27, 2020 on B8, should have stated that the tapestries were replicated for Henry VIII, not Henry VII. The Epoch Times regrets the error.

## 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 brings hope. It brings comfort and peace and that's meaningful to many, many people. ... It's more than merely visceral. It's again something that's spiritual. It's something that speaks to the inner man. And that's what I think is valuable about what Shen Yun has brought.

**BRUCE HAHN**, Washoe County assistant district attorney, at the Pioneer Center for the Performing Arts in Reno, Nev., on Feb. 28, 2020



I think it inspired people to live a healthy life, one where you love other people, where you connect with other people, where you share with them, and it's all about the good in man.

**MARC KRAMER**, entrepreneur, at the Merriam Theater in Philadelphia on Feb. 27, 2020



This tradition from China, of which I had not known about before, but which is outstanding and thousands of years old, must be kept alive. This is telling us that we need peace, so it can bring its knowledge of humanity to the world's people ... We need a renaissance of humanness. This is what the Shen Yun show imparted to me.

**FELIX RUDOLF VON ROHR**, who was awarded the "Européen de Coeur" in 2019, at the Musical Theater Basel in Switzerland on Feb. 25, 2020



The amount of discipline that goes into that kind of performance—I think that centers the self and the soul. I think those performers made that very present on stage. To watch human beings contort themselves into moving that way almost suggests some sort of divine intervention.

**BART BEYERS**, local business owner, at the Stifel Theatre in St. Louis on Feb. 29, 2020



If you are going to see one show for the rest of your life, this is what you want to see. ... The integrity, the faith and the salvation, divinity and spirituality was just a wonderful undertone, but the incredible talent of everyone involved in the production was just superb. I absolutely was moved by it, goosebumps-moved, it was that incredible.

**GEORGE MCREYNOLDS**, owner of McReynolds Wealth Management, author, and speaker, at the Merriam Theater in Philadelphia on Feb. 29, 2020



I really did love the message [that] ... we all are students of beauty, and flow, and the synchronicity, and life in general, but also of how we all become more one.

**LEEZA BOCK**, corporate director, at The Smith Center for the Performing Arts in Las Vegas on March 1, 2020



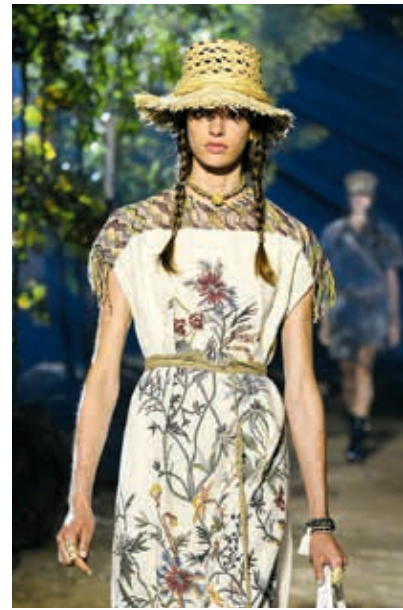
# The Best Fashion Trends for Spring-Summer 2020

Welcome to spring... almost! While we wait for the flowers to bloom, here are the top five spring/summer trends that ruled the runways in New York, Paris, Milan, and London.

## MANY NGOM



Oscar de la Renta



Christian Dior

### Botanical Garden

This season, designers thought outside the garden box, going beyond the usual floral patterns with roses, peonies, and sunflowers. They created a botanical garden, exploring patterns, embroideries, and prints with plant varieties we rarely see on clothing. Take Dior, for instance: The collection displayed a wild plants design from the herbarium of the French National Museum of Natural History. The Oscar de la Renta collection was inspired by a 19th-century plant research book by American botanist Anne Kingsbury Wollstonecraft. The prints and embroideries are in earthy tones, which give them a vintage look. Pair any of these prints with earth tone colors like rusty orange, beige, or olive green.



Oscar de la Renta



Oscar de la Renta

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Jonathan Simkhai



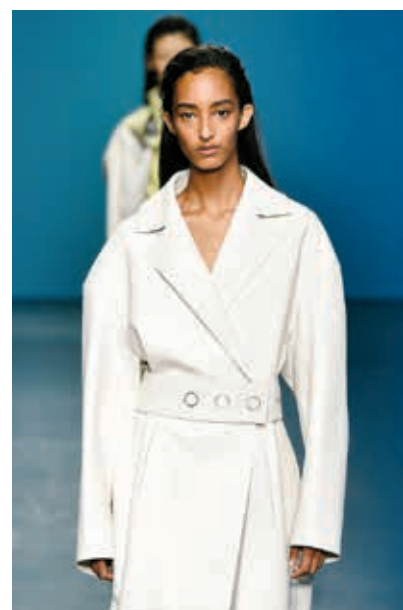
Each X Other

### White Summer

You don't have to be walking down the aisle to dress in white. The immaculate color made an appearance on most runways this season. Aside from white dresses, varying in style from shirt maxi dresses, like those by Valentino, to a more feminine shape, as seen in Louis Vuitton. In any case, embrace the white; don't be afraid to wear it from head to toe.



Louis Vuitton



Boss



Celine



Paul & Joe

### Polka Dance

Designers are getting "dotty" about the polka dot trend: This is the second year it has made the cut. Last year, the trend was demure and subtle, playing mainly with black and white. This year, it's an explosion of colors and patterns. The dots are more whimsical in size, with big and small circles playing off of each other, as seen on the Ports 1961 runway, while colors alternate between light and bright tones, as seen at Paul & Joe. If you like this trend, try a blouse in polka dots or a maxi dress in the same pattern.



Ports 1961



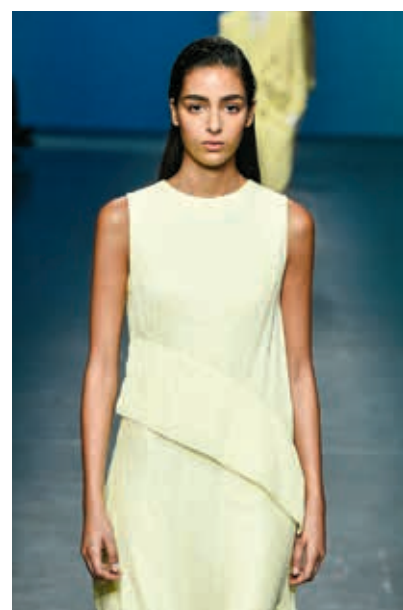
Michael Kors Collection



TommyNow



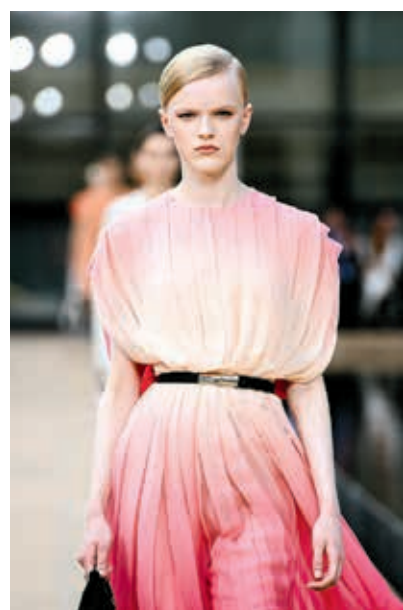
Roksanda



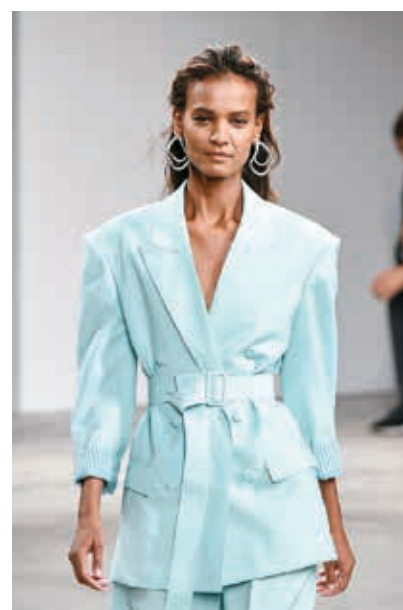
Boss

### Fresh Sherbet

I had the choice between two trends to highlight: neon colors and pastels. Neon colors, let's face it, are a fleeting trend; they are not timeless. Pastels, however, go with every classic, dark neutral color in your wardrobe, and they are soothing, reminiscent of fresh sherbet on a hot summer's day. At Agnona, designers opted for a monochromatic look: light turquoise from head to toe, good inspiration to go to the beach. Longchamp, meanwhile, presented its pastels in ombre shades, a nice and new way to wear the trend this season.



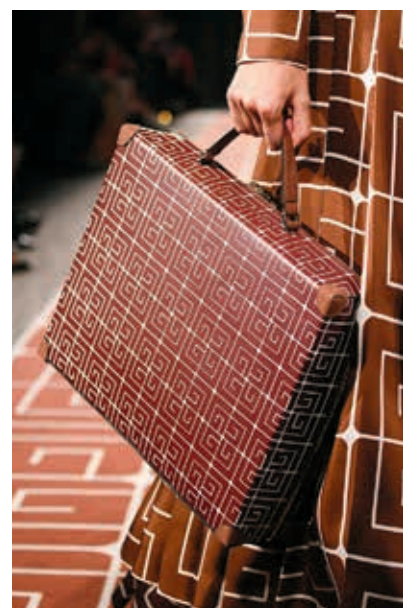
Longchamps



Agnona



Valentino



Guy Laroche

### Super Bag It

Let's talk about the bag trend. Last year, the bags were super tiny—useless, if you ask me—but this year, designers went in the opposite direction, opting for huge tote bags instead. This trend has plenty of practical benefits. If your bag is made of a soft material, you can roll it up when it's not full and carry it under your arm. If you have a long day ahead of you, you can use it to comfortably pack your second pair of shoes, your yoga mat, and even a late-day snack. What's not to love about it?



Valentino



Christian Dior



# FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES

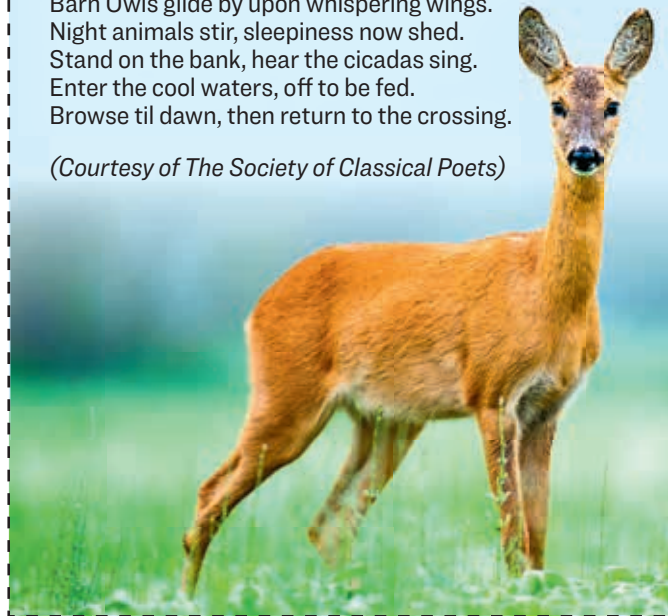


## The Deer Crossing

by Ken Allan Dronsfield

Sun slowly dipping in the western sky; the winds are light and the pine boughs tossing. From their warm, peaceful beds the meek and shy, walk to the river; time for the crossing. To the fields above, to graze for a meal; prance through the meadow, always listening. Hear the Blue Jay; alerting all with zeal. Just twilight now, time to make the crossing. Squirrels have disappeared, gone to their beds. Barn Owls glide by upon whispering wings. Night animals stir, sleepiness now shed. Stand on the bank, hear the cicadas sing. Enter the cool waters, off to be fed. Browse til dawn, then return to the crossing.

(Courtesy of The Society of Classical Poets)



SORU EPOTOK/SHUTTERSTOCK

WHAT DO YOU CALL A BEAR WITH NO TEETH?



A GUMMY BEAR.

ANT\_ART/SHUTTERSTOCK

Love the animals: God has given them the rudiments of thought and joy untroubled.

FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY (1821-1881)

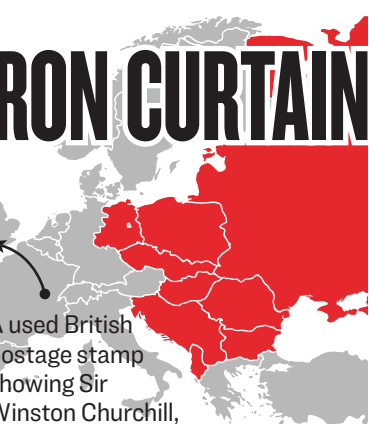


FAMVELD/SHUTTERSTOCK

## CHURCHILL NAMES THE IRON CURTAIN



A used British postage stamp showing Sir Winston Churchill, circa 1974.



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On March 5, 1946, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivered one of the most famous speeches of the Cold War period—a time in which great tension existed between the communist countries of Eastern Europe and the democracies of the West.

The speech took place at Westminster College and in attendance was U.S. President Harry S. Truman, who joined Churchill on

the platform. In what became known as the Iron Curtain Speech, Churchill condemned the communist policies of the Soviet Union. He said, "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent." Later, the image of the "iron curtain" became a metaphor for the divide between free societies and those living under the tyranny of communism.

By Aidan Danza, age 13

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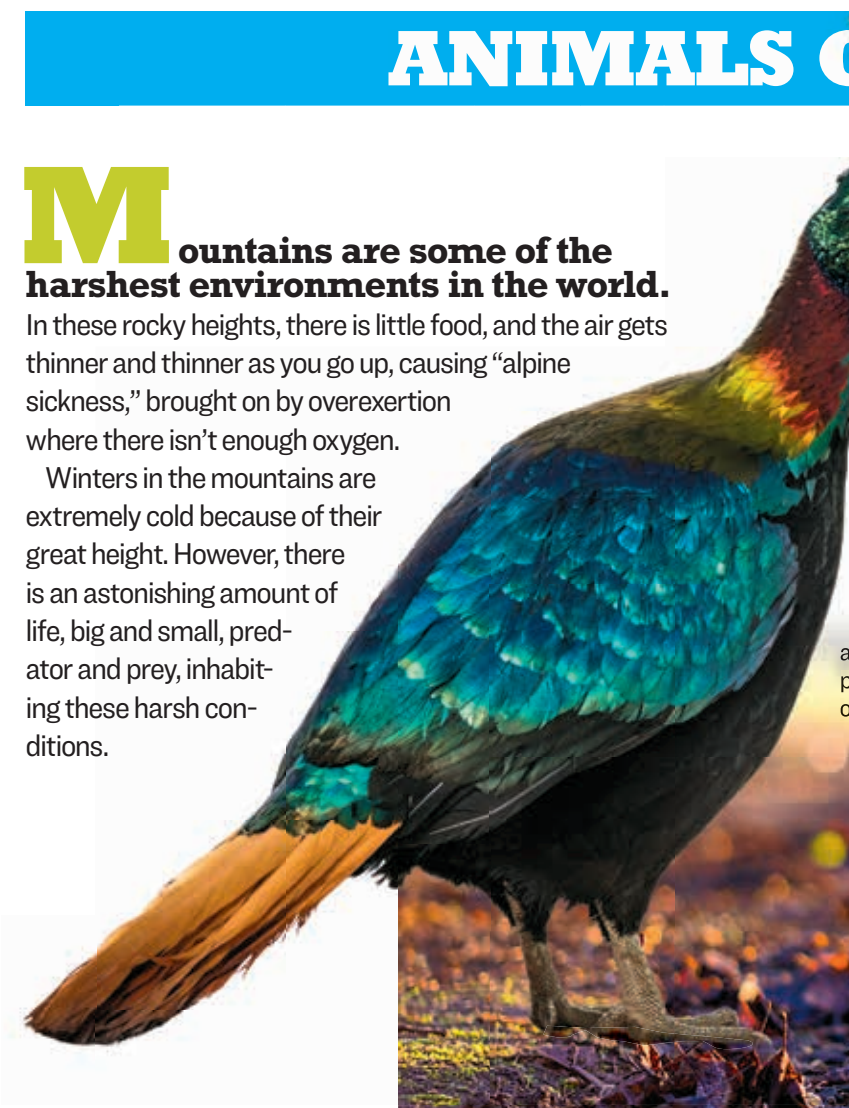
# ANIMALS OF THE MOUNTAINS

(PART I)

## Mountains are some of the harshest environments in the world.

In these rocky heights, there is little food, and the air gets thinner and thinner as you go up, causing "alpine sickness," brought on by overexertion where there isn't enough oxygen.

Winters in the mountains are extremely cold because of their great height. However, there is an astonishing amount of life, big and small, predator and prey, inhabiting these harsh conditions.



### HIMALAYAN MONAL

The Himalayan monal is one of the most colorful mountain-dwelling birds. It makes its home in the Himalayas, which include the famous peaks Everest and K2.

Males' plumage includes shades of iridescent blue, green, and rufous red on the nape and tail, while the belly, sides, and chest are a uniform shade of black that provides wonderful contrast to the other bright colors. Males also have a

small green crest plume, like a cherry on top of the head. Hens are very pretty in their own way—each feather on the back is brown and black, while each chest feather is brown and white. The head is brown, with a blue eye-ring.

Himalayan monal eats seeds, leaves, grass, and other plant material. During the breeding season, the birds stay in pairs with their chicks; during the rest of the year, they form large flocks.

In the harsh Himalayan winters, the birds will stay 6,500 feet above sea level; in the summer, they will migrate up to 16,000 feet above sea level. These beautiful birds carry the additional prestige of being the national bird of Nepal.

### GUINEA PIG

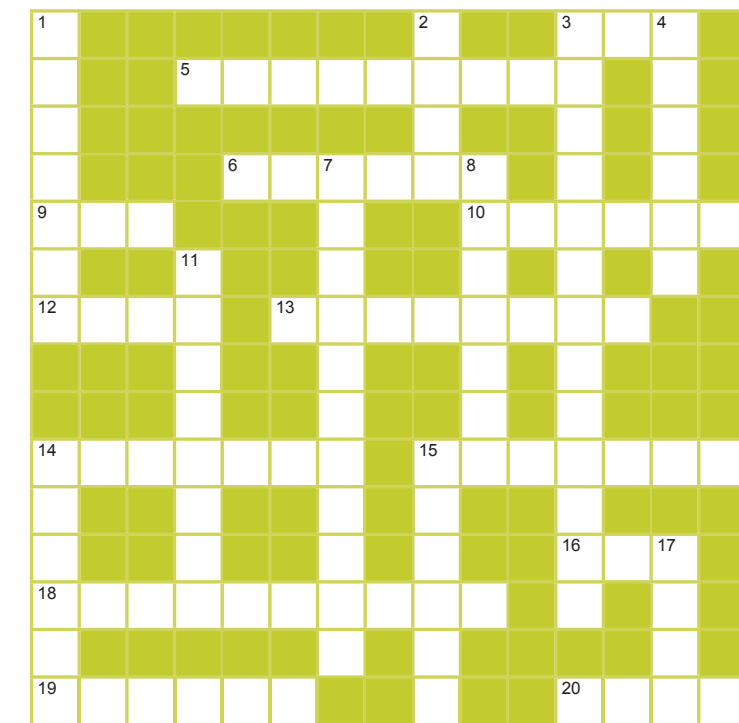
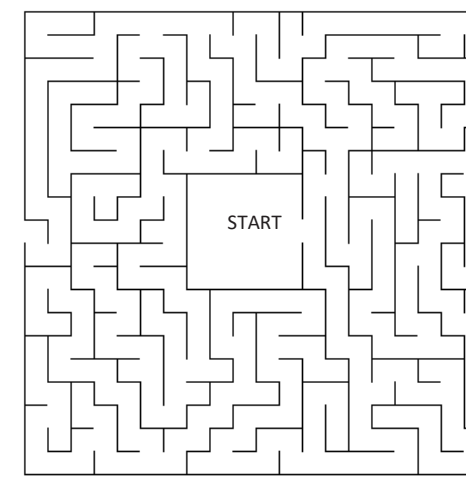
We now turn to the South American Andes, where many large and fierce animals dwell. The Andes are also home to a variety of small, cute animals, including the guinea pig!

Guinea pigs, one of the most popular small pets, actually originated in the Andes, where they were domesticated by the natives but were taken by conquistadores back to Europe, where they became popular pets. There are other species of guinea pig that live across the rest of South America.

Be on the lookout for part two in next week's "Just for Kids!"



## AMAZING ESCAPES!



### Across

- "A Bug's Life" bug (3)
- Fisherman's friend (9)
- Indian Ocean relative of the Sea Cow (6)
- Sylvester, Tweety's foe (3)
- Bird with black and bright yellow or orange feathers (6)
- Relative of the salamander (4)
- Bright red bird (8)
- Antarctic waddler (7)
- Eskimo's herd animal (7)
- Hooper (3)
- Big animal with a horn on its nose (10)
- Colorful bird with a big beak (6)
- Fish that might end up on a sandwich (4)

### Down

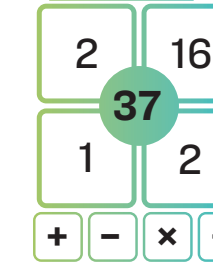
- Bird with a pouch under their bill used to catch fish (7)
- What the Ugly Duckling became (4)
- Buffalo (13)
- Squirt or Crush in "Finding Nemo" (6)
- Venomous lizard (11)
- King Kong (7)
- Where caviar comes from (8)
- A real talking bird (6)
- It likes to howl at the moon (6)
- The King of beasts (4)

Easy puzzle 1



Solution For Easy 1  
01 - 2 x (9 + 2)

Medium puzzle 1



Solution for Medium 1  
1 + 2 x (2 + 9)

Hard puzzle 1



Solution for Hard 1  
8 - 61 - 91 + 22







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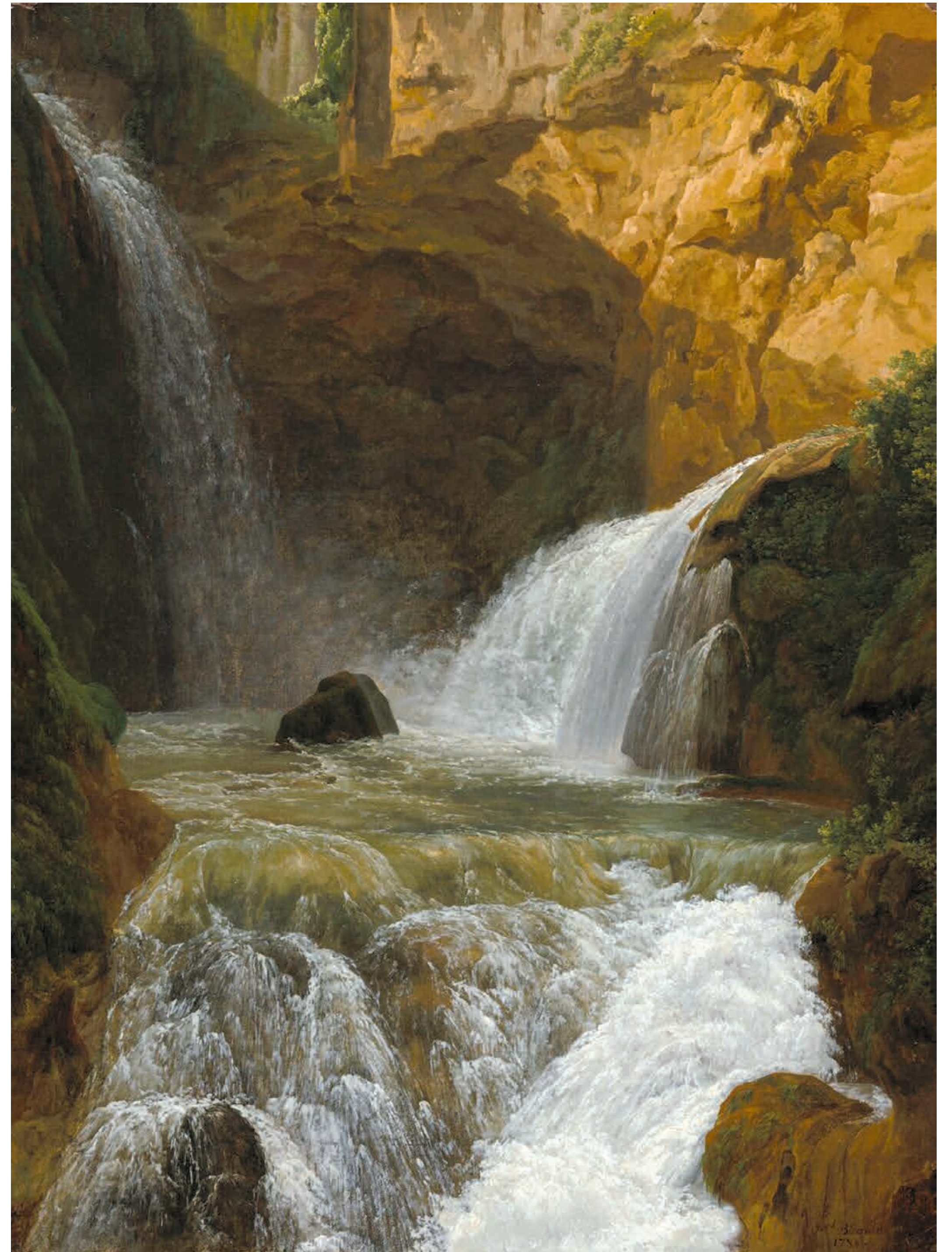
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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON



"View of the Waterfalls at Tivoli," 1788, by Jean-Joseph-Xavier Bidault. Oil on paper, mounted on canvas; 20 inches by 15 inches. Gift of Fern and George Wachter.

FINE ARTS

## In the Light of Italy, Artists Paint 'True to Nature'

Washington's National Gallery of Art presents oil sketches from across Europe

LORRAINE FERRIER

"No two days are alike, nor even two hours; neither were there ever two leaves of a tree alike since the creation of all the world; and the genuine productions of art, like those of nature, are all distinct from each other." British landscape painter John Constable said. Constable referred to nature's only constant: change. An academic art studio can never simulate the way the light falls on the

land at a particular time of day. Artists needed to go out and study nature for themselves. "In the late 18th century and across the 19th century, you simply were not an educated artist until you went to Rome and were steeped in ancient culture, ancient architecture, ancient sculpture, Renaissance and Baroque painting and architecture—and increasingly, in the 1780s, and 1790s, going out into the Roman campagna [countryside] and recording the beauti-

ful, magical light of Italy; the topography of the Roman campagna." Mary Morton said. Morton is the curator and head of the department of French paintings at Washington's National Gallery of Art. French landscape artist Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes further encouraged young artists to paint oils sketches outdoors with his influential treatise on landscape painting, published in 1800. Young artists traveled from European capitals such as Paris, Co-

penhagen, and Berlin to complete their art education by sketching the Roman countryside in oils: a tradition called plein-air painting (open-air painting.) These European artists' plein-air paintings immortalized the Italian landscape, and in turn, Italy—true to its nature as a country steeped in ancient artistic traditions—trained some of Europe's greatest artists outdoors. *Continued on Page 16*

**The exhibition is a discovery of many things: outdoor oil sketches, lesser-known artists, and the beauty of Europe.**



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# Patriotism, America, AND THE Arts

JEFF MINICK

Breathes there the man,  
with soul so dead,  
Who never to himself hath said,  
This is my own, my native land!

Sir Walter Scott

Recently, I was thumbing through some books in my apartment when I came across a couple of novels by Kenneth Roberts.

Many years ago, I was obsessed for a while by Roberts's historical sagas: "Arundel," "Oliver Wiswell," "Northwest Passage," and other tales of America's colonial and revolutionary period. Not only did I admire his style and storytelling skills—his knowledge of history was extensive, and he wrote as if he himself were living in the 18th century—but those books also reinforced pride in my country.

As I skimmed the pages of his "Rabble in Arms," wondering whether someday my grandchildren might enjoy these sagas, I started thinking of other writers I'd read who, like Roberts, celebrated America and patriotism.

**Celebrants of America**

Edward Everett Hale's story "The Man Without a Country" leapt immediately to mind. In this 1863 short story, Army officer Philip Nolan, accused and convicted of treason, shouts: "Damn the United States! I wish I may never hear of the United States again!" The court grants him his wish, sentencing him to live out his life on board different ships, where no one may speak to him of the United States or permit him to set foot on its shores.

When Nolan is an old man and dying, he invites a young officer to his quarters, which are decorated with all sorts of American memorabilia, and begs the man to take him through the history of his country since he first boarded a ship. The young man obliges. The last few passages of this story, particularly Nolan's written request that his memorial marker bear this epitaph—"He loved his country as no other man has loved her; but no man deserved less at her hands"—left me misty-eyed when I read those words in high school.

A short list of other favorites would include the tale of Irish immigrants in "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn," Thomas Wolfe's fulsome descriptions of America in "Of Time and the River," Michael Shaara's account of the Battle of Gettysburg in "The Killer Angels," and Esther Forbes's "Johnny Tremain," one of the great historical novels written for the younger set.

Artists other than writers have also

saluted our country. What are the canvases of Norman Rockwell if not a scrapbook of his love for America and its people? The musical "Yankee Doodle Dandy" honors the life, patriotism, and music of early 20th-century composer, producer, and star of Broadway musicals George M. Cohan.

Films like "It's a Wonderful Life," "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," and "Saving Private Ryan" demonstrate American ideals: neighborliness, generosity, a fierce belief in democracy, and valor on the battlefield. Sculptures from the Lincoln Memorial to the statue of the Confederate soldier on the courthouse lawn here in Front Royal remind on-lookers of the rich and complicated past of our country.

PUBLIC DOMAIN



Edward Everett Hale, an American author, historian, and clergyman, best known for his story "The Man Without a Country."

from around the globe have gathered and thrived.

For these critics, patriotism is a dirty word, implying jingoism and superiority.

Perhaps worst of all, we who rise to our feet for the national anthem may have grown so accustomed to our unique country that we lack the eyes and wisdom to appreciate its many blessings. When we see the American flag flying from a pole in someone's yard or from a public building, how many of us pause and offer thanks for our many freedoms? When we hear the anthem played at a ballgame, how many of us take a moment to think back on the American past, and to marvel at the creation of our liberties and the sacrifices of those who defended those liberties? How many of us feel shamed by the failings of our country, but forget to take pride in our successes and our attempts to rectify our flaws?

Has such indifference and overt hostility to America and its ideals affected today's arts and literature? Perhaps. We find snatches of the patriotic in such novels as Mark Helprin's "Freddy and Fredericka," particularly in the Prince of Wales's speech to Americans near the end of the story. Country songwriters and pop musicians feel free to express



George M. Cohan (James Cagney) in one his musicals that lauded America. Here Betsy Ross is featured sewing the original American flag, in "Yankee Doodle Dandy."



GHOST BEAR/SHUTTERSTOCK

(Left) The iconic bison, part of the poem of America.

(Below) "Freedom of Speech," between 1941 and 1945, by Norman Rockwell. U.S. National Archives and Records Administration.

patriotism in songs like Lee Greenwood's "Proud to Be an American," Johnny Cash's "Ragged Old Flag," and Jerrod Niemann's "Old Glory."

But if we look for examples of patriotism in the arts today, we have difficulty finding an Edward Everett Hale, a Norman Rockwell, or a George M. Cohan.

**Pride**  
What happened?

Maybe we grew up, became sophisticated, and left patriotism in the nursery. Or maybe not.

Instead, maybe our pride in being Americans has gone missing from long neglect. Or maybe our cultural critics have made some of us fearful and ashamed to step out of the shadows, and declare ourselves grateful for this land where we live.

Or maybe, just maybe, we still feel a deep love for our country and are looking for ways to express that affection.

I offer as evidence of that last claim President Trump's massive political rallies with their loud and boisterous chants of "USA! USA!" In her online article "After Attending a Trump Rally, I Realized Democrats Are Not Ready for 2020," Democrat Karlyn Borysenko writes of the Trump event that "the atmosphere was jubilant" and "more like attending a rock concert than a political rally." This Democrat goes on to say, "With Trump, there was a genuine feeling of pride in being an American."

**The Greatest Poem**

At my elbow as I write these words is a college textbook, "Modern English Readings," used by my father in 1946 after he returned to Pennsylvania

from fighting the Nazis in Italy. While browsing this book to see what Dad might have read long ago, I discovered an essay by Dorothy Thompson, once a famous journalist and a fervent opponent of fascism. The title of the essay is "America," and though I have searched the internet, I find no trace of this piece there. This is too bad, for Thompson's article, originally a speech, is a brilliant reminder of who and what we are as a people. In one paragraph of "America," she reminds us of our literary heritage:

"Always this country has had its poets—and epic poets—moved by the grandeur of the country itself, its history, its possibilities, its titanism. Longfellow, who celebrated the trek of the Arcadians; the philosopher-poet Emerson, seeking to find this country's over-soul; the anonymous ballad-makers of the ranges and mountains; Vachel Lindsay trying to catch this country's broad rhythms ... and the titan of all of them Walt Whitman, who wrote: 'The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem.'"

America is still the greatest poem, waiting to be explored and venerated by artists, writers, and the rest of us who possess the heart and mind to read, understand, and appreciate its verse.

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



PUBLIC DOMAIN

“Always this country has had its poets—and epic poets—moved by the grandeur of the country itself.”

Dorothy Thompson, journalist

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"Grotto in a Rocky Landscape," sometime between 1790 and 1870, by Louise-Joséphine Sarazin de Belmont. Oil on paper, mounted on canvas; 16 1/4 inches by 22 5/16 inches.

## FINE ARTS

## In the Light of Italy, Artists Paint 'True to Nature'

Washington's National Gallery of Art presents oil sketches from across Europe

Continued from Page 13

The artists vigorously painted the mountains, valleys, rivers, waterfalls, and even erupting volcanoes—quickly making note of every little thing between the earth and the sky. These oil sketches were not intended as detailed finished paintings but as studies or, as Morton describes them, field notes.

Artists would circulate these sketches among one another, or archive the paintings in their studios. In the studio, artists would develop some of the oil sketches into finished works, or they'd return to the same site several times in order to make a more finished work, Morton explained via email. When these artists returned to their home countries, they referenced the oil sketches for fresh compositions, and they also continued the tradition of making open-air oil sketches focusing on their native landscapes.

Visitors can see Europe's landscapes unfold through about 100 oil sketches in the exhibition "True to Nature: Open-Air Painting in Europe, 1780–1870," at the National Gallery of Art (NGA) in Washington.

The exhibits are from the NGA's collection and two European collections: the Fondation Custodia, Frits Lugt Collection in Paris and the

(Bottom left)

A quick oil sketch of clouds. "Cloud Study: Stormy Sunset," 1821–1822, by John Constable. Oil on paper, mounted on canvas; 8 inches by 10 3/4 inches. Gift of Louise Mellon in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon.

(Bottom right) "Study of Clouds Over the Roman Campagna," circa 1782 to 1785, by Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes. Oil on paper, mounted on cardboard; 7 1/2 inches by 12 5/8 inches. Given in honor of Gaillard F. Ravenel II by his friends.

Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, UK. Morton curated the exhibition together with Fondation Custodia director Ger Luijten and the Fitzwilliam Museum's keeper of paintings, drawings, and prints, Jane Munro.

The exhibition is a discovery of many things: outdoor oil sketches, lesser-known artists, and the beauty of Europe.

**Rediscovering Plein-Air Paintings** Only over the last couple of decades has the tradition of oil sketching become more fully understood, Morton said. The curatorial team researched 17th- and 18th-century scholarship for the exhibition and also the work of the late Philip Conisbee who, from 1993 to 2008, was the NGA's senior European paintings curator.

All this history is discussed in the comprehensive exhibition catalog "True to Nature: Open-Air Painting in Europe, 1780–1870." In 1954, John Gere, a curator in the department of prints and drawings at the British Museum and specialist in old master Italian drawings, spotted some plein-air paintings at auction. This piqued Gere's interest in the genre, and along with his wife, he started collecting these sketches, sparking a rediscovery of plein-air painting. Conisbee saw the collection at the

Geres' home and he began additional research.

In 1980, Conisbee wrote the exhibition catalog entries for the first comprehensive exhibition of plein-air paintings at the Fitzwilliam Museum, according to the exhibition catalog. For the next 40 years, he researched the plein-air tradition and built the NGA's collection of these works.

In 1996, he curated "In the Light of Italy: Corot and Early Open-Air Painting" at the NGA, the first American exhibition on the subject. "True to Nature" is a continuation of Conisbee's work, featuring oil sketches he acquired during his time at the NGA, and new scholarship as well. The exhibition aims to increase understanding on this important, yet relatively unstudied, part of European art history.

**Insights Into Plein-Air Painting**

Some of the little details we discover can make these sketches all the more endearing and perhaps more relatable to our everyday life. For example, some of these works on paper have one edge that's clearly been cut with a knife. Just as we may sometimes divide and cut a piece of paper to write notes, some of the oil sketches appear to have been cut from the same sheet by the same artist. And we can imagine the artists preparing

their materials: cutting the paper by hand, selecting brushes, and carefully packing the paint. Artists used animal bladders to store the paint or mixed a limited color palette to take with them.

Groups of artists ventured out into the countryside together across often treacherous terrain with their easels, paper, and paints in hand. Italian artist Giuseppe de Nittis traveled six hours every day to paint Italy's most accessible volcano, Mount Vesuvius. He went part of the way on horseback and for the rest he was carried by a guide, explained Jane Munro from the Fitzwilliam Museum. He did, however, change his route after he felt the earth move, signaling a possible volcanic eruption.

Once on site, artists would have painted each sketch for a set amount of time. As part of their academic art training, they would have been familiar with the discipline of timed life drawings. Just as these artists were able to capture a life model's pose in short, swift gestures with their charcoal or brush, so they applied the same spirit to capture nature's nuances in oil. Each oil sketch is "like a pantheistic reverie," Morton said.

Because these artists had formal art training, each sketch is "a piece of nature that's been formalized aesthetically and made satisfying for them,

PRIVATE COLLECTION, LONDON



(Left) "The Eruption of Stromboli, 30 August 1842," by Jean-Charles Rémond. Oil on paper, mounted on canvas; 10 1/4 inches by 14 7/16 inches.

(Below left) "Santa Trinità dei Monti in the Snow," 1825 or 1830, by André Giroux. Oil on paper, mounted on canvas; 8 11/16 inches by 11 13/16 inches. Chester Dale Fund.

(Below right) "Rooftops" by Frederik Niels Martin Rohde. Oil on canvas; 10 inches by 8 3/4 inches.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON



FONDATION CUSTODIA, FRITS LUGT COLLECTION, PARIS



because for the most part, most of these are for them," Morton said.

**Embracing Plein-Air Painting**

The exhibition starts with two Italian regions, Rome and Naples, and then covers the rest of Europe. Spread over a total of five galleries, the sketches have been grouped by subject matter as the artists would've archived them in their own studios: There are rocks and caves, waterfalls, and volcanoes, to name a few of the 11 categories.

Nineteenth-century French landscape painter Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot was a prolific plein-air painter who brought the tradition to France. As a traditionalist, Corot vowed "to reproduce as scrupulously as possible" what he saw in front of him. Corot's oil sketch "The Island and Bridge of San Bartolomeo, Rome," which is featured in the exhibition, attests to this. Corot's teacher Achille Etna Michallon taught him to paint true to nature, and Michallon must have learned this from his teachers: neoclassicist Jacques-Louis David and Valenciennes.

Valenciennes's advice to artists was to always start with the sky when painting a vista. Artists could include a band of land as a guide to orientate themselves, but Valenciennes believed the sky set the tonality for the entire landscape, Morton explained.

Valenciennes's British counterpart, Constable would have agreed. For Constable, the sky was of utmost importance. It's "the key note, the standard of scale, and the chief organ of sentiment" in a landscape painting, he said.

Constable was obsessed with the sky. He read meteorological reports and would spend hours "skying," a term he coined for watching and recording the changing skyscape. He annotated his sky studies with weather reports, the direction of light, and more meteorological information. Morton invites us to look at what Constable does with light in his paintings. At the exhibition, we could start with "Cloud Study: Stormy Sunset."

"Santa Trinità dei Monti in the Snow" by André Giroux is painted in a similar palette as Constable's "Cloud Study: Stormy Sunset." French students like Giroux, who were sponsored by the French government, stayed at the Villa Medici. Giroux painted the sketch straight from his bedroom window.

In the sketch, a snowy scene unfolds, and in parts Giroux used his finger to paint or scraped through the wet paint. Technical art historian Ann Hoenigswald discovered Giroux's creative "mark-making" as part of her study of each exhibit to

understand more about how these plein-air paintings were rendered.

One of the two female painters featured is Louise-Joséphine Sarazin de Belmont, a student of Valenciennes. Women were not yet permitted to study at art schools, so Valenciennes tutored them. Sarazin de Belmont generally began painting outdoors and then continued working on her paintings to sell on the Parisian art market, Morton said via email. "Grotto in a Rocky Landscape" expresses the "thrill of being inside the earth looking out," Morton said.

Sarazin de Belmont managed to create a huge sense of scale on the paper, which feels as if we are almost popping our head out into the painting's landscape. She used atmospheric perspective to achieve this: The background fades away while fresh color fills the fore- and middle ground.

French painter Jean-Charles Rémond painted many plein-air oil sketches, but his finished painting "The Eruption of Stromboli, 30 August 1842," was a commission from the Gallery of Mineralogy and Natural History Museum in Paris. Rich reds and darkness dominate the painting as lava spews from Stromboli.

**True to Nature** Jane Munro ponders who is "true to nature"? Are artists like Giuseppe

de Nittis, who sketch volcanoes and predict the likelihood of volcanic eruptions by holding their ears to the earth to listen to the lava bubbling below, or are scientists such as physicist Luigi Palmieri, the director of the Vesuvius Observatory, who monitor the earth with their seismographs? We can wonder too.

Morton referred to Baron François Gérard's rather strongly colored painting full of a purple and red sunset as a wave crashes violently on the rocks. "There's no way you [can] paint a wave true to nature; you're going to paint the sensation of a wave, which is what Gérard has done," she said. Each of these oil sketches is an artist's conversation with nature, evoking the sensations and sentiments that were true to that artist at that moment in time.

The exhibition "True to Nature: Open-Air Painting in Europe, 1780–1870" is at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, through May 3, 2020. To find out more, visit [NGA.gov](http://NGA.gov)

Information in this article is primarily from the audio of the press preview for "True to Nature: Open-Air Painting in Europe, 1780–1870" given by Mary Morton, curator and head of the department of French paintings, at the National Gallery of Art. Jane Munro from the Fitzwilliam Museum also presented.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON



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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON



"The Tomb of Caecilia Metella," circa 1830, by Léon-François-Antoine Fleury. Oil on canvas; 11 inches by 13 inches. Gift of Frank Anderson Trapp.



## ESSENCE OF CHINA



## CHINESE CULTURE

# The Story of Laozi's Servant

SU LIN

The very first story in the 500 volumes of the "Extensive Records of the Taiping Era" is about Laozi.

It is said that Laozi had a servant named Xu Jia who had served him for over 200 years. But Xu Jia was not happy. He had not received his pay of 100 qian per day since the day he started work. It had been over 200 years, and every day he waited for his master to pay him. Every night before going to bed, he would calculate and tally the outstanding amount owed to him.

Indeed, Laozi had never paid his servant a single qian for the past 200-odd years. But everything was on record. Laozi owed Xu Jia 7,200,000 qian in total.

Laozi did not have a successful career during the Zhou Dynasty. During the reign of King Wen, he was a librarian, handling books and archives. When King Wu ascended the throne, again he was assigned a low-ranking position.

That did not bother Laozi. Life may have been hard, and his social status may have been low, but his mind was set on practicing the Way.

The code of etiquette and ethics that the first kings of Zhou established had degenerated by the Spring and Autumn Period. Laozi was about to leave China. He mounted a water buffalo and headed west together with his servant.

The governor of Hangu Pass was named Yin Xi. He had a relatively smooth career in the imperial court, but he was not interested in working as an official. Fortune-tellers had told him that he was destined to practice the Way. Therefore, his goal in life was to look for a master to teach him the Way. He had learned the basics of Taoism and was able to distinguish the aura of sages.

Yin Xi was studying Taoism one night when he noticed that the position of the stars had shifted. He also spotted a soft purple glow heading toward Hangu Pass from the east. He could not help but exclaim, "The sage I've been waiting for is heading my way!"

Laozi was traveling on a water buffalo with his servant Xu Jia behind him. The farther west they



SUN MINGGUO/THE EPOCH TIMES

went, the more remote the land was, and the more despondent Xu Jia felt. The land beyond Hangu Pass was the Western Regions.

"Once we reach the Western Regions, there will be no way I can get my money back. Nobody has suffered greater injustice than me!" Xu Jia thought.

He decided to lodge a complaint against Laozi to the authorities at Hangu Pass. There was a man at the inn who made a living by writing letters and complaints for others. Xu Jia told him about the injustice he had suffered. The man did some calculation; 7,200,000 qian was a lot of money and a great temptation. He immediately expressed his wish to marry his daughter to Xu Jia once the latter got the money.

Xu Jia was even more determined to get his money.

Meanwhile, Yin Xi was busy getting ready to welcome Laozi. He knelt before Laozi and expressed his wish to learn Taoism from him.

Xu Jia's case was taken to court. Laozi asked Xu Jia to lie on the floor facedown with his mouth open. Out came an amulet, and Xu Jia disappeared. What was left on the floor was a skeleton.

Laozi sighed. "When I hired you, I

It is said that Laozi had a servant named Xu Jia who had served him for over 200 years.

was a low-ranking official and could not afford to pay you. I only gave you the Taixuan amulet and told you your name had been removed from the Book of Life and Death. It was agreed that when we reached the Land of Resting in the Western Regions, I would pay you back what I owed you in gold. Why did you choose to have me up just when our journey was coming to an end?"

Yin Xi could not believe his eyes. He pleaded with Laozi to bring Xu Jia back to life and offered to pay Xu Jia on Laozi's behalf.

Laozi put the amulet on the skeleton, and Xu Jia came back to life instantly. Xu Jia was pleased to get his pay, and the man who wrote the complaint for him was pleased, too. They both left happily to prepare for the wedding of the man's daughter to Xu Jia.

The case was closed. It was time for Laozi to go past Hangu Pass to continue his journey to the west. Yin Xi pleaded with his master to leave behind something.

Laozi wrote the "Tao Te Ching," which consists of around 5,000 Chinese characters. Yin Xi got it printed and circulated it, and then he resigned from his job and left with Laozi.

**Laozi wrote the 'Tao Te Ching,' a spiritual treatise, which consists of around 5,000 Chinese characters.**

# The Leaf-Picking Girl Who Remembered Her Past Lives

SU LIN

Quite a number of people can remember their previous lives. Sometimes, it is for the sake of letting people know previous lives do exist. In other cases, it serves the purpose of repaying karma.

A monk was begging for food at noontime. He saw a girl picking leaves from a mulberry tree. He went up to her and asked, "Is there anywhere I can get food?"

The girl answered: "A family by the surname of Wang about three or four li [one li equals about a third of a mile] from here is preparing vegetarian food for monks. Go now. They'll be happy to receive you."

**Who would sin if they knew they would have to pay for it one day?**

The monk followed her directions and came to a residence. He was delighted to see a group of monks sitting down for a meal and was invited to join them. After the meal, the host's wife was puzzled that the monk knew about the lunch and could make it in time. The monk told her about the mulberry-leaf-picking girl.



A girl picking leaves from a mulberry tree.

The host and his wife could not believe what they heard. "Take us to the girl," they said.

When the girl saw the old host and his wife, she scrambled down from the tree, dumped the basket, and went into her house. The host and his wife chased her to the house. It turned out that the girl's parents were acquaintances of theirs.

The girl barricaded herself in the house with a bed.

Her mother asked the host and his wife what she could do for them.

They said: "We were preparing a vegetarian feast for some monks today. A monk came along and said a young girl had told him about the lunch. I did not tell anyone about my plan. So I'm just wondering how your daughter was able to know about the feast."

The girl's mother tried to convince her to come out, but she simply refused. The mother got agitated and scolded her.

The girl said: "I don't want to see the old man and his wife. What's

the problem?"

Her mother asked, "Why won't you see them?"

The host and his wife were even more bewildered. They pleaded with her to come out.

The girl shouted, "On this day and date, what happened to the goat seller and his two sons?"

As soon as the couple heard that, they ran off without even looking back.

The girl's mother asked her what had happened. The daughter explained: "In one of my previous lives, I was a goat seller who came from Xiazhou. I spent the night at the old man's manor. He killed my sons and me that very night and took our money."

"Then, in my last life, I was their son and the apple of their eyes. I fell very sick at 15 and died at 20. The money they spent on my medicines was a few times more than what they had stolen from me. They have also hired monks to perform a rite on my death anniversary every year. The old couple often think of me and cry. The monk asked me where he could get food, and I told him to go to the Wangs'. The bad blood ended there."

Who would sin if they knew they would have to pay for it one day? No one can escape karma.

Adapted from "The Book of Unofficial History."

## FILM INSIGHTS WITH MARK JACKSON



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

## POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

# Communist Specter Gets Body-Slammed in Olympic Hockey Biopic

## MARK JACKSON

I'd never seen the movie "Miracle" until yesterday. I'd experienced the story of the 1980 gold-medal-winning American underdog Olympic hockey team firsthand my sophomore year, down at the student drinking establishment "The Log" at Williams College, after classes—along with serious amounts of beer and even greater amounts of hooting, hollering, table-banging, and cheering.

"Miracle" went completely under my radar. It's the Hollywood-ized telling of the now-mythical story of how Olympic hockey coach Herb Brooks (Kurt Russell) smelted, forged, and honed our gold-medal-winning U.S. amateur team in just seven months. And grew them all the way up, from a motley crew of collegiate, cream-of-the-crop talents who'd all been big fish in their various little ponds, into a formidable juggernaut of world-class warriors.

With a regimen of brutal workouts normally seen only in military special-forces boot camps (and lowan collegiate wrestling), and a virtuoso ability to manipulate and tweak the emotions of his boys via whatever-means-necessary mind games, Brooks created a team—the only team in the world—that could take on the massive, legendary, Goliath-like Soviet professionals.

The political matchup between the United States' free democratic republic versus the Soviet Union's communist regime rode heavily on these young men's shoulders. The 1980 Lake Placid Olympics took place smack-dab in the middle of the America and USSR superpower Cold War that had been underway since approximately 1947 and didn't end until 1991.

Prior to the Lake Placid Games, the Soviets utterly dominated the Olympic hockey world, bagging five out of six gold medals between 1956 and 1980. (They won bronze in 1960.) As mentioned, our college boys were amateurs. These were the Russians' top professionals.

## 'Miracle'

Director  
Gavin O'Connor

Starring  
Kurt Russell, Patricia Clarkson, Noah Emmerich, Sean McCann, Eddie Cahill, Patrick O'Brien Demsey, Michael Mantenuto, Nathan West, Kenneth Mitchell, Kenneth Welsh

Rated  
PG

Running Time  
2 hours, 15 minutes

Release Date  
Feb. 6, 2004

★★★★★

**This is literally a tale of boys challenging men.**

Kurt Russell (C) as Olympic hockey coach Herb Brooks in "Miracle."



Mike Burden (Garrett Hedlund) finds redemption in "Burden."

## FILM REVIEW

## Healing Through Faith and Unconditional Love

## IAN KANE

Mark Twain once wrote: "Truth is stranger than fiction." This saying is often proved by films based on actual events and is no more evident than in di-

rector Andrew Heckler's drama "Burden." The film received attention at 2018's Sundance Film Festival, but it took two years to bring it to movie theaters. Luckily, the filmmaker's perseverance paid off. It would have been

a real shame for this beautifully crafted film to miss the exposure it deserves.

The titular character, the aptly named Mike Burden (Garrett Hedlund, "Troy," "Friday Night Lights"), is a hard case, but he wasn't always that way. When a young orphan, Mike fell in with the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in order to have some semblance of a family. The film opens up in the year 1996 when Mike, as an adult, is the repo man in a small South Carolina town. The job's an ages-old tinderbox as far as race relations go.

The local KKK chapter's leader, Tom Griffin (played by Tom Wilkinson), has infiltrated the town so completely that he's managed to turn a dilapidated movie theater into the Redneck Shop and KKK Museum full of racist memorabilia. Since Griffin holds such sway in town, the local authorities do nothing about the opening.

But that doesn't mean everyone will let things be.



Foreground: Eddie Cahill (L) and Patrick O'Brien Demsey play key hockey players in the 1980 gold-medal-winning US Olympic team.

## Herb Brooks

What was Herb Brooks's motivation and how'd he get so good at what he did? Basically this: Brooks was one of the last guys cut from the 1960 Olympic hockey team. That created a powerful need to finish what he started.

That said, Brooks wasn't interested in the political implications particularly, nor the media frenzy—he was a jock at heart, and this was a coach's dream. As was famously said of storied football coach Bear Bryant, "Bryant can take his'n and beat your'n, and then he can turn around and take your'n and beat his'n."

Herb simply wanted to take these college boys and turn them into a massive, armor-piercing tank, and blow the unstoppable, megalithic Soviet tank to kingdom come, because he was thoroughly fed up with hearing about how the Soviets couldn't be beat.

Brooks studied film on the Soviets nonstop and figured out that what set them apart was due to "skating, passing, flow, and creativity." That, and the fact that nobody heretofore had mustered up the willpower to attain the cardio level needed to stay with the Soviets for the duration of the game. In his opinion, this level of play was missing from both amateur and pro American hockey.

Is it perhaps ironic that coach Brooks was able to beat the communists by divesting his players of their American individualism and making them submit to, well ... communism? Teamwork for the greater good? But isn't that the nature of all team sports? Are team sports a form of communism? In a word, no.

A political-philosophical tangent: The basis of communism is that everyone is exactly the same. But sports-wise, that would translate into some nonsense like this: It doesn't matter who's hot on a given game night—everyone needs to have an equal opportunity, so don't pass the puck to the guy who's on fire; pass it to his less-talented teammate and let him try and score, so everyone can have an equal share.

Who does that? Not even the commies. Nyet. Their philosophy of "skating, passing, flow, and creativity" meant that if one guy is on a hot streak—you pass your comrade the puck with alacrity and creativity and flow. And skating.

Speaking of flow, the American hockey boys hilariously notice that their first-string team of three forwards seems to have developed a hive-mind—a supernatural ability of

knowing each other's thoughts and finishing each other's sentences—and dub them "The Coneheads" à la the famous "Saturday Night Live" skit about aliens. The hockey Conehead boys take flow and creativity to new heights.

So the America-Soviet showdown boils down to a bunch of boys playing for love of the game, versus a bunch of slave-driven men playing out of terror of being sent to the Gulag Archipelago, or Siberia, if they mess up too egregiously. Who might be more motivated to win?

## Popcorn and Inspiration

"Miracle" is spectacularly inspirational. During the opening credits, the film runs a montage of news footage of the American invasion of Cambodia, the death of Elvis, America's 1970s oil crisis, Nixon and Watergate, etc. That's all to say, America was in desperate need of some inspiration.

The film portrays the full intensity of the body-checking, testosterone-fueled, excellent hockey violence that manly men live for (and it's not toxic) without exceeding its PG rating. And when footage shows sportscaster Al Michaels asking his now-renowned, rhetorical question—"Do you believe in miracles? Yes!"—I felt it almost as strongly as I did sitting beer-buzzed at The Log, back in '80.

The game remains one of the best moments in sports history and represents a spiritual triumph over the Specter of Communism. Check out the audiobook called "How the Specter of Communism Is Ruling Our World" and find out why this showdown was so important in the grand scheme of things.

Noah Emmerich shines as the assistant coach to Brooks, as does Patricia Clarkson as Brooks's (sort of) long-suffering but proud, supporting wife. Brooks was probably not the easiest man to live with. Talk about your strong, silent types; he has to leave the stadium after the win to allow himself a private, stifled "Yes!!"

The ensemble of hockey-savvy actors (Eddie Cahill, Michael Mantenuto, Patrick O'Brien Demsey, and Nathan West) nail the heart and soul of what might be America's all-time favorite sports team ever.

Brooks himself never got to see the film; he passed away in a car accident in August 2003. He did serve as a consultant during principal filming. But this is all reminiscent of the Taoist saying, "If a man hears the Tao in the morning, he can die in the evening." Brooks fulfilled his life's mission inspirationally.

The film's excellent cinematography (Jeremy Rouse) along with both a snappy script (Heckler also wrote the screenplay) and some natural performances by the excellent cast combine beautifully. Hedlund plays the part of a conflicted man, caught between two worlds, with phenomenal acumen and gusto. Riseborough is equally convincing as a small-town single mom who wants the best for the man she's fallen in love with.

"Burden" manages many tension-filled scenes that never feel overwrought or artificially manufactured. The adeptness of its outstanding cast and crew keep it from ever treading into predictable waters, and so the good-hearted "Burden" is a solid film telling a hopeful tale about eventual redemption.

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Needless to say, Reverend Kennedy's wife Janice (Crystal Fox), son Kelvin (Dexter Darden), and members of his congregation are all suspicious of the reverend's new house guests. All of these elements set up a tension that carries the film through most of its one-hour-and-fifty-seven-minute runtime.

Just when things might get dull, meeting her, begins to have second thoughts about his role as a Klans-

★★★★★

Just when things might get dull, meeting her, begins to have second thoughts about his role as a Klans-

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



## THEATER REVIEW

# Folksy, Poignant Telling of a Coal-Mining Disaster

JUDD HOLLANDER

**N**EWYORK—Death statistics should not be simply filed and forgotten. What writers Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen set out to do with their moving documentary-theater piece “Coal Country” is show that the 29 coal miners who died in the 2010 disaster at the Upper Big Branch Mine in West Virginia were more than just statistics in a ledger.

Most of the show’s text is taken from interviews conducted in 2016 with those directly affected by the tragedy, while other material comes from trial transcripts. The original music by Steve Earle, who serves as the show’s music director and sole musician, also adds, as he notes, a few words of his own to the story.

As these coal miners’ lives start to unfold before the audience, we begin to understand how it wasn’t uncommon for the men to have a connection to the mine that stretched back decades. Gary (Thomas Kopache), who had 34 years of mining experience himself, proudly points out how he, his father, grandfather, and then his son all worked in the mine.

Indeed, it was not uncommon to have multiple members of the same family working side by side deep within the earth. Those who went away to college for a time usually ended up working there. Even if some didn’t actually work in a mine—working where one never sees the sky is not for everyone—one would likely work for the mine in some other capacity.

Roosevelt (Ezra Knight), for example, ended up working as a mining dispatcher, while his dad labored underground. The entire place was basically a company town. And those industries that didn’t deal directly with the mine were almost certainly dependent on it for a major portion of their businesses.

Just as the audience gets to know those

who worked at the mine—all drawn as down-to-earth characters who give off a next-door-neighbor familiarity—the show provides a general explanation of mining life, a Coal Mining 101. For example, the top-quality coal, and therefore the kind fetching the highest price, was located so far down that it took an hour and a half just to get there—and this in a vehicle.

But as Gary notes, in his day, you were treated like family when you worked at the mine, but changing times, new mine owners, and, in the race for increased productivity, the ignoring of various safety rules, changed all that. The mine became, in the words of Goose (Michael Gaston), another veteran miner, “a ticking time bomb.”

“Coal Country” presents a deeply involving story of those at the lower links of the coal food chain. These people are forced to work in evermore dangerous conditions by those interested only in the financial bottom line.

While the obvious thing when faced with unsafe working conditions is simply to walk away, the coal miners had done the same thing all their lives and couldn’t easily conceive of doing anything else. This point is made through conversations between Goose and his wife (Amelia Campbell), as well as by recollections from Patti (Mary Bacon), who urged her husband not to return to the mine because he wasn’t feeling well.

At one point, some miners were so afraid of getting laid off that they refused to talk to the safety inspectors who went there to check on any alleged problems. One man eventually sees it as his duty to speak up for those who were no longer there, because they could no longer speak for themselves. He also feels more than a little guilt for not speaking up earlier.

The actors bring the characters and situations to life and help to create, on a basically bare stage, the atmosphere and camaraderie around the company town, as well as the shock, horror, and helplessness



Steve Earle (foreground) wrote and performed the original music.

“Coal Country” presents a deeply involving story of those at the lower links of the coal food chain.

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

## ‘Coal Country’

**Irish Repertory Theatre**  
The Public Theater,  
425 Lafayette St.  
New York

**Tickets**  
212-967-7555 or  
PublicTheater.org

**Running Time**  
Running Time: 1  
hour, 30 minutes (no  
intermission)

**Closes**  
April 5

(L-R) Ezra Knight, Michael Laurence (seated), Thomas Kopache, and Michael Gaston in “Coal Country.”



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