

THE EPOCH TIMES LIFE & TRADITION

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Higgs drew on his experiences in the Boy Scouts, at West Point, and in the Army to build a people-oriented company culture, which he called 'making heroes.'

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8 Ways to Celebrate St. Patrick's Day With Kids

BARBARA DANZA

You don't need to be Irish to have some good Irish fun with your family on St. Patrick's Day. From leprechauns to chocolate coins to green, well, everything—St. Patrick's Day is full of fun and good luck!

Here are some simple and enjoyable ways to celebrate the day with your wee ones.

Learn How It All Began

Why are we celebrating in the first place? Answer your kids' natural curiosity by explaining the origins of St. Patrick's Day. Short documentaries or books on the subject are great resources. The life of the saint, the legends about the holiday, the origin of celebratory traditions, or even information about Ireland in general, different angles may spark an interest in your children. Don't underestimate them, and follow their curiosity. Holidays are learning opportunities.

Catch a Leprechaun

A childhood favorite—let the kids work their creative muscles in making the perfect trap for the leprechaun that is sure to visit your home. In advance of the holiday, a shoebox and copious craft supplies with an emphasis on the green is all you need to make a simple or elaborate (if that's your jam) leprechaun trap.

I've never actually seen a caught leprechaun, but I have seen the messy aftermath of one surely having navigated a trap, and the chocolate coins they left behind.

Lucky Surprises

When the kids wake up in the morning, they'll head straight to their leprechaun traps, of course! We always surprise them with little gifts for the day—perhaps a fun St. Patrick's Day T-shirt, shamrock socks, or a leprechaun hat. Other fun morning treats may include holiday pencils and erasers, a book, or simply something green.

Have Them Seeing Green

Speaking of green, we always decorate our dining room table for holidays big and small. A green table cloth, shamrock plates



TIM BOYLE/GETTY IMAGES

From leprechauns to chocolate coins to green, well, everything—St. Patrick's Day is full of fun and good luck.

and napkins, and, if I'm really on top of things, some rainbow decor usually set the stage for a fun day ahead.

Stock up on some green food coloring, and add it to items such as baked goods, pasta, ice cream, or even milk! No time for that? Head to your local bagel shop for some green bagels!

Listen to Irish Music

My personal favorite part of St. Patrick's Day is enjoying Irish music all day. Artists like The Irish Rovers, The Dubliners, or The High Kings will be sure to have your hands clapping and your feet tapping!

Head to the Parade

Many towns and cities will pull out all the stops for their Saint Patrick's Day parade. Have the family don their Irish sweaters

and head to the nearest one to you. The New York Saint Patrick's Day parade is the oldest of its kind, dating back to 1762! Nothing beats the sound of the lovely bagpipes and the celebration of Irish culture and families.

Enjoy an Irish Feast

Head to the local pub or stay in and cook together. Bangers and mash, Irish stew, shepherd's pie, fish and chips, or, of course, corned beef and cabbage would all make for a fitting Irish meal. Oh, and don't forget the soda bread.

End the Day With Stories

What's more Irish than a good yarn? Tell your own stories or enjoy reading aloud to your children or listening to audiobooks about St. Patrick's Day.

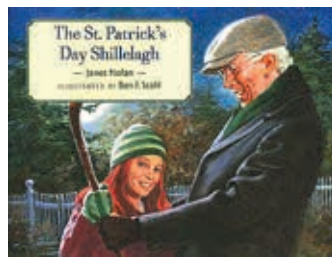
Dancers from the Sheila Tully Academy of Irish Dance perform in the St. Patrick's Day parade in Chicago, in this file photo.

7 Children's Books for St. Patrick's Day

BARBARA DANZA

It's almost time to don our green and celebrate all things Irish! One of my favorite ways to enhance the celebration of holidays like this is to stock our shelves with themed reads to enjoy together as a family.

Here are seven books to enjoy with your wee ones this St. Patrick's Day.

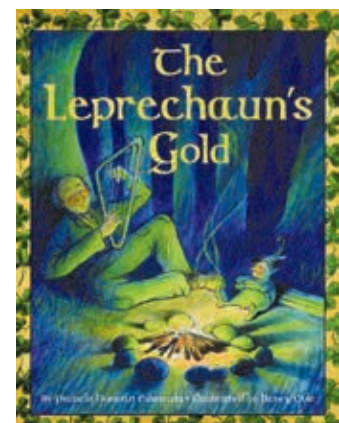


'The St. Patrick's Day Shillelagh' by Janet Nolan

Illustrated by Ben F. Stahl, this lovely story takes place during Ireland's potato famine, when young Fergus and his family leave their beloved homeland and head to America. On the journey over, with tears in his eyes, he whittles a beautiful shillelagh out of a branch from the blackthorn tree at home. (A shillelagh is a thick stick, typically made from blackthorn wood and traditionally used as a weapon in Ireland.)

The story illustrates how the shillelagh is passed down throughout Fergus's family, and how the tale of his journey to America

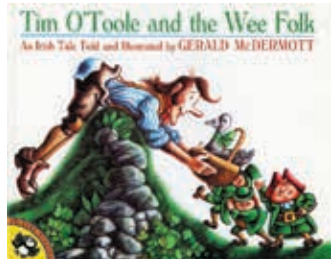
is shared each St. Patrick's Day with the shillelagh in hand, for generations. A beautiful testament to the importance of family and tradition, and to the familiar immigration story of so many Irish, "The St. Patrick's Day Shillelagh" is a treasure.



'The Leprechaun's Gold' by Pamela Duncan

Here's an entertaining tale of two harpists in Ireland who enter a music contest. One is young, dishonest, and selfish; the other is old, kind, and generous. When they encounter a leprechaun in peril on their journey to the competition, magic and a bit of leprechaun trickery lead to each getting his due.

"The Leprechaun's Gold" illustrates the virtues of selflessness and kindness, making this a standout in this collection.



'Tim O'Toole and the Wee Folk' by Gerald McDermott

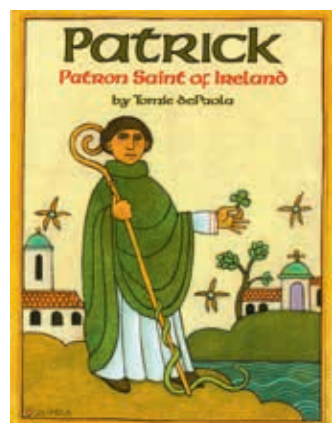
This is a fun tale about a little Irish family, struggling to make ends meet, and their encounters with leprechauns. When Tim O'Toole heads out to "earn wages" for his family, he instead encounters a band of leprechauns who give him gifts that promise to make his troubles go away. His easy turn of luck turns out not so easy, however. "Tim O'Toole and the Wee Folk" is a light-hearted and fun read for St. Patrick's Day.



'St. Patrick's Day in the Morning' by Eve Bunting

Illustrated by Jan Brett, "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning" is an enjoyable picture book for young ones. First published in 1983, it's a charming story

portraying a boy's determination and independence in the face of others' doubts. The theme, relatable any time of year, is set amidst the lovely traditions of the celebration of St. Patrick's Day and a perfect read the weeks leading up to it.



'Patrick Patron Saint of Ireland' by Tomie DePaola

This book introduces children to the life of Saint Patrick. An educational and thought-provoking read, DePaola presents the story of the compassionate and faithful man in a child-friendly way, illustrating why March 17 is known as St. Patrick's Day. The book also includes summaries of some of the legends associated with Saint Patrick, such as driving the snakes out of Ireland and illustrating the Holy Trinity with the leaves of a shamrock.



'St. Patrick's Day' by Gail Gibbons

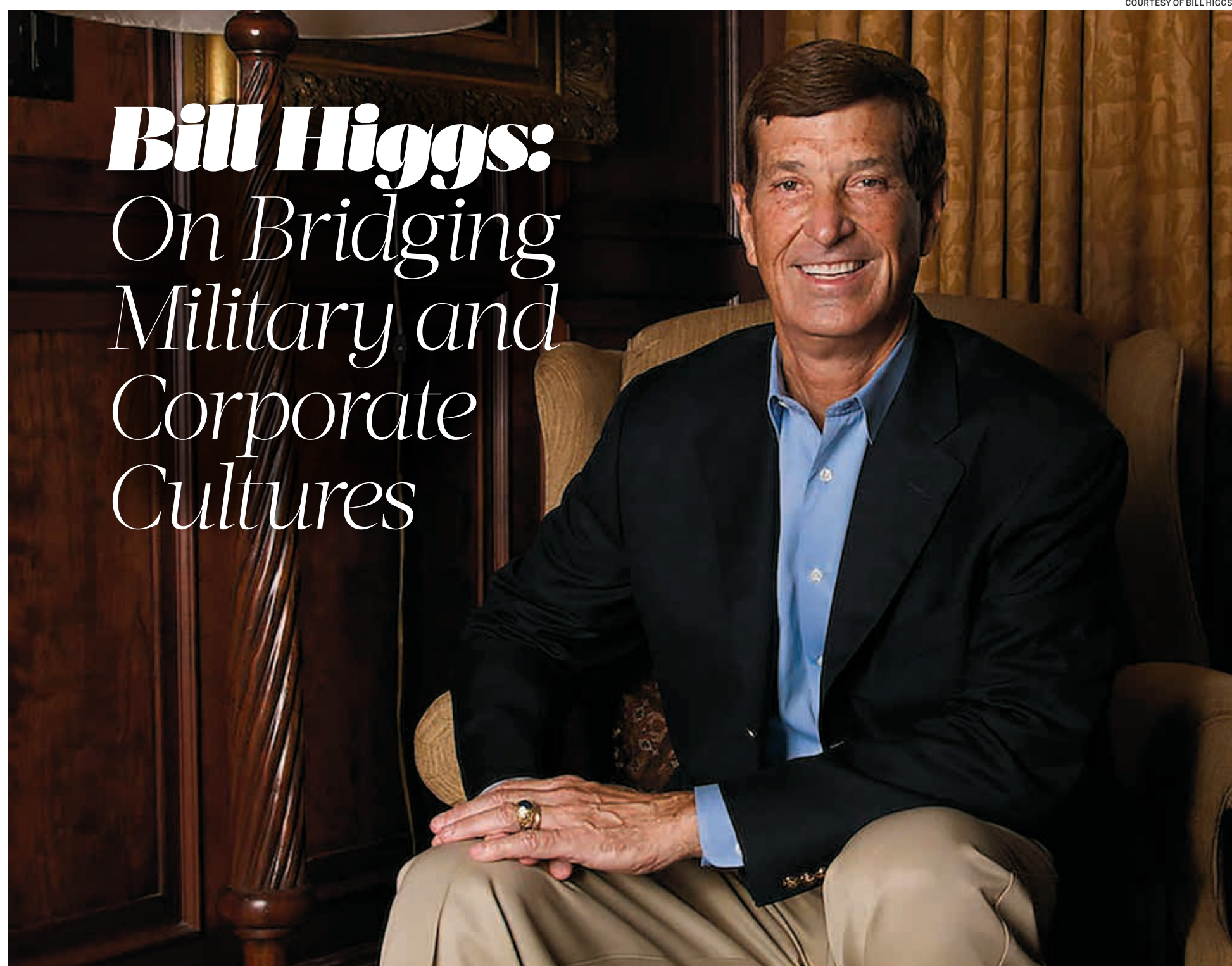
A basic rundown on the holiday, "St. Patrick's Day" briefly describes the life of Saint Patrick, the customary ways people celebrate and their origins, along with the different symbols of St. Patrick's Day, and gives an overview of some legends associated with the saint. Well-presented and educational, you'll be glad you picked this one up.



'The Story of the Leprechaun' by Katherine Degen

Round out this St. Paddy's Day collection with a fun tale about a clever leprechaun who manages to keep his gold hidden. Illustrated by Sally Anne Lambert.

One of my favorite ways to enhance the celebration of holidays is to stock our shelves with themed reads to enjoy together as a family.



Bill Higgs: On Bridging Military and Corporate Cultures

ANDREW THOMAS

Bill Higgs, one of the titans of American business, leveraged his experiences as a Boy Scout, West Point graduate, and in the military to build the offshore oil engineering and construction company Mustang Engineering. Higgs graduated from West Point in 1974 and became a Ranger and officer in the U.S. Army. After he left the Army, he began working in the offshore oil and gas industry. After surviving stage 4 cancer, he started a business with two colleagues that strove to create an effective company culture. He's also the author of "Culture Code Champions: 7 Steps to Scale and Succeed in Your Business."

I had an opportunity to speak with Higgs about his young-adult life experiences, and how he applied what he learned to build a successful business in the middle of an industry crisis.

The Epoch Times: Where did you grow up, and what was life like growing up?

Bill Higgs: I was born in Denver, and then lived in Fort Collins until I was about 8. My parents had a bad divorce, and my mom moved us to Cleveland, and I stayed there until I was accepted into West Point. I thought [life] was pretty good. It was tough that I never really knew my natural dad until I was about 42. I had an older sister, younger brother, and lived in the suburbs. For about three years after the divorce, it was super-tough in Cleveland for my mom being a single parent.

Once we had a stepdad though, things pretty much leveled out. Both my mom and stepdad ended up starting their own companies. My mom had three yarn shops that she started, and my stepdad had a home construction company that also built some small commercial buildings. So I grew up seeing them having their own companies and felt that eventually, I'd probably do that.

The Epoch Times: What motivated you to join the Boy Scouts?

Mr. Higgs: In Cleveland, my mom wanted me to get some male role models that I could have contact with, so she pretty much encouraged me to get into the Boy Scouts. I think it totally turned my life around because in school, you're learning a bunch of stuff, but in scouting, you're out camping, [there's] a lot of camaraderie, and it expanded things you're learning in school and expanded things you're learning on sports teams. So it seemed like a pretty good combination. I was 10 years old.

The Epoch Times: What lessons did you learn during your time in the Boy Scouts? **Mr. Higgs:** One of the things I learned was how to organize to get a merit badge, so I would write down all of the requirements, figure out which ones took the longest, and

Bill Higgs is a West Point graduate and co-founder of Mustang Engineering.

then I'd sort of schedule out how I was going to go after that merit badge. I think that the discipline of planning it, figuring it out, setting a goal was something that helped me then in school and helped me later on in the Army and in the civilian world.

The Epoch Times: What motivated you to apply to West Point?

Mr. Higgs: It's sort of interesting. I went to the dentist, junior year with my mom, and while he was examining my teeth, he said, "Man, your teeth are good enough to get into an academy."

I'm driving home with my mom and my mom says, "What do you think about that?"

I said, "About what?" She said, "About getting into an academy?"

“They broke you down to where you didn't think you could tie your shoe by yourself. You couldn't do it right unless a classmate was helping you. I thought it was interesting how they really welded us together.”

Bill Higgs, on his experience at West Point

I said I hadn't really thought about it, but I looked them up and it seemed like it would be some more Boy Scout stuff on steroids. I applied for the Naval Academy, and during the physical fitness test, I found out that I was colorblind. You can't be at the Air Force Academy or Naval Academy if you're colorblind, so then I ended up applying to West Point.

The Epoch Times: Which experiences stuck with you the most from your time at West Point?

Mr. Higgs: I remember they really broke you down in base barracks to weld you together as a team, and they would always say, "Cooperate and graduate." They broke you down to where you didn't think you could tie your shoe by yourself. You couldn't do it right unless a classmate was helping you. I thought it was interesting how they really welded us together. It built friends for life.

The Epoch Times: What were the core values instilled in you at West Point?

Mr. Higgs: Duty, honor, country [is one] of the two tenets for a West Point. Also, a cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal. You had a code of conduct that everybody just expected you to have, and then what they're doing at West Point is you're the cadre that's now going into the Army to bring those values to the chain of command.

The Epoch Times: What motivated you to start your own business after the Army?

Mr. Higgs: In '85, they let some people that were working really hard for me go in early November, and hired them back in the middle of January for \$5 less per man-hour. It just rubbed me wrong, and the same with two other guys I was working with, Paul Redmon and Felix Covington. So in '85, we started talking. "Hey, we should go start a company" that would be what we call "cycle-proof," so it would not go up and down with the cycles.

We wanted to get 35 top-notch people, create a really strong company, and keep that team together and not go through this hiring and firing, which was so common in

our industry. We started on July 20, 1987—the anniversary of landing a man on the moon—our vision for Mustang was that big so we called it a moonshot company. We were going to be totally people-oriented and project-driven. We didn't call ourselves owners, we called ourselves caretakers of this thing called Mustang, and we wanted to see if we could change what was going on in the industry.

The Epoch Times: How did you apply what you learned as a scout, cadet, and soldier to building Mustang Engineering?

Mr. Higgs: From day one, trying to create a culture that was people-oriented. We had a new engineer come in, he's putting his books on the shelf, and our \$5 bookcase just collapsed. All the books came down around his knees. I come running out of my office, and he's about buried in books. That weekend, I built a hell for stout bookcase [one built beyond structural requirements] and brought it in the next Monday. We threw all these books on it, and everybody goes, "Yeah, this is what we need, but we need 10 more of these things." So I invited everybody to come over to my house the next weekend, and I said, "We'll build bookcases."

I was surprised. The people came, they brought their kids, they brought their spouses, they're in my driveway, they're in the front yard, they're in the garage, and we're building bookcases. My neighbors are coming over and meeting them, and our people are saying, "Man, I've never been to an owner's house before. These owners are very real, and I really think they want to take care of us. They're talking to us, they're standing and cutting bookcases just like we are, we're in it together."

To me, that was something I learned in the Boy Scouts. To have these projects and get around them. I'd learned that at West Point. Have these projects. Get around them with teams. It was huge in the Army. I had all these projects, and you task people and you get together as a team and you just start to weld each other together.

The Epoch Times: Why is company culture more important than strategy?

Mr. Higgs: Culture eats strategy for breakfast because a lot of times strategy comes from the top down, so the people aren't totally bought into it. Some companies try to get the top leadership involved in setting that strategy, but then you're still trying to get all of your people to understand the vision and what their part is in doing it.

You can build a culture—we called it making heroes—where, top to bottom, everyone is trying to make a hero of everybody they touch, so... they're trying to make sure that they're giving that person everything they need to do their job right the first time. It's hard to make that happen through rules and regulations and systems—you need the hearts and the minds of the people for that to happen.

ENGAGING THE WORLD: Some Lessons for the Young

JEFF MINICK

“Hikikomori.” That’s Japanese for “extreme social withdrawal” and is the label for those people, many of them in their 20s and 30s, who shut themselves off from society, live with their parents, refuse to work or attend college, and communicate, when they communicate at all, largely through social media. Up to half a million hikikomori live in Japan, which is a major problem in a land with a growing population of the elderly and a shortage of young workers.

The Japan Times reports that older hikikomori also exist in abundant numbers. Like their younger counterparts, many of them suffer from depression, are ashamed of their societal status, and fear meeting acquaintances who may ask why they are unemployed.

But are the hikikomori only a Japanese phenomenon?

A 2017 US Census Report reveals some startling statistics regarding our young people and their living conditions. In 2015, a third of adults ages 18–35 lived with their parents, and 1 in 4 young people ages 25–34 (2.2 million) neither worked nor attended a school of any kind. In 2016, more young adults lived with their parents than with a spouse.

This report contains comparisons that suggest our young people are taking much more time to grow up than their parents and grandparents did. In 2005, 35 states reported that the majority of young adults lived independently. Just 10 years later, only six states reported this same majority. From 1975–2016, the number of young women who were counted as homemakers fell from 43 percent–14 percent. This same report

In 2016, more young adults lived with their parents than with a spouse.



Marriage and child-rearing are major markers of adulthood.

reveals that many young adults consider education and employment opportunities important markers of adulthood, but over half believe that marrying and having children have little to do with becoming adults.

Given the boom in the last three years in employment, these statistics have surely changed, yet many of the young undoubtedly remain under their parents’ roof. There should be no onus attached to that situation; one could easily make the case that living together is a wise financial arrangement for parents and children.

But what of those who live with Mom and Dad, and who don’t work or go to school?

Of all the young people I know, only three fit that description. One served as a Marine in the Middle East years ago, saw combat, returned home claiming he had PTSD, and took up residence in his parent’s basement, where to the best of my knowledge he remains, though his claims for government assistance were denied. Another woman won a suit for sexual harassment while serving in the military, and though she lives independently, she will lose the monies she receives from the government if she becomes gainfully employed. The third is a 22-year-old male with various personality disorders.

In “Failure to Launch: Why Your Twentysomething Hasn’t Grown Up ... and What to Do About It,” clinical psychologist Mark McConville introduces us to many more young people struggling with the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Nick does well in high school, heads off to college, parties and cuts classes, is suspended for his academic failures, returns home, resides in the basement, and refuses to find employment. Kaylee, an otherwise bright young woman, can’t bring her spending habits under control and is

constantly running up credit card bills. Kyle is terrified of making the leap from high school to college.

Birdie leaves her parents’ home seeking independence, but financial self-reliance proves more than she can handle, and soon “she was sleeping fourteen hours a day ... and was severely neglecting basic self-care.”

McConville believes that these young people and others are failing in three ways to grow up—they lack a sense of purpose, they fail at “administrative responsibility,” which means taking charge of their lives, and they are missing the social skills necessary to interact with other adults. Using these case histories and examples from his own experiences as a parent, McConville offers readers wise advice on easing adolescents into adulthood.

In “Dear Twentysomething,” a letter near the end of the “Failure To Launch” addressed directly to the young rather than their parents, McConville writes, “Becoming an adult is harder than most of us ever want to acknowledge, and far more difficult than anyone dares to tell you in high school,” then later adds, “You’re human, and this is the crooked path we each follow to our quirky, imperfect, rewarding futures.”

All of our young people might take heart from reading McConville’s wise reflections in this chapter.

Of course, the majority of young twentysomethings don’t fit these statistics and descriptions. My own four children all graduated from college, were married by the age of 22, and have found rewarding employment. As a result, a platoon of grandchildren now owns my heart, and I can go to my grave reasonably assured that their parents will make their way in the world.

But two points from the above data are particularly dismaying.

First up are those young people who live at home but neither work nor attend school. Like love, work—even work that is drudgery—contributes to the greater good and should bring some personal satisfaction, if nothing more than a check on payday. To do no work, not even volunteering at the local soup kitchen or public library, takes away the opportunity to feel useful, to be a contributor, to connect with an enterprise larger than the solitary self. In the article from The Japan Times, we meet an older man who lives as a recluse with his elderly mother. She struggles with household chores, yet even there her son refuses to lend a hand, relying instead on government workers to come to the house and perform chores too difficult for her.

Even more troubling is the failure among the young to equate family and marriage with adulthood. This attitude reflects a sad narcissism, a desire for personal gain—a solid education and lucrative work—but not a willingness to extend the definition of adulthood to the joys, responsibilities, and burdens of being a spouse and a parent.

Such a disregard for marriage and family doubtless has many contributing factors, among them fear of commitment, the failure to find a suitable partner, the inability to support a family, and a diminished regard for marriage, but there are consequences. Replacement level fertility rates are 2.1 births per woman. In Japan, the birth rate stands at about 1.44 babies per woman, a long-standing circumstance that haunts the Japanese as their aging population must rely on fewer and fewer young people for assistance. Though our situation here is less dire, the United States has for many years experienced a decline in birth rates. In 2016, the fertility level hovered around 1.80 births.

Marriage and child-rearing are major markers of adulthood. That so many of our young people consider them unimportant speaks volumes about the fallen state of matrimony and family life in our culture. As for any hikikomori among us, if you are depressed, seek counseling. If you feel lost, get some help. Put down your electronic devices, step outside, and engage the world. We need you.

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



Between constant news reports, overheard adult conversations, and whatever they may be picking up from their peers, the situation can be confusing and scary for kids.

Coronavirus: What to Tell Your Kids

A conversation with parent coach Eirene Heidelberg

BARBARA DANZA

The global spread of the novel coronavirus or COVID-19 has adults feeling anxious and uncertain, but what about children? Between constant news reports, overheard adult conversations, and whatever they may be picking up from their peers, the situation can be confusing and scary for kids.

Parents may find themselves unsure how best to comfort and guide their children as this situation continues to unfold.

I asked Eirene Heidelberg, parent coach, CEO of GIT Mom, and host of the podcast “Getting It Together With Eirene, The GIT Mom,” for her advice about how to talk to children about the coronavirus.

THE EPOCH TIMES: What do you think are the most important things parents can do to ease the minds of their children as the coronavirus continues to spread and dominate news headlines?

EIRENE HEIDELBERGER: Control yourself; keep yourself together; keep calm and carry on.

If you want to raise level-headed, calm children—lead by example and be a grown-up vs. a sobbing alarmist hysterical mess. When parents manage their own anxieties we are better parents because we have the brain space to listen and support our children.

If you appear OK, they will be OK.

THE EPOCH TIMES: When it comes to very young children, say under school-age, how

much—if anything—do you recommend parents tell them about the coronavirus?

MS. HEIDELBERGER: When discussing scary information it’s important to keep in mind your child’s age, temperament, and maturity. You want to be honest and real about life because it is not all rainbows and fairy tales; bad things happen, but, in some situations you just cannot be too real.

For children under 5, do not start a conversation or talk about it with your child or in front of your child because he or she is simply too young to process the information. Turn off disturbing images on your TV and social media. If the child brings it up, address it.

THE EPOCH TIMES: Children in school will surely hear various things about the coronavirus from their peers and, possibly, teachers. How should parents explain this situation to young kids?

MS. HEIDELBERGER: For children 6–9, explain the basic facts about the disease and what is occurring, but do not expose them to television or social media. The more repeated and prolonged exposure to TV and media images, the more anxiety this creates.

Depending on the age, explain the coronavirus as simply and neutrally as possible. Use journalistic principles—be short and to the point.

For example:

Who: The coronavirus is a disease mainly affecting older people and those already sick.

What: It causes fever, cough, and trouble breathing. It can be more serious in some people, especially if they are already sick.

When: At the end of 2019 coronavirus began to make people sick in China.

Where: The disease began in China, but now it’s spreading to other countries including the U.S.

Have these conversations sooner rather than later, so that you are your child’s trusted source of information.

Give them a frame of reference that they can understand, drawing on their past experience for what the sickness might be like—a cold, sniffles, aches, and tiredness.

Explain how advanced medicine is, all the hard work happening to protect American citizens, and that it’s easy to catch and spread but healthy kids and grownups aren’t likely to get it.

Additionally, your child may already be seeing individuals wearing face masks in everyday places. Don’t make a big deal out of it. If your child asks why, answer with a swift, “because they feel it’s their best way to stay healthy and every family has different strategies, that’s why we are doing a great job washing our hands.” Then, distract and move on with your conversation.

THE EPOCH TIMES: Older kids need to be more equipped to take common-sense precautions in the face of the virus’s spread. What do you recommend parents teach them about minimizing their risk?

MS. HEIDELBERGER: For children 10 and older, review basic precautionary steps: Hand washing, sneezing into elbows. Don’t spend time at friends’ houses if someone is sick.

Start by asking what they’ve heard and what they know about the virus. Let your child talk. Listen to them and address their feelings.

By talking about it they’ll cope better. Or, if they’re unconcerned, respect their indifference and update as you feel necessary.

Remind kids that scientists are still learning about this new virus, so we don’t know a lot about it yet. Barely any children have gotten sick from it and it’s mainly making adults and older people sick. “But, Mommy and Daddy are healthy and so are Grandma and Grandpa so you have nothing to worry about.”

Remind them also that sometimes the news will talk a lot about one topic, which makes it seem like it’s much worse than it is; when actually measles and the flu affect many more people than the coronavirus.

Reassure your child that most people only get a mild illness and fully recover within a few weeks; that children very rarely get sick and when they do it is usually just like a cold; that pets are not affected. Describe what the main symptoms are and encourage them to let you know if they feel unwell.

“If you’re cool, calm, and collected, your child will feel safe in our uneasy world.”

Eirene Heidelberg, parent coach and CEO of GIT Mom

THE EPOCH TIMES: What common fears or worries might children harbor as this topic remains front and center in society?

MS. HEIDELBERGER: That they, or their loved ones, are going to die.

If your child is worried over the news, show compassion to your child with love and affection and say, “I understand you are scared and how you’re feeling.” Be the grown-up and put aside your anger and grief to be a supportive parent.

Your child comes to you with questions because he or she heard something from the news or a friend and is confused, answer questions directly so there can’t be confusion or misunderstanding. Don’t hypothesize or jump to conclusions. Explain that doctors are doing everything they can to keep families safe and protected. Stay away from frightening words like disease and death.

If your child feels distraught and nervous, get your child involved in creating the family preparedness kit including family solutions in the case of school closings and evacuations and your back-up plan for childcare in the event your child’s school closes. This teaches responsibility and will allow them to take control over the situation in an impactful and visual way.

Be aware if the news is stressing your child out, and be extra involved to soothe anxiety or sadness or issues with sleep or concentration.

If you’re sad, be sad and tell your child what’s going on in your brain. Kids pick up on parents’ emotional temperaments and you are not doing them any favors by pretending you’re not affected.

The most important tip to cope is to get the TV off. The news’ job is to sensationalize events to get viewers to tune in, and a child’s brain is too young to process scary stuff.

If you’re cool, calm, and collected, your child will feel safe in our uneasy world.

We all want to hear everything is going to be OK. As parents, it’s our job to make our children feel safe. Put aside your own uncertainty to be there for your children.

How to Keep a Germ-Free Home

BARBARA DANZA

Maintaining a clean and clutter-free home is always a good idea. With the spread of the new coronavirus, families are taking a more serious look at the state of their homes and, beyond simply creating a pleasant place to live, are perhaps, considering what they can do to reduce the spread of germs at home.

I asked Tracy McCubbin, a decluttering expert and the author of “Making Space, Clutter-Free: The Last Book on Decluttering You’ll Ever Need,” for her advice on maintaining a clean and safe home for your family. Here’s what she said.

THE EPOCH TIMES: Broadly, what are the key steps to keeping a clean, germ-free home?

TRACY MCCUBBIN: The first and, I think, most important step is to declutter the stuff you don’t need, use, or want. If your home is cluttered and full of stuff, it makes it much more difficult to clean, giving germs a place to breed. Cleared surfaces are easier to wipe down daily during flu season.

Countertops in the kitchen and surfaces in the bathroom should be cleaned on a daily basis, as well as doorknobs to the outside.

THE EPOCH TIMES: What areas of the home should one give special attention to when aiming to mitigate the spread of germs?

MS. MCCUBBIN: Start in the entryway. Have a place to take off and store shoes that have been worn outside, so you don’t track dirt and germs into the rest of the house. Designate a hall closet for coats and bags so that anything worn outside isn’t brought into the rest of the house. Shed the outdoor layer of clothes as soon as you come home. Consider having indoor and outdoor clothes.

Sinks should be clean with ample hand soap and towels for hand drying. Consider making the bathroom closest to the entry door a hand-washing station. Everyone washes their hands the minute they come home. Don’t forget to wash while singing “Happy Birthday” twice.

Clean your cell phone! Microfiber cloths help, but for a serious deep clean, Dr. Charles Gerba, a microbiologist and professor at the University of Arizona recommends trying a home solution of 60 percent water and 40 percent rubbing alcohol. To use, he says to “lightly dampen the corner of a soft, lint-free microfiber cloth or cottonswab or square with the mix.” Important:

Tracy McCubbin is a decluttering expert and the author of “Making Space, Clutter-Free: The Last Book on Decluttering You’ll Ever Need.”



“In a home full of stuff, it’s very, very difficult to keep it really clean.”

Tracy McCubbin, decluttering expert

Don’t apply or spray the mix directly onto your phone, which could damage it. “Gently wipe phones to kill unwanted bacteria and use a dry corner of the cloth to remove any excess liquid on your phone,” he says.

Don’t forget to wash canvas shopping bags on a regular basis. If not cleaned, they can harbor E. Coli.

THE EPOCH TIMES: What common mistakes or misconceptions do you encounter in helping families keep their homes safe and clean?

MS. MCCUBBIN: That a cluttered home is a clean home. In a home full of stuff, it’s very, very difficult to keep it really clean. Items are picked up to be wiped or dusted around. Books can hold dust and mold. While I’m not saying throw everything out and live with one plate, one bowl, and one cup per person, I am saying, the more things you have, the more you have to clean.

THE EPOCH TIMES: What ongoing practices do you recommend to keep a home clean?

MS. MCCUBBIN: In addition to weekly cleaning sessions, people need to schedule in weekly decluttering and home organization. That means put everything away and if it’s something you don’t need, want, or use, then instead of shov-

ing in a closet or drawer, let it go.

THE EPOCH TIMES: What specific cleaning supplies do you recommend to keep your home free from germs?

MS. MCCUBBIN: Every household needs a good antibacterial cleanser. I use Method products in my own home. The CDC’s recommendation is an EPA-registered disinfectant to kill germs. Read the label to make sure it states that EPA has approved the product for effectiveness against influenza A virus. During this time of uncertainty, use a stronger product than maybe you normally would.

THE EPOCH TIMES: For those overwhelmed with the prospect of cleaning their home thoroughly, where do you suggest they start?

MS. MCCUBBIN: Start with the entryway, kitchen, and bathroom. Those are the most frequented areas and most likely to have germs from the outside. Once you get those areas under control, move on to laundry. The build-up of laundry can be overwhelming, especially for families. Often times if someone gets upside down on doing laundry, they will buy more clothes to have something to wear, which only adds to the problem of more stuff.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION: FILMS THAT UPLIFT THE SOUL

'Going My Way' From 1944: Faith From the Emerald Isle

TIFFANY BRANNAN

Celebrating all things Irish on St. Patrick's Day can mean more than leprechauns and green beer. The Feast of St. Patrick is a religious holiday honoring the Irish faith, not "plastic Paddy" commercialism. One film that honors Irish traditions and faith is Leo McCarey's 1944 "Going My Way." This movie centers on two Irish priests of a New York City parish who disagree on issues of formality while struggling to save their church. It shows how faith can make life "bright and beautiful."

Father Charles O'Malley (Bing Crosby) arrives in town as the new assistant pastor at St. Dominic's. After finally finding the church, he meets Father Fitzgibbon (Barry Fitzgerald), a stubborn older priest whom he immediately displeases. Father O'Malley came to St. Dominic's to help its failing finances, since it has a hefty mortgage and a heartless landlord (Gene Lockhart).

Little does Father Fitzgibbon know that the bishop sent Father O'Malley to run the church without informing Fitzgibbon. Although hampered by their disagreements, Father O'Malley is determined to help St. Dominic's and the community.

The neighborhood is filled with young hoodlums. Realizing the boys need guidance, Father O'Malley befriends them by taking them to a baseball game. Then, after earning their trust, he organizes the reluctant rascals into a choir.

Meanwhile, he advises a young woman who left home with aspirations to be a singer, Carol James (Jean Heather). When she attracts the attention of the landlord's son Ted (James Brown), he sets the young couple on the right path.

Before becoming a priest, Father O'Malley contemplated being a composer. He still enjoys singing, playing the piano, and composing. He decides to use his talent to earn the church some much-needed money. His boyhood friend, Father Tim O'Dowd (Frank McHugh), ar-



ranges for him to present one of his songs to a music publisher (William Frawley). Meanwhile, Father Fitzgibbon begins to see Father O'Malley's good heart.

Three Types of Music

Since this film stars Bing Crosby, a famous crooner, it features popular music. Although he couldn't be too jazzy as a priest, he does sing three new songs. After Carol James tells Father O'Malley that she wants to be a singer, she demonstrates by singing "The Day After Forever." But Father O'Malley shows her a more emotional rendering, teaching her that real feeling beats schmaltz. Later, O'Malley and his boys' choir (the Robert Mitchell Boy Choir) sing "Swingin' on a Star" (which won the Academy Award for Best Song). The film's musical climax is the beautiful title song, which summarizes O'Malley's views on faith.

Bing Crosby is not this film's only famous musician. Rise Stevens, a Metropolitan Opera mezzo-soprano, plays Father O'Malley's old friend Genevieve Linden. Linden performs the famous "Habanera" from "Carmen," a role for which Miss Stevens would become famous. Linden also sings "Going My Way" with the boys' choir for the publisher.

In Rise Stevens's second of only two Hollywood films, this lovely singer brought opera to the masses. Since this film has a religious

(Above) Barry Fitzgerald (R) and Bing Crosby in "Going My Way."

(Right) Barry Fitzgerald (L) and Bing Crosby in "Going My Way."



setting, it also features beautiful sacred music. Most notably, Genevieve Linden sings "Ave Maria" by Schubert, accompanied by the once unruly boys' angelic voices. The other hymn is "Silent Night," a Christmas carol that Father O'Malley sings with his boys' choir. This film has music for all tastes.

A Great Day for the Irish

When this film was made, the Irish were very influential in Hollywood. In addition to stars Bing Crosby and James Cagney, supporting actors Frank McHugh and Alan Hale, and directors Leo McCarey and John Ford, many of Hollywood's insiders were Irish. Irishman Joseph I. Breen was the Production Code administrator from 1934-1954 and ensured that films followed the Motion Picture Production Code guidelines for acceptable film content throughout production. The Code was co-written by Martin Quigley, an Irish film-trade paper publisher.

The Code forbade insulting nationalities. This included the Irish, who were often caricatured as brawling drunks. Resenting this stereotype, the 100 percent Irish Mr. Breen demanded fair, dignified representation of his ethnicity. As "Going My Way" shows, 20th-century Irish Americans were serious and moral as well as fun-loving. Although playful, they cherished family and prized their Catholic faith.

Joseph Breen's grandson Jack Benton recalls that there were two "tribes" in old Hollywood, the Jewish and the Irish. For the 20 years when Hollywood's morals were supervised by a popular member of the latter, it was, as the song title claims, "A Great Day for the Irish."

An Irish Lullaby

Earning over \$38 million worldwide, "Going My Way" was 1944's highest-earning film. It was critically acclaimed, receiving enthusiastic reviews from The New York



A poster for the 1944 film "Going My Way."

Times and Variety. In addition, it received seven Academy Award wins, including Best Picture, Best Actor (Bing Crosby), Best Supporting Actor (Barry Fitzgerald), Best Director, Best Original Story, and Best Screenplay. It also won Golden Globes for Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Supporting Actor (Fitzgerald).

It's easy to understand this movie's popularity. Its charming simplicity is still heartwarming and inspiring. Father O'Malley shows that you can enjoy life while serving a higher purpose and helping others. Life can be cheerful and pious.

Father O'Malley's choice to serve God instead of his career is very moving. Although a talented singer, a gifted composer, and a handsome man, he decided to "go my way." His way meant that he helps a young couple, wayward boys, and even Father Fitzgibbon, as well as motivating his friends. Of course, we in the audience are inspired too.

You don't have to be Irish to celebrate St. Patrick's Day, and you don't need to be Catholic to appreciate this film. Although the protagonists are Catholic priests, it isn't overtly religious. It's more about faith's uplifting power than Catholicism.

When you're wearing the green on St. Patrick's Day, complete the celebration with "Going My Way." Your heart will be warmed as O'Malley sings "Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral," an Irish lullaby with music box accompaniment. Like everyone at St. Dominic's, you will be happier for knowing the good Father.

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.

'Wendy': An Ode to the Spirited Mother

Filmmaker Benh Zeitlin on his new movie

MASHA SAVITZ

HOLLYWOOD, Calif.—It seemed entirely fitting to watch "Wendy," the rambunctious, mythical retelling of "Peter Pan," on the mercurial Leap Day, followed by a Q and A with its director Benh Zeitlin.

The film is set in a roadside diner, a home by the railroad tracks, where Wendy and her twin brothers are enticed to follow little Peter Pan, who is jumping from train car to train car along the tops of a massive locomotive that passes their house, shaking all of the windows and doors. The train itself seems a creature of the imagination.

They eventually journey to a mysterious island where they can stay young forever, as long as they don't think of anything worrisome or too serious, as the adults do.

True to Zeitlin's style, he captures, as described above, all of the elements of chaos, joy, and danger on the screen. The film evokes the true sensations of a real adventure.

As an adventurous, artistic spirit



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himself, Zeitlin explained at the ArcLight Cinemas theater in Hollywood that he was drawn to the subject of Peter Pan because he related to always being told to grow up and that, in the film business, he would probably soon have to.

"If you live for art and creative freedom, you're always being told to grow up," Zeitlin said. The Peter Pan story implies that "in order to be free, it seems you have to be heartless and alone."

Indeed, many artists feel the weight of this perceived dilemma. The film industry, in particular, represents as difficult an arena as any in the rela-

(From left to right)

(L-R) Devin France, Gavin Naquin, Gage Naquin, Romyri Ross, and Yashua Mack star in "Wendy," an adventure for the determined young at heart.

Devin France as Wendy, who represents the potent combination of free spirit and loving heart, in the film "Wendy."

(L-R) Wendy (Devin France) and her brothers (Gavin Naquin and Gage Naquin) in the film "Wendy."

tionship between art and commerce. Perhaps it is no accident that Zeitlin chose the opportunity granted him from the success of his last film, "Beasts of the Southern Wild," to examine exactly this dilemma.

He chose to reexamine the position in the original story by James Barrie, a story that always enticed him and his collaborator and sister Eliza Zeitlin. She served as production designer for the movie.

Barrie's idea is that one could either be like Peter Pan and his troop of Lost Boys—free but with no family or love—or choose domestic life and give up that life of

careless freedom and adventure. The Lost Boys are children free of the structure and discipline provided by adults and so they are full of wild abandonment, adventure, and play. Yet they are also free from the guidance, wisdom, and tender care that adults offer.

The question the film asks is, Zeitlin says, "Can you be free together with heart, be free with heart?" Interestingly, it is Wendy who leads him to that possibility, not Peter Pan. Zeitlin saw in the character of Wendy the remedy, or perhaps the bridge to the solution: an adventure-some girl who is also devoted to her

family. She is nurturing to all but, though wild and indeed the instigator of the adventure, is also imbued with a deeply maternal nature.

According to Zeitlin, Wendy represents that archetype, the one who embraces adventure as well as values the role of mother: family-centered, nurturing, compassionate, and willing to sacrifice for others.

The opening sequence features a young Wendy, perhaps just 2 years of age, held in the arms of her mother, who cooks up dozens of eggs and rounds of bacon and pancakes for customers in their family-run trackside diner. A strong sense of everything that is home—namely, safety and comfort—pervades this first scene.

This scene leads into its counterpart when one of the young boys present is told he might just end up being the janitor at the diner when he grows up. His alarm at this prospect, a lightly penciled point, sets us up beautifully for all that is to come.

The Mythic Mother

Motherhood is a driving theme throughout the film. In Zeitlin's telling, Mother, an actual character in the film, is a great mysterious fish-like sea creature, who is poetically brought into being at the sound of the first child's laughter.

She is the only source of comfort to Peter and the Lost Boys.

The film seems also, albeit circuitously, to explore the important themes of aging in a youth-obsessed culture, looking with a more nuanced eye at this cultural aberration and suggesting that getting old, too, is an integral part of life's great adventure.

Zeitlin noted that the character of Wendy is a natural extension or continuation of the character Hushpuppy. Hushpuppy was played by Quvenzhané Wallis, the 5-year-old lead of his award-winning film "Beasts of the Southern Wild," whom he watched grow up during the filming and promotion of the film. Hushpuppy, a wild child at heart, had to nurture her ailing father.

Support for a Wild Venture

The production team, Zeitlin said, is a group of mostly friends and desperately under-resourced filmmakers who banded together in 2004 and called themselves Court 13 Arts. They have worked together since Zeitlin's first film in 2008, "Glory at Sea." Their "all hands on deck" work ethic enables Court 13 to eschew the typical Hollywood hierarchies and act as a team reminiscent of what Zeitlin calls Lost Boys "with love":

They follow their filmmaking paths as adventures, but do so in the most supportive way possible.

In fact, Zeitlin made absolutely no money from "Beasts," ensuring that the team members, who had all worked for free, were rewarded for supporting that film's incredible adventure.

Zeitlin co-wrote the musical score for "Wendy." The music adds to the sense of chaos embodied by children set free to play out their youthful lives forever. It blends Louisiana Cajun flavors with classical motifs in a boisterous cascade of swooping and lilting notes as adventurous and wild as the narrative.

The impressive peaks on Montserrat, a Caribbean island with a highly active volcano, provided the location and majestic backdrop for this epic tale. It is an island so remote that the film's producers—the supposed adults in the room of filmmaking—were less likely to show up and interfere with Zeitlin's vision. It lent a convincingly visceral immediacy to the film.

Complete with train-top rides, old sunken ships, underwater caves, sea creatures, and a story that truly draws blood, the film seems to ensure that Zeitlin will be allowed to take on another epic adventure on whatever film project he chooses next.

SHEN YUN PERFORMING ARTS

Audience Reactions

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

The Epoch Times is a media sponsor of Shen Yun Performing Arts, and believes its mission to revive the 5,000-year civilization of China is history in the making, and in line with our mission of covering and preserving traditional arts and culture.



It's a magnificent, magnificent performance. It's good to see Chinese culture... I think you can't really crush culture. Communism can't crush culture.

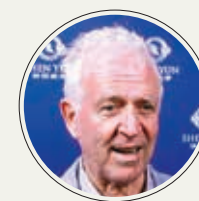
MATTHEW BRANSGROVE, lawyer, at Capitol Theatre in Sydney, Australia, on March 5, 2020



I feel that spirituality. I feel that sense of refinement, when I'm here in this hall. It is beautiful. It is out of the world, it is beautiful... If more and more people get

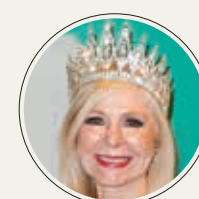
exposed to spirituality, the world will become a better place. It will become a happier place, less stress. It'll be a happier place.

TILAK DEWAN, founder of PACE Canada College, at Centennial Concert Hall in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on March 3, 2020



In one sense it's ethereal, but I don't want to use that word in a loose way. It's elevating. I have to say it's elevating. For me, it's real art. It's a form of art I'm not familiar with, but I feel very privileged to have been introduced to it.

PAUL MACNEILL, honorary associate professor at the University of Sydney, at the Capitol Theatre in Sydney, Australia, on March 6, 2020



It was magical, just magical, superb... I loved it, there was a significant, profound meaning behind the show. It gave depth to the show and was very touching. I loved it. I got a very good message, I loved that the creators were doing, and I loved the way the message came across: very sincere, very inspiring, and truthful.

CHERIE KIDD, Ms. Senior USA, at Lincoln Center in New York on March 6, 2020



I sat down and thought it was just going to be dancing. I didn't realize it was a story that took you into it and made you part of it. ... The dancing was superb, the costumes were magnificent. ... The belief in God is a powerful thing, and here we felt that God was there.

RICHARD LIBERO, head of an accounting firm, at Lincoln Center in New York on March 8, 2020



It's like you just get lost in the moment, and a dance for 5 to 10 minutes seems like forever, but it also seems [brief]. It just captivates you. It's like time stands still. ... It put me in a different place, spiritually and mentally. ... It uplifts you.

CARLOS VIRAMONTES, regional manager for Cook County court, at the Center for Performing Arts at Illinois's Governors State University on March 7, 2020

There is no cost to patients, and Sons of the Flag has helped over 1,000 burn patients to date.

A Navy SEAL's Mission to Revolutionize Burn Care

ANDREW THOMAS

"Birdman." While Ryan Parrott's nickname is certainly interesting, the story behind it is quite traumatic. In 2005, the Navy SEAL's Humvee was hit by a roadside bomb in Iraq. Parrott was in the gunner's turret, and the explosion sent him flying up into the air.

While he suffered first- and second-degree burns, an encounter with a gravely burned Army Ranger after his service would lead him to become a burn-care advocate for veterans, first responders, civilians, and their families.

Beginnings

Parrott, 36, grew up in Detroit and didn't do well academically in school. In his junior year of high school, he failed most subjects. He had been taking a class in motivational psychology, and the teacher was a Marine Corps and Vietnam War veteran. One day he told the class that there was only one thing better than the Marine Corps, and that was the U.S. Navy SEALs.

"I was so fascinated by his storytelling, and what these SEALs were capable of. I was so riveted," Parrott said.

Parrott stayed after class and told his teacher he wanted to become a SEAL. The teacher laughed and asked how he was going to pass one of the toughest tests in the world when he wasn't even passing the class. But he told Parrott that if he was serious, he would get him some literature on the subject. The next day, a copy of Reader's Digest with the article "The Making of an American Warrior" appeared on his desk.

Becoming a Navy SEAL

On Sept. 11, 2001, he was sitting in class when he watched the second plane hit the World Trade Center. That very day, he went to the Navy recruiting station. He was too young then, but after a couple of months, he enlisted in the Navy. In 2003, he started BUDS training and ultimately became a part of SEAL Team Seven in 2004.

"Now I'm around all these just unbelievably exceptional warriors, especially knowing that the platoon that I joined had just gotten back from combat," Parrott said. "You already instantly knew that everything coming out of their mouth was from real-world experiences."

Parrott had an opportunity to travel all over the world and relished in the camaraderie and new experiences.

During his first deployment to Iraq in 2005 when his vehicle was hit by an IED, the explosion sent fire and shrapnel through the Humvee. Having been ejected from the vehicle, he was the least injured. He took some shrapnel and suffered first- and



1. Ryan "Birdman" Parrott became a Navy SEAL in 2004.

2. Parrott is a retired Navy SEAL and the founder of Sons of the Flag.

3. Parrott's organization, Sons of the Flag, aims to revolutionize burn care for veterans, first responders, and their families.

second-degree burns to his face and hands.

But other members of his platoon suffered much more severe shrapnel and burn wounds. Fortunately, everyone survived and Parrott is still in touch with everyone who was in that vehicle. Parrott, meanwhile, would go on two more tours of duty in Iraq in 2007 and 2009.

Burn Unit

In 2010, Parrott left the military and moved to Dallas. There he was introduced to another Navy SEAL, who had a security firm. One day at work, a group of veterans came into the office, including an Army Ranger and West Point graduate who had suffered burns from an IED during his deployment to Afghanistan. Parrott asked him how they were treating his wounds. He replied that he had had three dozen surgeries, and that was the best that could be done for him.

"I'm thinking to myself, 'Wow. He's got disfigurement on his face, he's got disfigurement on his hands, God only knows what the rest of his body looks like. He had been through an IED where it did not go well,'" Parrott said.

What Parrott gathered from that exchange was that he needed help and that advancements in burn care didn't exist. He went home and researched the subject. After staying up all night, he couldn't find anything that would help. He said it infuriated him, so he asked the Army Ranger if he would join him if he could find a

way to change the situation for burn patients. He said he was all in.

Parrott and his colleagues began going to fire conferences and traveling to different burn units to speak with doctors, nurses, patients, families, and social workers to find out where the voids in burn care existed and how they could help them fill those voids.

Filling the Gaps

After extensive research, Parrott started his own charity called Sons of the Flag in 2011, which officially became a registered nonprofit in 2012. The organization addresses the gaps in burn care for veterans, first responders, and civilians. Now, Sons of the Flag has 28 team leaders in 28 states and works with 14 different burn units nationally.

Sons of the Flag has two primary programs: The Fellowship Program and Mission Reconstruct Freedom.

The fellowship program motivates and engages young doctors to become burn surgeons. According to the American Burn Association, there are 480,000 people burned in the United States every year. However, there are only 300 burn reconstruction surgeons in the country. In addition, there isn't a burn unit in every city, nor is there even a burn unit in every state. The organization provides scholarships for young surgeons to become fellows who undergo a year of training under a burn surgeon, and then becomes burn surgeons themselves. They also participate in

research and development.

"Add new doctors to the mix. Each doctor is going to help thousands of patients in their lives, so that's ensuring the future," Parrott said.

Care for Burn Patients

Mission Reconstruct Freedom focuses on the patient. During the initial hospitalization, Sons of the Flag gives families of the patients go-bags that contain essentials such as toiletries, phone chargers, pens and paper, and blankets. After patients are stabilized and leave the hospital, they can develop a number of complications. Sons of the Flag has traveled across the country and partnered with some of the best reconstructive burn surgeons to create a panel to work with these patients.

Patients who send an application through the Sons of the Flag website are contacted by the organization, which then connects the patients with a panel of surgeons via Skype. The panel, based in Tampa, Florida, is under the direction of Dr. Smith and Dr. Pribaz.

After the Skype consultation, the doctors create a course of treatment and Sons of the Flag takes care of all of the logistics to send the patients and a family member to Tampa to undergo surgery at no cost to the patient.

Sons of the Flag has helped more 1,000 burn patients to date.

"Just being a piece of the puzzle is the most rewarding thing," Parrott said.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF RYAN PARROTT

How Retirement Savers Can Glide Through Market Turmoil

NEW YORK—If you are close to retirement in the United States, chances are you do not have to worry about cashing out of the market as it gyrates wildly on coronavirus fears.

Many retirement savers own target-date funds, which are professionally managed to glide over time from stocks to bonds and other fixed income, starting about 20 years out from the projected date you will stop working.

According to Morningstar, investors had more than \$1.7 trillion in target-date funds at the end of 2018.

For those approaching retirement, it is likely that your portfolio is approaching a 50/50 mix, and it will systematically ratchet back even further away from stocks as you age.

Vanguard's 2025 fund, for instance, is currently at 60 percent equities and 40 percent bonds and other fixed income; its 2020 fund is at 50/50. In February, while the MSCI U.S. index lost 7.43 percent for the month, the 2025 fund dropped 3.98 percent, and the 2020 fund fell 3.22 percent.

Vanguard's senior investment strategist, Scott Donaldson, said 77 percent of the company's participants use target-date funds. Just over half of those participants are in a single target-date fund.

If you are managing your own allocations, with or without an adviser, the key to surviving market turmoil is to have a long-term plan and stick with it.

Target-date usage will become even more prevalent over time because so many younger workers are automatically invested in target-date funds—to the tune of 90 percent of those under 25, compared with just 50 percent for those aged 55–64, according to Vanguard.

Fidelity, another giant in the retirement market, says about 76 percent of its savers use target-date funds.

By contrast, just 7.5 percent of Fidelity's do-it-yourself investors aged 60–64 are 100 percent allocated to equities, while

4.9 percent are totally out of stocks. The typical mix for that age group is 66 percent equities and 34 percent non-equities, as of the end of 2019, Fidelity said.

"We do check-ins with people periodically," said Katie Taylor, vice president of thought leadership at Fidelity. "Sometimes people just need to be reassured, especially if they don't follow the markets day-to-day."

On Your Own

If you are managing your own allocations, with or without an adviser, the key to surviving market turmoil is to have a long-term plan and stick with it. You need to balance safety with the need for returns that beat inflation.

For certified financial planner Tim Doehrmann, whose practice is in Morton, Illinois, that process starts as soon as he meets new clients and talks to them about their risk tolerance. When the conversation turns to asset allocation, Doehrmann prefers to talk about time rather than percentages.

A key consideration is how much Doehrmann's clients are willing to withdraw from fixed income while waiting for the market to recover.

Doehrmann gives the example of this client couple: Both are 70 and have \$2 million in investable assets. For them to be able to draw \$95,000 a year from investments, on top of approximately \$45,000 in Social Security, he suggests setting aside about six years of a portfolio in fixed income like bonds, which is about \$600,000, or about 30 percent.

Lisa Kirchenbauer, a certified financial planner in Arlington, Virginia, takes more of a bucket and goal-based approach. A few years ahead of retirement, Kirchenbauer's clients will estimate their needs, especially the required minimum distributions they need to take from their accounts. Each year, they set that aside in cash so it is ready to go.

"We don't have to sell in a down market that way," Kirchenbauer said.

For a reality check, go ahead and take a peek at your accounts. "Even if you are 60, I'm not so worried about that, because your full retirement age is 67," Kirchenbauer added. "You have at least five years, and you can hang in there."

By Beth Pinsker
From Reuters



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHANE HENDERSON

A Father and Son Build a Multimillion-Dollar Business With Patriotic Metal Art

ANDREW THOMAS

During the summer of 2013 Shane Henderson and his 10-year-old son Justus were working on a metal art project, and spending some valuable father-son time in their garage. They made patriotic pieces of metal art and started an Instagram page that featured their work, which is now the largest Instagram page showcasing metal art in the world. Little did they know their home project would become a multimillion-dollar business.

Henderson had been a welder, and working with metal came naturally to him. However, what made the work particularly special was the fact that he was creating pieces of art with his son.

"It was good because I was passing something onto him," Henderson explained.

Henderson's son is a baseball player, and the two have always bonded over the sport. Working with metal and building art pieces together fortified their relationship even more.

Rapid Growth

Henderson's own father is a Vietnam War veteran, and he has always been incredibly patriotic. His Instagram page began to be followed by many active-duty military, veterans, police officers, and firefighters, and within a couple of months, he had 40,000 followers.

People began asking him for custom pieces and commemorative pieces while Henderson was working a full-time job. By 2015, he found himself working on pieces until midnight in his garage.

"By the time I had outgrown my garage we had metal art stacked all over the house. Packing boxes, packing tape, you couldn't even walk through our house. It was a shipping station basically for all this metal art," Henderson recalled.

Henderson would load his truck with different pieces every night and would go to the gas station, where there was a post office. The woman who worked nights was named Daphne, and she would help him unload his work. During Christmas 2015 Henderson had an impossible 700 orders to fill, and he hired her to help him part-time.

"It was painful. It was pretty bad. We

were kind of like war buddies by the end of it. That Christmas kind of put us on the map. By then I'd already had 150,000 followers on Instagram and probably 20,000 on Facebook, so the brand was out there," Henderson explained.

The Freedom Cabinet

As the business was growing, Henderson began incorporating wood into his work. He routed out grooves, and inlaid steel. The flags are oiled, burned, polished, and everything is handmade. Business continued to grow rapidly, and he began hiring employees and buying machinery. He also rented his own shop. As the 2016 election approached, he was selling hundreds of flags a day. By Christmas they had sold thousands of pieces.

By 2017, he had his second shop and six employees. They had the idea to put one of the flags onto a locked cabinet with foam in it and hang it on the wall. From there, the Freedom Cabinet was born. By summer 2017, he had countless backorders, he couldn't hire people quickly enough, and he had outgrown his shop. After getting through Christmas 2017, Henderson had to move into a new 15,000-square-foot space. He now has 31 employees, and still has thousands of backorders.

While not marketed for this purpose, many customers store their firearms in the Freedom Cabinet. Henderson didn't want his brand to be too narrowly focused on one industry, so he rebranded the Freedom Cabinet into a new, second product called the Speakeasy Vault. The item is the same, but features space for a full-bar and glassware.

Henderson runs a successful business, but his patriotism is the hallmark of his work. In 2017 during his time in his second shop, he started Flags for Fortitude. He had been receiving calls and emails every day for donation pieces and was driven to give back.

People can nominate an active-duty military member, veteran, police officer, firefighter, or any local hero describing their story, and all Henderson asks for in return is a picture of the recipient holding the custom piece. Last year, he shipped over \$120,000 worth of art as part of Flags for Fortitude. "I've got so many more ideas of things that I want to make and things that I want to do," Henderson said.

1. Shane Henderson with his son Justus outside of Metal Art of Wisconsin.

2. One of Shane Henderson's pieces.

3. The Freedom Cabinet.

For Special-Needs Kids, New Jersey Rabbi Offers Chance of a 'LifeTown'

LIVINGSTON, N.J.—Looking out of his office window, Rabbi Zalman Grossbaum finds it hard to get work done as he watches kids enjoying the miniature town he built for them.

The village of storefronts inside his enclosed "LifeTown" complex in Livingston, New Jersey, lets children with special needs—"special abilities," Grossbaum insists—hone their social skills, and he always wants to join them.

"I feel this magnetic pull to come out here and to be with the kids and experience life with the kids, because there's

something absolutely magical for what happens here," Grossbaum said standing in the miniature town, known as LifeTown Shoppes.

If there is any lingering frustration over the seven years it took to convert the 53,000-square-foot building into his dream, including a year of construction that stretched into three, Grossbaum does not show it.

The 48-year-old rabbi with an early salt-and-pepper beard smiles from beneath his silver-frame glasses as he explains the interactive features of the



A special needs student rides a tricycle in LifeTown Shoppes, an indoor Main Street with businesses that allow for students with special needs to practice how to interact in real-world settings, in Livingston, N.J., on March 2, 2020.

complex that welcomes children of all faiths, most of whom have physical or intellectual disabilities.

And always, he has a story, like when some New York Jets players came in November to help inaugurate LifeTown's football field and he saw "their whole demeanor changes" as they threw balls and ran plays with kids with autism.

"It was equally an opportunity for these players to have that experience as it was for these kids to be playing with NFL players," he said.

Autism is one of the most common conditions for children who visit LifeTown on school trips or with their parents, Grossbaum said.

In fact, New Jersey has the country's highest rate of autism spectrum dis-

order, with one child in 34 diagnosed with the condition, compared with the national rate of one in 59, according to nonprofit support agency Autism New Jersey.

Learning to Use Money

At the Shoppes, LifeTown's 11,000 square-foot centerpiece, children begin their 90-minute visit with a \$12 withdrawal from a Regal Bank branch and then decide how to spend it at stores including a bike-rental stand, a Shop-Rite supermarket, a nail salon, and movie theater.

"They're learning to use money, to count out how much money to give me, and are using 'please' and 'thank you,' and 'you're welcome,'" said Sheldon



Co-founder and CEO of LifeTown Rabbi Zalman Grossbaum poses in front of an Alphabet Wall in LifeTown, a 53,000-square-foot center dedicated to teaching life skills to children and adults with special needs, in Livingston, N.J., on March 2, 2020.

Kirsch, 72, a retired chemist who volunteers as a Shop-Rite clerk.

Educators said the low-key setting of the Shoppes, with its enclosed storefronts and "Main Street," works well for autistic children, whose senses may be overloaded by the smells, sounds and sights of real-life commercial areas.

"This is great for working on social skills in a small setting," said speech pathologist Annie Peterson, 32, who accompanied two classrooms of elementary school children with autism from Parsippany-Troy Hills, New Jersey, on a recent visit to LifeTown.

One of the visiting students, 9-year-old Alexander Nahullier, said his favorite store was the pet shop, "because I saw guinea pigs, and they're my favorite ro-

dent and they're extremely adorable."

Since LifeTown opened in September, school districts from as far away as Long Island, New York, and Maryland have sent or expressed interest in bringing their students, for whom the fee is \$35 each, Grossbaum said.

Schools usually send therapists along with visiting students, he said, but LifeTown has 45 part-time therapists for children who come with their relatives.

For Grossbaum, however, it is LifeTown's volunteers—300 adults and 850 teenagers—who are its heart and soul.

"LifeTown is not about therapy. LifeTown is about life," he said.

By Peter Szekely and Roselle Chen
From Reuters

Highlights From Men's Spring and Summer Fashion Trends

This spring season, there is a plethora of new styles that are bound to suit every taste. Whether you are looking to completely change your look or just want a few summer styling tips, check out the top men's trends for spring-summer 2020.

MANY NGOM

ALL PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

* The Modern Sailor

The nautical trend has always been a staple during menswear spring runway shows. But this season, the traditional peacoat got some competition. Styles got more "street" as designers took the trend more mainstream for everyday wear. Some call this look "shipster" as opposed to hipster. If this look piques your interest, update your outfit by adding key pieces like a printed parka from Lanvin or a vintage print top as seen in Kenzo's runway show.



Michael Kors



Kenzo



Lanvin



Lanvin

** The Utilitarian

I always wondered why men keep everything in their pockets. It's because they don't have much to carry—basically a phone and a wallet. But this season's trend seems to be telling us a different story. The multi-pocket trend, or the utilitarian look, is ruling the runways, as designers addressed the question of multi-functional clothing for men. As they carry more things, how can they still travel light? Workwear and army looks were the inspiration this season. If you want to try this look, balance a utilitarian jacket with a pair of jeans—but not with cargo pants, as that would be too much.



Paul Smith



Canali



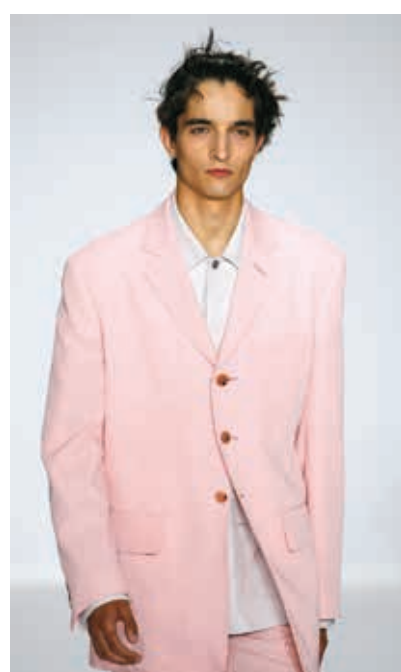
Louis Vuitton



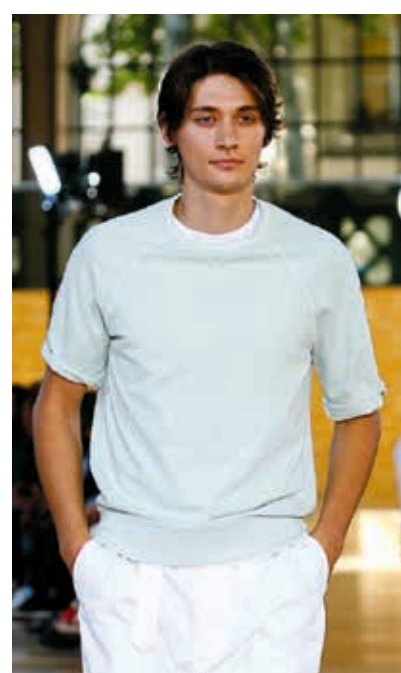
United Standard

*** Macaron Colors

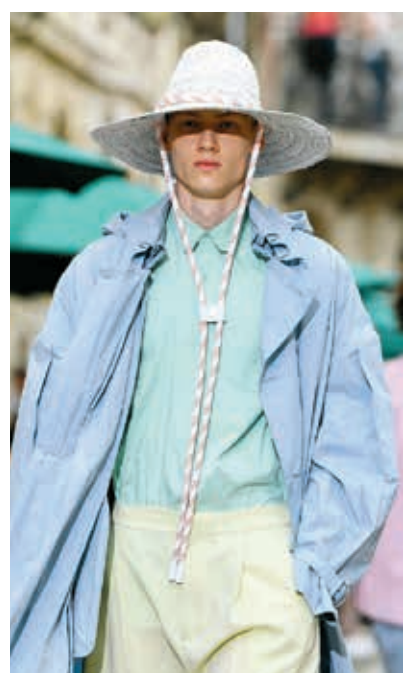
Gentlemen, would you wear pastels—like pale pink, lavender, aqua, or peach? I'll let you decide, but just know that the look can be nice if put together well, or weird if you don't know how to wear colors. It's a good trend that challenges you to get out of your comfort zone! If you want to try, opt for a nice pastel polo top (say, pink) or a crisp shirt (in lavender). If you can own it, try a pastel top (in mint green) with linen pants and pair the set with sneakers; people might just ask you if you are European.



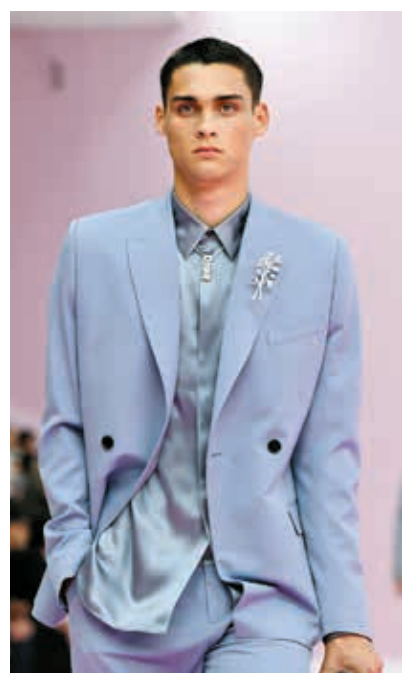
Paul Smith



Officine Generale



Louis Vuitton



Dior Homme

**** New Suiting

When sportswear took over this past season, tailoring had a major setback, with corporate attire no longer a must and not millennial-friendly. But fashion always revisits styles, especially the classic ones. The traditional two-piece came back, but with a twist. Designers brought back the suit but with a looser fit and an oversized cut rather than a slim fit. It's definitely not the suit you once wore; most designers presented new suits in pastel colors rather than your traditional navy or black, and some even went with florals... but that's another story.



Pal Zileri



Officine Generale



Dunhill



Officine Generale



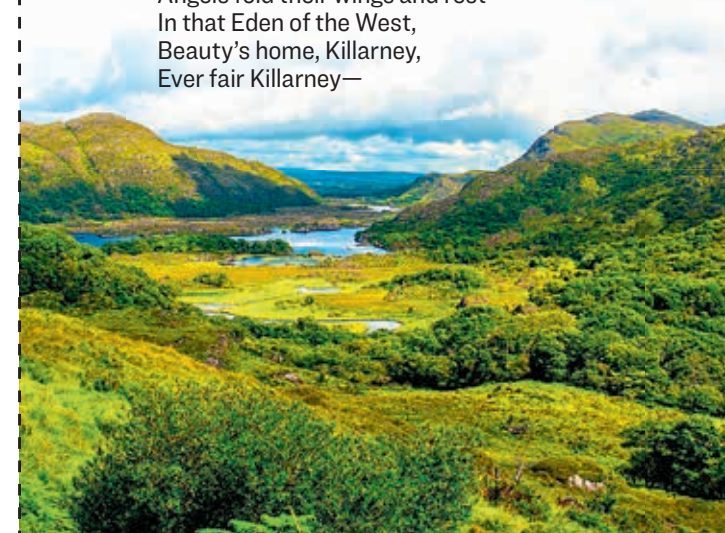
FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES

An Excerpt From 'By Killarney's Lakes and Fells'

by Edmund O'Rourke

By Killarney's lakes and fells,
Emerald isles and winding bays,
Mountain paths and woodland dells
Memory ever fondly strays.
Bounteous Nature loves all lands;
Beauty wanders everywhere,
Footprints leaves on many strands,
But her home is surely there!
Angels fold their wings and rest
In that Eden of the West,
Beauty's home, Killarney,
Ever fair Killarney—



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WHAT DO YOU GET IF YOU CROSS
POISON IVY
WITH A
FOUR LEAF CLOVER?



GISELA/KSHUTTERSTOCK

“He who loses money, loses much; he who loses a friend, loses more; he who loses faith, loses all.”

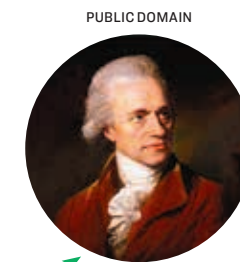
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This Week in History

A NEW PLANET IS DISCOVERED



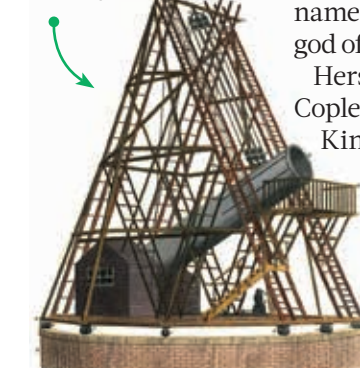
A portrait of William Herschel by Lemuel Francis Abbott.

On March 13, 1781, German-born British astronomer William Herschel saw what he thought was a comet or a stellar disk. As he continued to observe it, Russian academic Anders Level computed its orbit and declared it to be that of a planet.

Herschel wanted to name the new planet the Georgium Sidus ("the Georgian Star") after King George III, but it was eventually named Uranus after the Greek god of the sky.

Herschel was awarded the Copley Medal and named "The King's Astronomer." He and his sister, Caroline, later discovered two moons of Uranus and two moons of Saturn.

An illustration of Herschel's grand forty-foot reflecting telescope.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

By Aidan Danza, age 13

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

ANIMALS OF THE MOUNTAINS (PART II)

In our last installment, we discussed animals living in the Himalayas of Asia

and the Andes of South America. This week we head to the American Rockies, and then to the snow-covered Alps of Europe.

WOLVERINES

Wolverines are probably not the first animal you think of when you hear "the Rockies," but this is where they make their home.

Wolverines are about the size of a medium-sized dog. They're short and stocky, with a brown, beige, and black coat. They are extremely tenacious and fierce and will attack bears to take their food.

They eat whatever they can, which classifies them as omnivorous. They often eat the carcasses of large animals, but they won't hesitate to take down moose, caribou, deer, and elk. They also eat rabbits, hares, chipmunks, lemmings, and marmots—choices that are especially favored by females with young.

They are always solitary and keep a strict territory, which they scent-mark with their pungent odor. They will attack other wolverines that trespass on their territory, only intentionally coming together with others to breed. Females raise their young for five to seven months, but young wolverines become adults at 2 to 3 years of age.



A young chamois.

CHAMOIS

Chamois are goat-like antelope that reside in the European Alps. They normally live at altitudes of around 10,000 feet, but they migrate down to lower altitudes in the winter to find food.

Their coat is mostly brown in the summer, turning gray in the winter. Males and females both have small horns that curl back at the tips. Chamois form an interesting social structure where females form a herd for most of the year and males come to breed in late summer.

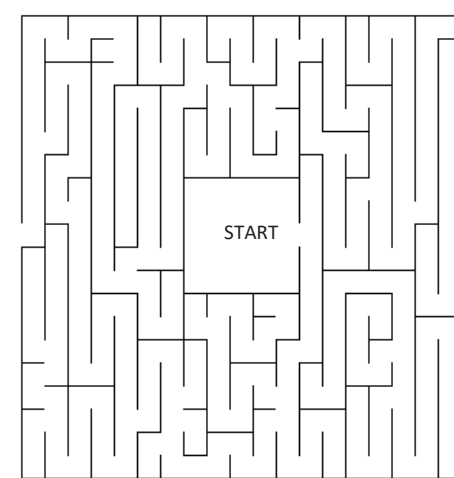
When kids (young) are born, they can

walk almost immediately after birth. A female kid will stay with its mother's herd for life, while males stay for two or three years and then become nomadic until the age of 8 or 9, when they establish their own territory.

Chamois eat herbs, flowers, lichens, mosses, and pine shoots. They are very hardy in the winter and can survive for two weeks without food. Their primary predators are Eurasian lynx, wolves, and man. To evade such predators, they can run up to 30 miles per hour and leap distances of 18 feet and heights of 6 feet.



AMAZING ESCAPES!



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

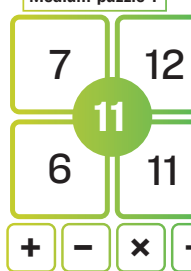
Easy puzzle 1



Solution For Easy 1

6 - 9 + (5 + 5)

Medium puzzle 1



Solution for Medium 1

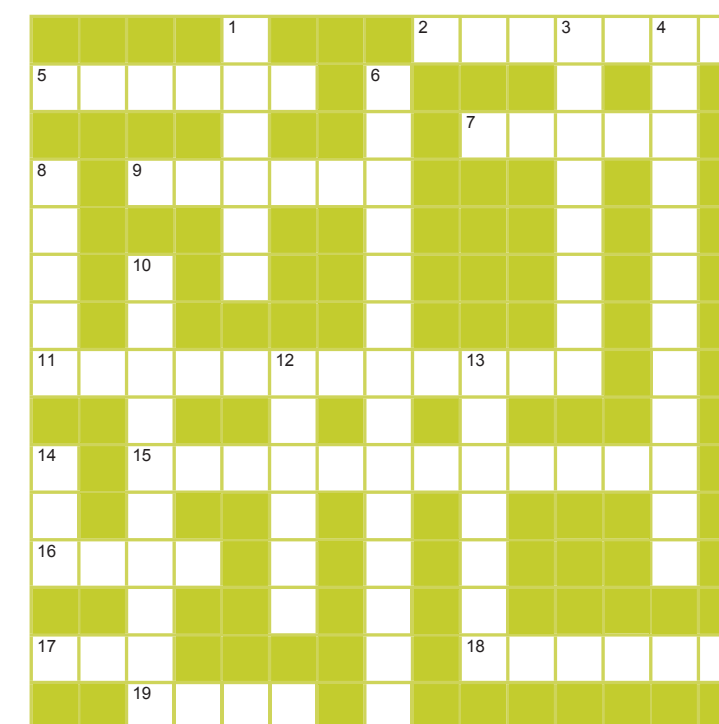
11 + (21 - 9 + 1)

Hard puzzle 1



Solution for Hard 1

8 - 28 - 8 + 18



Across

- 2 Wailer (7)
- 5 "Lucky" four-leaf find (6)
- 7 St. Patrick didn't leave one in Ireland (5)
- 9 Language of Old Ireland (6)
- 11 17 March is his day (12)

Down

- 1 Story of St. Patrick and the snakes (6)
- 3 Cloverleaf (8)
- 4 The color of Ireland (12)
- 6 Blessing of being born on The Emerald Isle (14)
- 8 Nickels and dimes (5)
- 10 Leprechaun's staff (10)
- 12 Benefactor (6)
- 13 "The Emerald Isle" (7)
- 14 Source of Irish peat (3)

Down

- 15 The Leprechauns (12)
- 16 First-place medal (4)
- 17 "The ___ is up!" (3)
- 18 Capital of Ireland (6)
- 19 Instrument on Ireland's Coat of Arms (4)



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Three Greek goddesses are directed by Zeus to let Paris judge who is most beautiful. A detail from "Judgment of Paris," circa 1480, by Master of the Argonaut Panels, Fogg Museum.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

The Judgment of Paris: Who Are We Ignoring?

JAMES SALE

One of the greatest stories in Greek mythology is that of the Judgment of Paris. It is in a way a simple story, but beneath the seemingly obvious veneer of "who is the fairest of them all?" there are profound implications that speak to us today, for this story will always resonate so long as human beings reflect on their lives. First, though, what exactly is the story? It is the prelude, or the cause célèbre, of the

Trojan War. Homer does not exactly deal with it, but his masterpiece "The Iliad" and the death of Achilles directly follow from the Judgment of Paris, as do the wanderings of Odysseus once Troy is sacked. Put another way, a whole civilization, Troy, and 10s of thousands of people on both sides are destroyed as a result of the judgment. What seems inconsequential proves to have massive implications.

To illustrate this in relatively modern terms, we might think of Gavrilo Princip, a 19-year-old nobody, yet a terrorist,

A whole civilization, Troy, and 10s of thousands of people on both sides are destroyed as a result of the 'Judgment of Paris.'

who in 1914 shot Archduke Ferdinand of Austria. This triggered World War I, the death of millions, and the fall of at least three major empires: the Russian, the Austrian-Hungarian, and the German.

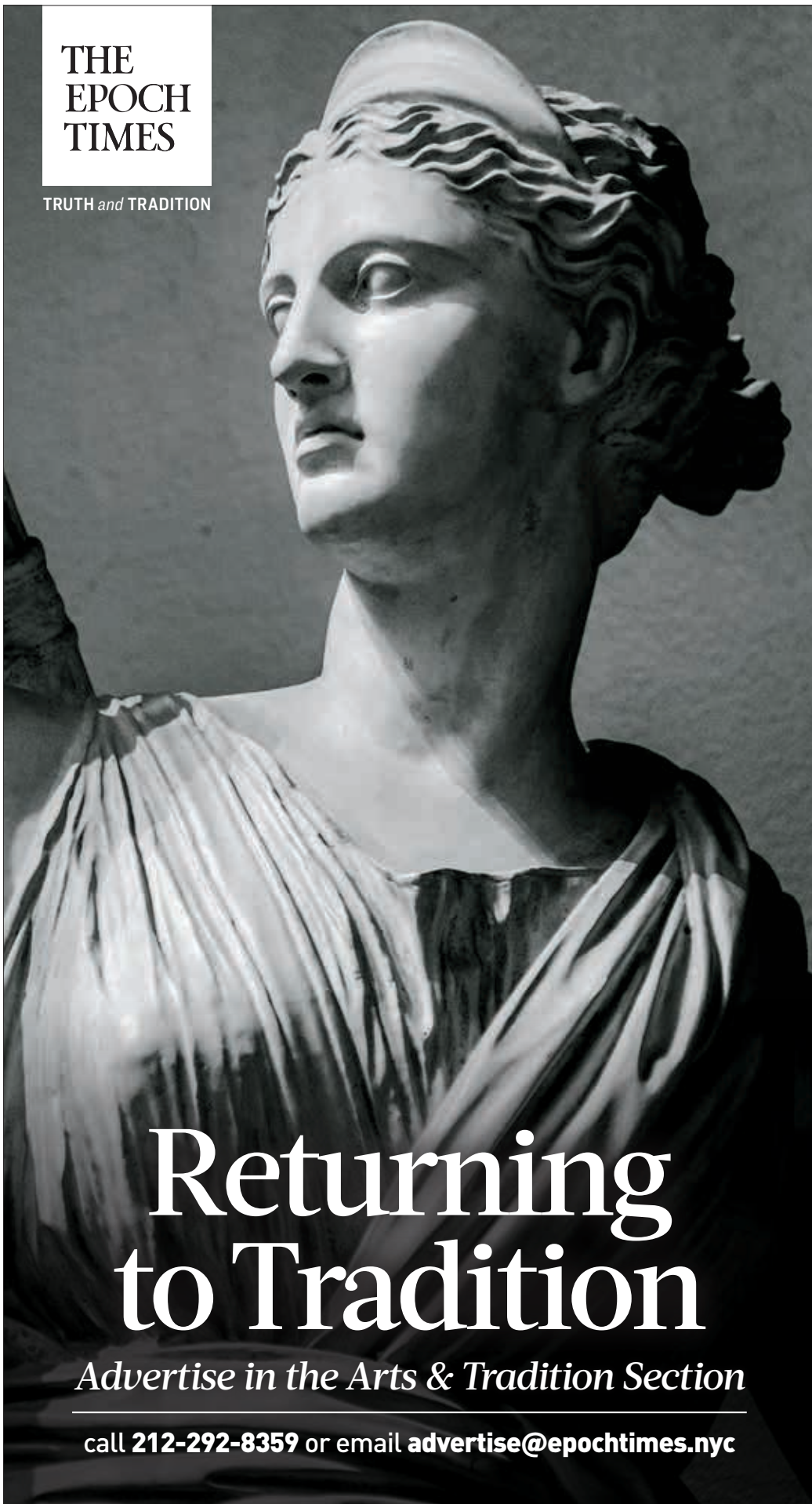
Paris himself was the son of King Priam of Troy. He was especially handsome, though it had been prophesied before his birth that his life would lead to Troy's destruction.

At the wedding of the man Peleus and his bride, the goddess Thetis, all the gods were invited except Eris. She was the goddess of strife and

too disagreeable to invite to such a lovely wedding. Eris gets her revenge by throwing into the wedding party the prize of a golden apple that is inscribed with the words "for the fairest" (or, "to the most beautiful"). Immediately, three major goddesses claim the prize as their own.

And so begins the saga. First thing to notice is that no male seeks to claim to be the "fairest." The Greeks clearly understood that this was a feminine thing; if the apple had said

Continued on Page 16



THE EPOCH TIMES
TRUTH and TRADITION

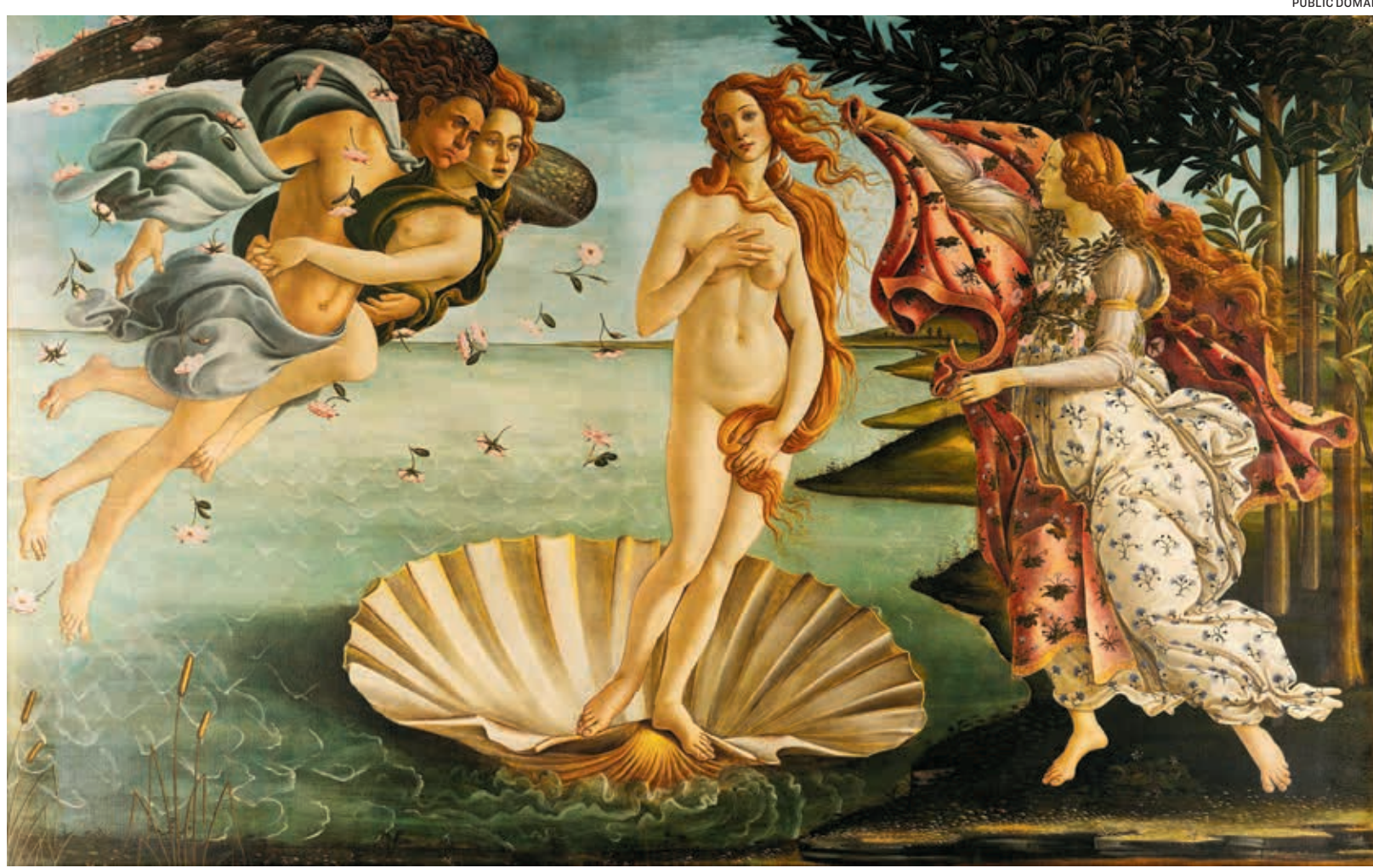
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FINE ARTS

BEAUTY PLEASURES US:

Representational Art Versus the Abstract



PUBLIC DOMAIN

attractive, but the rest of us can appreciate her beauty with or without his explanation.

As we are on the subject of Botticelli, let's take these same gentlemen and whisk them off to Florence, Italy, and the Uffizi Gallery. Stand the four of us in front of Sandro Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus." The critic tells us why the art world holds this magnificent painting in such high esteem, but if we were suddenly stricken with laryngitis, I am confident that the auto mechanic, the policeman, and I would still be drawn to the beauty of this canvas, this goddess created from tempera, brush, and imagination over half a millennium ago.

Is That Art?

Now whisk us back to the United States and drop us down in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, home of the Norman Rockwell Museum. Place us in front of Rockwell's "Four Freedoms." Here the critic turns up his nose a bit, sniffing that Rockwell was a technician and an illustrator rather than a true painter.

Meanwhile, we others listen to him absentmindedly, but we identify with Rockwell's themes of freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. The paintings speak to our experience. The auto mechanic explains that he knocks himself out daily to put food on his family's table; the policeman tells us that a big part of his job is to give others the freedom from fear; I highly value the freedom to write and speak as I choose; and all of us practice a religious faith.

Make Mine a Double

Now off we go again, this time to an opening exhibition of abstract art in a Manhattan gallery. Here is a canvas blotted with what appear to be ink dots, similar to that painting I once viewed at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville; here are seven stones arranged on the floor with a written explanation posted as to the meaning of the arrangement,

similar to an exhibit my wife and I visited long ago in a Swiss gallery; here is a tangled globe of wires, similar to that much larger monstrosity in front of the federal building in Asheville, North Carolina.

The delighted critic analyzes each work, going on about the texture of the paint, the juxtaposition of color, the depth of the sprawl of colors on this canvas, and the despair evidenced by the color black on another.

Meanwhile, the mechanic, the policeman, and I have slipped away to the open bar that the gallery owners have so thoughtfully provided for the occasion.

Here are a few reasons we preferred a bottle of suds to art on this last excursion.

What We Have Here Is Failure to Communicate

We don't need a Ph.D. in art history to connect to representational art. It exists as it is, without need of further explanation to take delight in it. Whatever our religious beliefs, my two acquaintances and I could stand before the "Pietà" and be moved by a mother grieving the death of her son. Mark Rothko's "Orange and Yellow" baffles us.

Secondly, for the mechanic, the cop, and myself, abstract art all too often seems antihuman, nihilistic, and ugly. It's not just that we don't understand its meaning—we don't—but we simply can't connect with it. And if art, great art and even the art of those two young painters from the coffee shop, aims at creating a connection between the artist and the viewer, then modernism or post-modernism, or whatever we wish to call it, frequently leaves us cold and disconnected. Think of the film "Cool Hand Luke" and its famous line, "What we have here is failure to communicate."

Last, Beauty, like her companions Truth and Goodness, has the power to make us more fully human. Even tiny ancient churches in Rome have the power to silence us, to lift us out of our-

selves, to draw us into contemplation. Sorrow, joy, laughter, tears, struggles and pain, triumph and defeat: These are the components of the human condition. Great art reflects these emotions.

When We See With the Heart

In writing about our apprehension of God and the necessity of faith, Pascal once stated: "The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of... We know the truth not only by the reason, but by the heart." He was directing his readers to seek faith with their hearts and their reason.

Art and beauty act on the ordinary viewer in the same way. They sway our emotions, and they rouse our hearts. They lead us to mysteries beyond those provided by pure reason.

Beauty pleases us. It's as simple and profound as that.

PUBLIC DOMAIN



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

JEFF MINICK

Four or five times a week, I escape the solitude of the house where I live and head into Front Royal, Virginia, to the Happy Creek Coffee Shop to write for a while and surround myself with other people. Originally built as a stable and livery in the 1880s, Happy Creek today serves not only as a coffee shop and café but also as a gallery. Local artists hang their paintings and drawings from the old brick walls for about a month, and then a new display goes up.

nection with abstract painting or sculpture. After pondering the question, and after expanding it to include modern architecture, I arrived at some answers.

No, I'm Not an Expert

Before sharing those recognitions with you, however, some personal information is necessary.

I have visited art museums in cities like Florence, Paris, Rome, New York, Washington, and Boston. I have stood in awe before Michelangelo's "David" and his paintings in the Sistine Chapel; I have wandered through such magnificent churches as St. Paul's in London and Notre-Dame in Paris; I was fortunate enough to have once spent a month in Rome, where I daily visited churches, galleries, and ruins. I have read some books on painting and artists.

In other words, as an art critic, I am a rank amateur.

The word "amateur" derives from the Latin "amare," which means to love, and I have loved the paintings and sculptures of many different artists.

So why does that love wither away in the presence of abstract art?

Coffee Shop Epiphany

This week a 16-year-old, Dominica, whose father is a friend of mine, exhibited her work on one wall of the shop while a girl of 15, unfamiliar to me, arranged her paintings on the wall opposite. Both young women display incredible talent, particularly in their paintings of the human form.

Why have I so rarely felt any connection with abstract painting or sculpture?

What fascinated me, however, was my reaction to Dominica's paintings. On the wall to the left of the doorway were her renditions of human faces, mostly female and exquisitely portrayed. On the right side of the doorway hung her abstract compositions.

Her abstracts drew a brief glance from me. Her representational art—the faces filled with youth and mystery—captured my interest for a full five minutes.

When I became aware of this discrepancy in my attention span, I wondered why I so rarely felt any con-

Three Men and a Critic

In the opening chapter of "Beauty," philosopher Roger Scruton kicks off his discussion of the beautiful with what he calls six platitudes. The first of these platitudes is for me the most pertinent here: "Beauty pleases us."

Suppose a professor of aesthetics, an auto mechanic, a policeman, and I were all gathered at the counter of the coffee shop, ordering our beverages from the attractive barista whose eyes, features, and curled hair might

have snagged the attention of the Renaissance artist Botticelli. I think I can safely say that we four men would agree this young woman was beautiful. The professor of aesthetics might be able to explain why we find her



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TRADITIONAL CULTURE

The Judgment of Paris: Who Are We Ignoring?

Continued from Page 13

"for the strongest of them all," then a fight between males would almost certainly have ensued, and probably immediately! What women (typically) want—to be "beautiful"—is not what men (typically) want. Their psychologies, like their physiologies, are different.

Three senior goddesses of Mount Olympus claim the prize as their own. (Poor Thetis, the bride on her wedding day doesn't enter in.) These goddesses are Hera, queen of heaven and wife of Zeus, who as king of the gods is by far the most powerful; Athena, the goddess of wisdom and war strategy, or more succinctly put, of victory, and also Zeus's favorite daughter; and finally, Aphrodite, goddess of love and sex, and whose origins are more complex, being in one sense Zeus's own aunt.

Even for the king of the gods, a decision would be impossible in such a situation: his wife versus his daughter, to highlight only one conflict of interest. And so, Zeus decrees that the young, handsome prince Paris, who is tending flocks on Mount Ida, will be the arbitrator and decide which goddess is the most beautiful and will receive the golden apple.

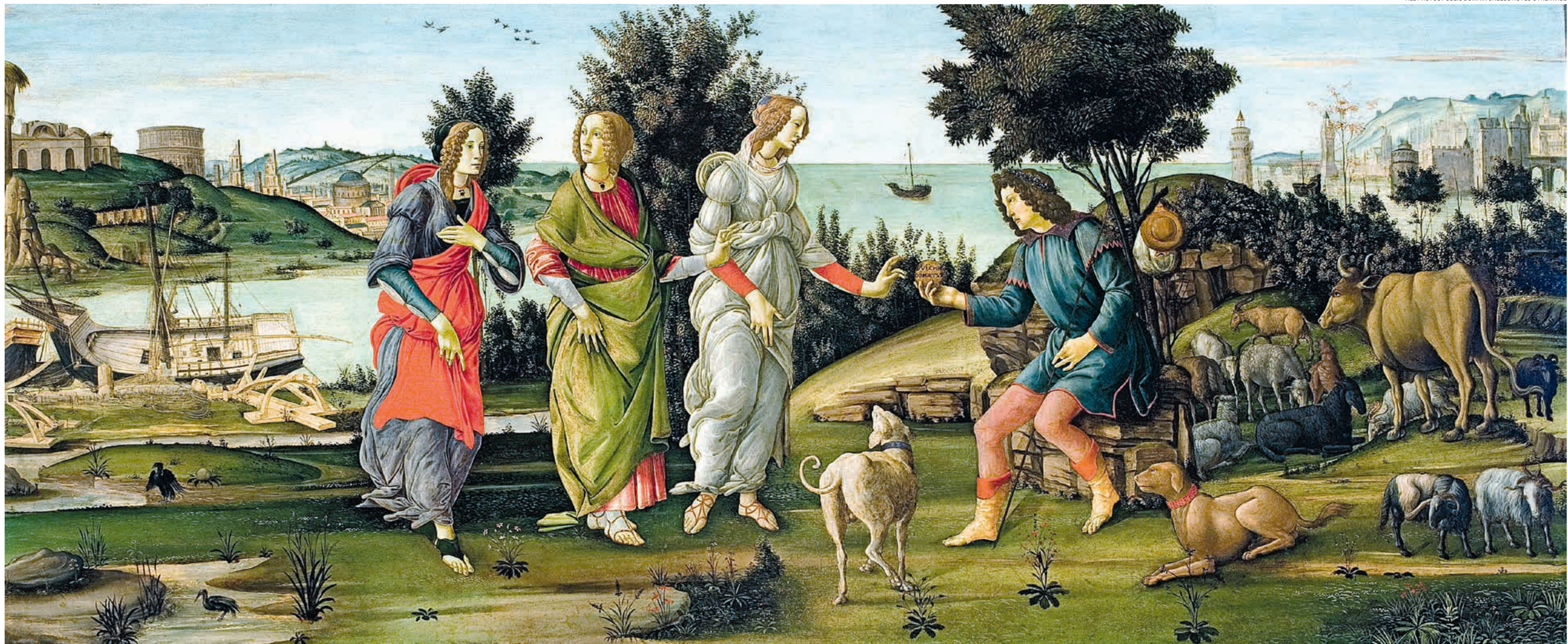
The Young, Inexperienced, and Bribable

The young, inexperienced Paris is suddenly confronted by the three goddesses and, unsurprisingly, is terrified. Ancient vase paintings depicting the scene show Paris trying to escape in fear at the approach of the goddesses. Nevertheless, he is asked to judge, and then a very human thing happens: Each of the three goddesses attempts to bribe him, to make him an offer he can't refuse.

Hera offers him imperial power: his scepter to extend over Asia and Europe too—to be a great emperor therefore. Athena offers him victory in battle: He will lead a Trojan army that will overthrow Greece, a reverse of Alexander the Great, as it were. And what about Aphrodite? She offers him the most beautiful woman in the world as his consort and wife. Political power, military success, or great romance.

The point about the Greeks and their philosophies, of course, was that the god Apollo's maxim was writ large as proverbial wisdom, and that was "moderation in all things," or not too much of any one. Excess in any of our choices can lead to unexpected consequences that can

"The Judgment of Paris," between 1485 and 1488, by Sandro Botticelli and workshop.



potentially destroy us. I like to think of Paris's choice here as analogous to those facing the Greek philosopher Plato.

Plato and his successors wrangled over what we call three transcendental realities, namely, goodness, truth, and beauty. In a sense, the choice Paris must make is between these three: goodness (Hera, as queen of heaven), truth (Athena, as goddess of wisdom), and beauty (Aphrodite, as goddess of love, sex, and attraction). And oftentimes, it is these

“Romantic love is the single greatest energy system in the Western psyche.”

Robert Johnson, psychologist

three criteria (transcendentals, if you will) that determine our choices. Indeed, the best example, and fullest-blown catastrophe where all three of these criteria come into play comes at the beginning of our time.

Eve's Excesses

In verse 6 of chapter 3 of the book of Genesis, we find the temptation of Eve framed in these terms: "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food [goodness], and that it was a delight to the eyes [beautiful], and that the tree was desirable to make one wise [truth], she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate."

Here, of course, there is no moderation at all. Eve and subsequently Adam are entirely seduced by an overwhelming desire to possess all three properties, rather than restrict or limit their appetites. But the thing to note is the unintended consequences of bad choices.

So, to return to the really important point about Paris's decision, we need to keep in mind that, as Jung observed, the gods or goddesses we ignore are spiritual entities that have not been integrated into our personalities. Therefore, we are not "whole" or healthy, and these gaps

will manifest themselves in ways that we cannot foresee.

Take the wedding of Peleus. If we consider this congregation as one "person," and all of the gods, goddesses, humans, and other guests as subpersonality types, then we see that they were all there. All—except one.

The gods of our human psychology did not accept the presence of Eris, the goddess of strife. And what was the consequence of not integrating her into the "party," as it were? Strife of unimaginable intensity breaks out across the whole known Greek world. The destruction of everything valuable occurs, and the greatest heroes go down to death while still in the bloom of their youth.

What is happening on the world stage then mirrors what happened long before at a simple wedding reception: The important and powerful goddesses are now at war with each other and will take sides in the conflict to come, based on Paris's choice.

Again, Jung: "A neurosis is an offended god." In our times of trouble, who are we offending? Which god or goddess has not been given his or her due in our psyche? And who has been repressed and will exact revenge in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead? What we have denied

within will return as outward fate, and there is no escaping it, so Jung thought.

Loving Aphrodite, Ignoring Eris

This story is relevant today as we see conflict everywhere. And as in Paris's day, we see the same choice for Western society: We choose Aphrodite and ignore other important gods and goddesses. Robert Johnson in his "We: Understanding the Psychology of Romantic Love" remarks that "Romantic love is the single greatest energy system in the Western psyche. In our culture it has supplanted religion as the arena in which men and women seek meaning, transcendence, wholeness, and ecstasy."

This seems profoundly true today. Notice also the suppression of Eris, or strife, which of course only produces more strife. In secular efforts, we try to create a brotherhood and sisterhood where everyone is equal, and we sing along with John Lennon to "Imagine" a world without conflict. (Ironically, of course, he was shot.)

Anyone notice the upsurge in recent years of memes on Facebook, Twitter, and others about "Be kind" and the idea that one must not contradict another human being for fear that the person might suffer some irreversible shock or trauma? How



(Left) A detail from "The Judgment of Paris," 1812, by Guillaume Guillon Lethière.

(Right) "Adam and Eve," 1504, by Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528). Engraving, The Frick Collection; Henry Clay Frick Bequest.



(Above) Aphrodite (or Venus) with the apple awarded by Paris, 1813–1816, by Bertel Thorvaldsen. The Thorvaldsen Museum, Copenhagen.

(Left) "The Wedding of Peleus and Thetis," 1636, by Peter Paul Rubens. The Art Institute of Chicago.

shocking! We want, we insist upon, we must have diversity, for everyone must be included without strife—except diversity of opinion. We can't have that.

And so, we see from our obsession with Aphrodite and our exclusion of Eris that we too are heading where Paris went—to a place of individual and collective destruction. That is what the choice of Paris tells us.

It's a matter of tremendous irony that the survivors of the holocaust caused by Paris's decision turned out to be Menelaus, the cuckold and rather nondescript king and husband of Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world; and Helen herself, of whom it may be said that while she may have been beautiful, she was hardly interesting, wise, or good—and so also nondescript.

Menelaus wants to kill her for her betrayal, sees her in the ruins of Troy, and then falls in love (or is that lust?) all over again and forgives her infidelity! After all, why not? Was she responsible? Of course not. It was the gods who did it, and who gainsays them?

And, of course, once we are not responsible—the gods did it!—we are transported back to our modern world again, where few seem able to take responsibility for their actions, and we revel in a victim culture where others have caused all our problems and we demand compensation.

To avoid this fate, it seems to me that we have to return to those seminal choices we make, and take responsibility for them. Conscious responsibility asks: Which gods are we excluding from the depths of our own self?

The Bible quote is from the New American Standard version.

James Sale is an English businessman whose company, Motivational Maps Ltd., operates in 14 countries. He is the author of over 40 books on management and education from major international publishers including Macmillan, Pearson, and Routledge. As a poet, he won the first prize in The Society of Classical Poets' 2017 competition and spoke in June 2019 at the group's first symposium held at New York's Princeton Club.



KEN HOWARD

THEATER REVIEW

Passion, Disillusionment, and Tenacity

The fictionalized story of John Kennedy Toole and his impact

JUDD HOLLANDER

NEW YORK—Vivian Neuwirth's drama "Mr. Toole" is a fictionalized take on the real-life story of John Kennedy Toole (Ryan Spahn), author of "A Confederacy of Dunces," which won the 1981 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Spanning the years 1968 to 1981, it explores how the most tragic of events can bring some light into the world.

Mr. Toole, known to all as "Ken," is a passionate and sensitive man who finds himself suffocated by his lot in life. He teaches poetry at the all-female St. Mary's Dominican College in New Orleans and lives with his parents just a short walk away. It's a job that he hates more and more every day, especially as he's faced with rows and rows of young women, most of whom don't even make the effort to understand the meaning of poetry.

Ken is also a frustrated writer whose family responsibilities interfere with that objective. John (Stephen Sch-

netzer), his once-absentee father, now shows signs of dementia, thus making Ken the sole breadwinner. In addition, Ken must contend with his controlling mother, Thelma (Linda Purl), who continually hovers about him like a hawk. Much to Ken's embarrassment, she's been known to track him down at local bars and other haunts where he goes to drown his pain.

Ken's dream finally seems within his grasp when, after multiple rejections, a New York book editor shows an interest in his aforementioned novel.

However, his inability to move to New York to work on the book and his conflicts with the editor, as seen via a series of correspondences, doom the project. This failure, as well as Ken's feeling there is nothing before him in life but more of the same, finally sends him over the edge and he commits suicide.

It falls to Thelma, who, after pulling herself out of a deep depression of her own, eventually realizes that the best way to honor her son's memory and make up for her failings as a mother is to make sure his novel gets published.

"Mr. Toole" reminds us that good can come from even the most personal pain. As an example, Lisette (Julia Randall), one of Ken's former students, was deeply affected by his death. (Lisette functions as a stand-in for the playwright, for Neuwirth was a student in Toole's class and was greatly affected by him.) Her finding and reading "A Confederacy of Dunces," which she came across totally by accident, inspired her to write this play.

Lisette eventually befriends Thelma, it being the elder woman's memories of her son that helped Lisette to keep Ken's memory alive. Running through the story is the

John Kennedy Toole (Ryan Spahn), author of "A Confederacy of Dunces," who also taught poetry to high-schoolers.

'Mr. Toole'

59E59 Theaters
59 E. 59th St.
New York

Tickets
646-892-7999
or 59E59.org

Running Time
1 hour, 50 minutes
(no intermission)

Closes
March 15

'Mr. Toole' reminds us that good can come from even the most personal pain.

THEATER REVIEW

Generations and Mysteries Unfold

DIANA BARTH

NEW YORK—A young girl, Ellen (Zoe Glick), around 11 years old, enters and sings: "Sometimes you see a picture, Or hear a song, Or read a letter, And a person that's forgotten comes alive for a moment, They can tell you a story."

And so begins the chamber musical "Unknown Soldier," with its book and lyrics by Daniel Goldstein, and music and lyrics by Michael Friedman. This production marks a New York premiere, but it had a former incarnation at the 2015 Williamstown Theatre Festival at Williams College in Massachusetts.

'Unknown Soldier' is gentle, serious, and mysterious.

As a chamber musical, it lacks the usual rah-rah song and dance chorus numbers, or any of the grand or grandiose elements of what constitutes the typical Broadway musical. "Unknown Soldier" is gentle, serious, and mysterious.

In a boring town in upstate

New York, Ellen Rabinowitz (Margo Seibert) has found an old photograph of an unknown soldier and a pretty woman, whom Ellen realizes is her now deceased grandmother, Lucy Anderson (beautifully played by Estelle Parsons).

The photograph is in a newspaper clipping and reveals that the World War I soldier was an amnesiac, discovered wandering about in New York's Grand Central Terminal. Hospital authorities, not knowing his real identity, name him Francis Grand (Perry Sherman).

But Ellen knows that the soldier is not her grandfather, who died in that war. Who then is he? She sets out to search via the aid of a librarian, Andrew (Erik Lochtefeld), who has access to old records of the area.

Ellen also seeks to find out more about the life of her grandmother, who raised her after Ellen's mother died in childbirth. The younger Lucy is played by Kerstin Anderson.

Ellen discovers that Lucy apparently met the soldier, enjoyed a picnic with him, and married him that very evening. (A neat trick, but this is theater.) Their brief encounter results in Lucy becoming pregnant, and Ellen's mother and ultimately Ellen are the result. We never learn the identity

'Unknown Soldier'

Playwrights Horizons
416 W. 42nd St.
New York

Tickets
212-279-4200 or
PlaywrightsHorizons.org

Running Time
1 hour, 30 minutes
(no intermission)

Closes
March 29

Perry Sherman as Francis Grand, the name given to an unknown soldier, and Kerstin Anderson as Lucy Lemay.



JOAN MARCUS

of Francis Grand, but he is excellently played by Sherman. A doctor played by James Crichton has both serious and comedic moments. The ensemble, consisting of Emilie Kouatchou, Jay McKenzie, Jessica Naimy, and Thom Sesma, lends excellent support.

Musically, there is some exquisite singing by Kerstin Anderson. Patrick McCollum is credited with the choreography.

Director Trip Cullman is responsible for the contemporary look of the entire production, with the staging being spare and uncluttered. But this fact has not affected

performances, which are uniformly rich and deeply felt.

Sets by Mark Wendland follow in the spare style: There is a platform and small replicas of lit buildings so that all must focus on the storyline and the characters.

Well received by the audience at the preview I attended, "Unknown Soldier," I foresee, will have a very much appreciated and successful run.

Diana Barth writes for several theater publications, including *New Millennium*. She may be contacted at diabarth99@gmail.com

warning to not simply go through life, but to truly live it. A T.S. Elliot poem deals with this issue, and we see Ken dissect the poem in class. Clearly Ken sees himself unable to truly live life, as did his father to a lesser degree.

However, while Neuwirth knows her subject, one also gets the impression that she is too close to it. Some of the scenes of Ken pontificating about poetry, while interesting, become repetitive and could have benefited from judicious trimming.

"Mr. Toole" is, in actuality, a two-pronged story. The first concerns Ken, and the effect he had on those in his orbit. The second is about Thelma, who is the ultimate catalyst in the play. As Thelma is iron-willed throughout, especially in her determination that her son get the recognition she feels he deserves, Purl does an excellent job of taking the character from one to be avoided at all costs, to an object of pity, and finally to one whom you can't help but support and applaud for her tenacity.

Spahn cuts a compelling and sympathetic figure as Ken. The actor brings to life the author's passion for the written word and for the images and characters he has created. He also evokes Ken's immense frustration and pain when he feels he no longer has anything left to give.

Schnitzer does well as John. The character is a third wheel in his own family (a status that may account for his need to be continually on the road), yet Schnitzer is able to bring a sense of pride to the role.

Randall is fine as Lisette, who also serves as the show's narrator. The actress allows the audience to understand the healing process that the character goes through.

Thomas G. Waites offers a nice bit of local color as Thelma's brother. Initially seen as estranged from his sister, in the end he becomes a major source of support in her quest to get Ken's work seen by the right people—such as author Walker Percy (John Ingle), who later becomes a champion of Ken's novel.

Cat Parker's direction keeps the piece moving nicely while allowing us to fully understand the complex characters depicted. Credit must also go to dialect coach Charley Layton for helping the cast assume the proper accents.

"Mr. Toole" shows the lasting effects one person can have on those around him—particularly when the person in question is both passionate about things he cares about and willing to share them with others.

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



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.

Ben Affleck's Art Imitates Life

MARK JACKSON

Ben Affleck stars in a movie about a man with a drinking problem, who's lost the love of his life as well as their only child. It's well-played because it's been lived, and is a fine example of those we go spend money on in movie theaters courageously putting their hard-earned, art-imitates-life lessons onscreen for us to learn from.

I remember reading an article where Ben Affleck said of his then-fiancée that she was incredibly sweet and would have been thrilled, regardless, had he bought her a toy engagement ring from a dime store. It stuck in my mind. I thought, "I want one of those sweet ones too."

Affleck's also recently said that the worst thing in his life to date and the source of his need for alcoholism recovery was his divorce from said dime-store-ring-contented ex-wife. I thought, "I might, myself, also turn to drink in such a situation."

Gavin O'Connor Knows Sports Movies

I recently reviewed director Gavin O'Connor's 2004 movie "Miracle" (hadn't seen it, loved it), and then I realized that one of the few movies I've ever given a 5-star rating to was O'Connor's 2011, Ultimate Fighting Championship and mixed martial arts movie "Warrior."

Of course, any basketball movie is going to immediately call up its Ur Example: "Hoosiers." "The Way Back" follows the trope fairly closely: a basketball coach attempting to help a team of severe high school underdogs actualize their hoop dreams and go to state.

It's got the classic archetypes of this particular story: the low-self-esteem kid (Brandon Wilson) with the best skills who needs to step up and lead, and the wild-child player (Melvin Gregg) in need of a tough coach who can set hard boundaries for him.

Another good one is the chubby kid (Charles Lott Jr.) who likes to do Joey Bag O' Donuts type courtside dances, but who's not allowed to dance anymore until they win some actual games.

And yet another is the smooth-talking little player (as in "playah") who's constantly got a different girl up against a locker, crooning, "Yeah baby, every time I put that ball through the hoop, I'm thinking of you." How to discipline this player (Will Ropp)? Introduce all his "girlfriends" to each other, bring them as a collective peanut gallery to varsity practice, and let them be the judge



(L-R) Ben Affleck, Jeremy Radin, and Al Madrigal in "The Way Back."



Janina Gavankar and Ben Affleck play a divorced couple.



Michaela Watkins and Ben Affleck as brother and sister.



Ben Affleck (L) and Melvin Gregg as coach and player.



Recovering alcoholic Jack Cunningham (Ben Affleck, R) meets his team for the first time in the high school basketball movie "The Way Back."

of how many wind sprints their communal "boyfriend" needs to run.

Basketball Is the Backdrop to the Booze

Affleck's character, head coach Jack Cunningham, was a former high school basketball phenom who turned down a full financial aid package to play college ball upon realizing that his father loved him only for his spectacular ability to play. That led to substance abuse.

Jack managed to land a lovely lady nonetheless, but when their young son died of cancer, and he discovered his wife was having an affair with a rich man, Jack Cunningham turned to Jack Daniels and Joey Fridge Full O' Beer. And that's not funny at all.

He's now a full-blown (and yet surprisingly high-functioning) alcoholic construction worker with a full thermos of booze to keep him company at his bleak, high-altitude job site.

He starts off his day with a beer in the shower, and ends his nights at the local pub, where an older (but abler) drinker takes it as his duty to deposit drunk Jack on Jack's doorstep (he used to do the same for Jack's dad.) On his non-pub nights, Jack compulsively drains the entire case of beer sitting in his fridge.

Jack is, of course, in denial. When his sister (Michaela Watkins) tries to broach the subject one-on-one after a family gathering, he drops the nice Uncle Jack act and shows his violent side.

Then, he gets the coaching request from headmaster Edward Devine (John Aylward) at Bishop Hayes, the Catholic parochial school he attended. Which he initially rejects. But after he meets the team and their subpar but well-meaning stand-in math-teacher assistant-coach (Al Madrigal), Jack's passion for hoops goes flame-on.

Jack likes to curse up a storm, cringe-worthy insulting the referees. He exhorts the boys to play with a major chip on their shoulder. The latter recommendation initially functions as good warrior training for the boys.

It's too bad that Father Mark, the team chaplain (Jeremy Radin) who (correctly) tries to get Jack to deal with the boys from a higher, more righteous place by saying "Don't underestimate the impact that you can have on them"—it's too bad Father Mark registers more as the irritating, high-

horse-moralizing, namby-pamby that our modern culture has come to associate with such figures.

It results in audience glee and hilarity at the running gag of Jack's passive-aggressive, rebellious, F-bomb-laced vulgarity when he goes on yet another foul-mouthed rant. It's time that church father figures get portrayed as manly enough to inspire the budding inner warrior so boys can come to respect the clean-burning, spiritual-warrior path. Then again, according to the movie "Spotlight," such real-life father figures from the church are in short supply.

Crash and Burn

The team starts winning, Jack coaches his heart out, and all's well until he accompanies his estranged wife (Janina Gavankar) to a birthday party thrown by friends for their own sick kid (in remission). When Jack finds out she's seeing someone else, back comes the booze with a vengeance, naturally, and of course the swan dive off the wagon comes just as his team's getting ready to go to state.

"The Way Back" puts the unflinching portrayal of addiction first, and the sports-underdog story second. Similar to "Warrior," director O'Connor hews to the powerful human drama as well as the ravages of "sins of the father" alcoholism.

Actor Ben Affleck's need for alcoholism recovery was caused by his divorce.

And while O'Connor is a master of exciting sports action on film ("Warrior" and "Miracle" are particularly electrifying in this regard), surprisingly short shrift is given to Jack's journey of recovery. All we see is a quick meeting with his wife in the common room of some rehab facility, where he makes amends and expresses hope that in the future he can eventually learn to be the man she'd hoped he'd become. You almost expect Mike Myers to pop in from some "Saturday Night Live" skit rehearsal happening in the next room, and go, "Anndd scene!"

To my way of thinking, if you're going to go to all the trouble of depicting the ravages of addiction, don't gloss over the requisite monumental hangovers that accompany this level of hardcore drinking. Show at least a little quality time in an AA meeting. Jack just keeps more or less strolling into the shower for some hair of the dog that bit him.

Much like Ed Norton's character in "Fight Club," I once discovered 12-step meetings by chance and went around for a few months, sitting in meetings I had no business being in. For a young New York actor trained to examine human drama, the stories in there are beyond riveting. Attend a Saturday night East Village AA meeting packed to the rafters with street hookers, winos, Hells Angels, and punk rockers, and you're going to get a full picture of how any addiction left unchecked will kill you.

This version of "The Way Back" might have been good for the early 1990s. In an ideal world (not the one where America is strewn with the ravages of opioid and meth addiction from the redwood forest to the New York Island), this 2020 version would have fulfilled the responsibility of art to return humanity to the divine. "The Way Back" could have depicted and portrayed that the way back from severe alcoholism, from any addiction (including the smartphone you're reading this review on), is universally about prayer, meditation, cultivating a belief in a Higher Power, and following a series of actions that consistently raise one's moral standard. That's the tried-and-true, time-honored way back.

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FILM REVIEW

A Roughly-Hewn Cop Actioner Caught Up in Clichés

IAN KANE

As with many contemporary film directors, Peter Berg has seen his share of ups and downs. His latest effort, “Spenser Confidential,” is his fifth partnering with actor Mark Wahlberg, and it looks like the film is meant as a launching pad for a new crime-mystery series.

The duo paired up for 2016’s disaster film “Deepwater Horizon,” as well as the 2017 bomb-drama “Patriots Day,” both of which showcased Berg’s adroit ability to couple real-world geopolitical situations with lots of gusty, high-octane action sequences.



ALL PHOTOS BY NETFLIX

‘Spenser Confidential’

Director
Peter Berg

Starring
Mark Wahlberg, Winston Duke, Alan Arkin

Running Time
1 hour, 51 minutes

Rated
R

Release Date
March 6



Winston Duke (L) and Mark Wahlberg star as a team to bring down the bad guys, in “Spenser Confidential.”

The film’s script feels flat-footed and relies entirely on genre tropes.

However, the combo also recently hit a low note with 2018’s “Mile 22,” a half-baked, by-the-numbers action-thriller that not only tanked at the box office but also squelched a would-be film franchise.

In this latest film, set in South Boston, Wahlberg plays former police detective Spenser, who is just wrapping up a five-year stint in prison. The reason he served time was that he walked in on drunk and disorderly police captain Boylan (Michael Gaston) beating his wife, and commenced to unload a few of his own fists upon the naughty captain.

Berg gets things rolling off to a fast-paced start when Spenser is beset upon by a bunch of goons in the prison library, which just so happens to be on his last day of confinement. After surviving the tumultuous fisticuffs, he’s back on the streets, embracing his freedom. But with all of the chaos that has surrounded his life in Boston, Spenser has hatched a plan to leave the big city and relocate to Arizona to live a less complicated life as a trucker.

Spenser’s old friend Henry (Alan Arkin) offers him a place to stay so that he can get acclimated to his new life on the outside. Spenser soon meets his new roommate, Hawk (Winston Duke, “Black Panther”), a large, gruff, wannabe MMA fighter whom Henry is helping

to train.

Things are thrust into disarray when suddenly good ol’ Captain Boylan turns up murdered, and another cop also died at the crime scene, one who seems squeaky-clean. The deaths pique Spenser’s detective senses and make him all curious as to what’s behind the murders. Of course, it doesn’t take long to figure out that there’s a dark web of conspiracy involving dirty cops and an accompanying sinister plot.

The film revolves around Spenser trying to track down those responsible for the double murder, with the aid of Henry and Hawk.

Spenser’s ex shows up in what could only be described as the perfunctory “romantic interest” portion of the film. This entails a

screchy, motor-mouthed blonde, Cissy (Iliza Shlesinger), periodically showing up and throwing tantrums: She flails her arms around, shrieking at Spenser. These scenes cannot be mistaken for Shakespeare’s.

The minuscule elements of comic relief come at the expense of blockheaded Spenser as he attempts to master the new technologies that have left him behind during his prison sojourn. Spenser seems dimwitted as he wanders from one scene of bewilderment to another.

Low-brow action yarns can be pretty fun if they’re crafted correctly. Unfortunately, this film’s script feels flat-footed and relies entirely on genre tropes, including the typical “crooked cop” deal, which has been absolutely done to death.

The action scenes are also overwrought and jumbled, with lots of shaky-cam trickery along with quick-cut editing. The visuals are accompanied by overly

loud and dramatic sound effects, like something out of a “Looney Tunes” cartoon. Together, these give the illusion that something is happening when in reality the action looks contrived and convoluted.

Toward the end of the film, plot-turns careen off of clichés that you can see coming a mile away. Wahlberg does his usual thing—act like Wahlberg—which isn’t necessarily a bad thing. But with a boilerplate, by-the-numbers script, and half-baked action sequences, just like “Mile 22,” this buddy actioner never really takes off from its launching pad. My guess is that “Spenser Confidential” will not herald the dawn of a new series, but will fade away into the annals of cinematic history.

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



Mark Wahlberg’s character seems in a constant state of bewilderment in “Spenser Confidential.”

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***Speed comparison based on 15 Mbps DSL.