

THE EPOCH TIMES

LIFE &

TRADITION

EKATERINA SHAKHAROVA/UNSPLASH



Reach out to loved ones on this Valentine's Day and let them know how grateful you are for the role they play in your life.

Be My Valentine: Embracing the Day

This year is the perfect time to expand the scope of this festival of love

JEFF MINICK

Of all the special days on our calendar, surely Valentine's Day is the strangest.

Unlike occasions such as Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, Martin Luther King Day, or even Christmas and New Year's Day, Valentine's Day isn't an official national holiday.

Celebrations such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, or Easter are by their very names clear as to their purpose. We take Mom to lunch, we buy Dad a power tool or a book, and we celebrate the resurrection on Easter or at least have a bunny magically bring the kids baskets of candy.

But Valentine's Day? Really, what's the point? Is it, as a couple of my friends claim, a holiday concocted by Hallmark cards, chocolate manufacturers, and florists? Is it a festival reeking of artifice and false sentiment? Isn't February 14, at bottom, bogus in its demands that we shower a beloved with gifts, something we could do any day of the year?

I don't think so.

No—the older I get, the more I see Valentine's Day as unique, as rare as a red rose in a February snow. Religion and race play no part on this day. The tags we assign ourselves—liberal, conservative, libertarian—matter not a whit in the festivities of February 14.



"Love's Secrets" by William-Adolphe Bouguereau, 1896.

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Priests for Life National Director Says Pro-Life Gains Can't Be Undone by Policy

Frank Pavone on the pro-life movement: 'Proceed with confidence'



COURTESY OF PRIESTS FOR LIFE

Father Frank Pavone is the national director of Priests for Life.

CATHERINE YANG

In 1994, a young woman went to get an abortion, but when she looked out the window of the facility, she saw a priest. She decided to go outside to talk to the praying man.

"And she changed her mind. I ended up helping her baptize her baby, and now, all these years later she's still in touch with me, and that baby that we saved that day ended up having a baby of her own," said Frank Pavone, national director of Priests for Life.

People in the pro-life movement tend to have stories like this—but they know most of the lives they've saved they'll never meet.

When Pavone first heard about the March

for Life in Washington, D.C., he was still in high school. He attended the third annual event in 1976, before he knew anyone who had an abortion or what abortion was all about. But as he got involved over the years, and after he became a priest, he felt a "call within a call," and got permission from the Church to dedicate himself to pro-life advocacy.

After all, the founder of the abortion industry, Bernard Nathanson, who later became pro-life himself, had said that if all the clergy across the nation had stood up against abortion, the effort to normalize abortion never would have taken hold.

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“Anytime you hear of somebody who's pregnant and in need, you can actually help save that life.”

Frank Pavone, national director, Priests for Life

FROM A READER

The Elephant in the Room

JOHN FALCE

The day I broke the elephant was not a good day.

To start, my father was deployed on a Coast Guard ship, so all of us were struggling with despondency. To make matters worse, both my siblings and I, for then we numbered three, were screaming and roughhousing up and down the house as my poor mother tried to clean it. Everyone in the house was trembling on the brink of emotional (and in my mother's case, physical) collapse.

That was the day I broke the elephant.

The care of a mother in her child's hour of need is mercy itself.

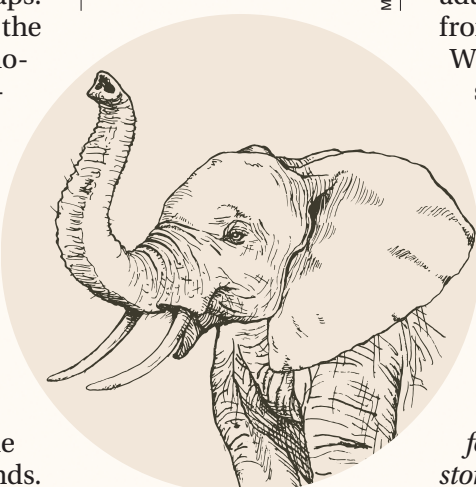
My mom found the elephant online. It reminded her of a statue that her aunt used to have. She loved that elephant and was constantly reprimanding us, the children, who were equally enamored with it, not to play on it, not to jump over it, and absolutely not to ride it. Despite the occasional good intention, we paid spare attention. We began at first to play around it, then to incorporate it into other games, finally deteriorating into mounting and galloping on it rodeo-style. The day the elephant was broken, I remember, she had warned me already more than once for abusing it.

I can't recall what finally, inevitably, pushed us all over the edge. Maybe we scattered her dust pile one too many times. Maybe someone picked the wrong moment to run screaming through the kitchen. Whatever the cause, my mom finally snapped. At her wit's end, she started hollering at us in consummate vexation. Eventually, her frustration gave way to distress. She started crying, and that was it. Just like that, all of us were sobbing hysterically and holding on to each other as our frayed nerves gave way completely. This went on for quite some time before we began to wipe our eyes and pull ourselves together. Then, out of the blue, my mom asked: "Who wants to go out for ice cream?" Just like that, our moods swung 180 degrees and cheerful pandemonium ensued. Everyone else ran upstairs to get changed. I began jumping over the elephant. Back-forth. Back-forth. Faster and faster until ... SMASH!

I had slightly mistimed one of my leaps. My bare feet crashed straight through the ceramic top of the sculpture. For a moment, I just stared down at my feet, feeling no pain. I couldn't reconcile my feet inside the elephant. What had happened seemed impossible. Then blood began coursing down my legs from a thousand tiny cuts. I started howling, more in shock than anything. My mom came running. She took it all in at a glance, then without a word began fixing it. I was pulled from the elephant. The sharp shards were thrown away. My mother put me in the tub and started to clean my wounds.



Author John Falce.



At this point, however, I was more worried about ice cream than anything else. I took a deep breath, sniffing for effect, and asked, "Can we still go for ice cream?" She didn't hesitate. Ice cream was still on. The care of a mother in her child's hour of need is mercy itself.

So we went for ice cream with cookie crumbs and gummy worms on top. When we returned home and in the following days, life proceeded peacefully. Some weeks later, when my father got back, in an attempt to please my mother, Dad reincarnated that elephant as a lamp, which lights our house lopsidedly to this day.

Though the elephant went on to shine brightly, it couldn't be as if it didn't smash. I never faced punishment for breaking that ceramic monument, instead I learned a valuable lesson. The many times I blew my mom off, sure that I was right, she had actually been correct and predictive. I started to pay more attention to my parents and adults in general, and to regard direction from older and wiser heads than mine. When I broke the elephant, I broke off some bad habits as well ... or at least I thought a little more about trying.

John Falce is 12 years old. He is Catholic, lives with his military pilot father, Florentine-trained artist mother, two brothers, and sister on a four-acre hobby farm in Milton, Fla. He is trying his hand at raising pigs when he's not at school. John got into writing while obligingly editing for his mother's book. He loves a good story and hopes you enjoy this one.

Once Homeless and Alone, Army Officer Finds His 'Band of Brothers'

JENNI JULANDER

As a boy orphaned at a young age, Matthew Mickey was homeless when he witnessed on television the Twin Towers collapse on 9/11. He made the decision to join the U.S. Army to fight in the war on terror, and that turned his life around completely.

Now a first lieutenant, Mickey, who lives in North Carolina, said he hopes his life's story will be an inspiration to those facing difficulties in life.

"All I want is to give hope to others," he told The Epoch Times.

Going "from foster home to foster home to foster home" while growing up was rough enough. Between being bullied by the older kids, a looming sense of being alone in the world, and eventually being kicked out of his foster home at age 16, Mickey learned he had to rely on himself.

To support himself, the teen took on any work he could find, from odd jobs at the grocery store to working as a janitor at McDonald's; he eventually took a job in construction and commercial plumbing. He sometimes couchsurfing but mostly slept in an old Isuzu Trooper, catching a few hours of sleep each morning before school.

With very little pocket money for gas, Mickey made it through the winters by lining his car windows with newspaper. "I stayed cold," Mickey said. "I didn't really have much money for gas." It was still cold, but it helped.

Yet, he wasn't stingy with his money. When other homeless people in the area needed help, he gave them spare change without hesitation.

His longtime friend Christopher "Buster" Brown was one of the few who encouraged Mickey during high school.

"He had a heart of gold," Buster said. "He would take the shirt off his back and give it to you. He had leadership. He just needed someone to believe in him."

But on 9/11, Mickey's heart of gold broke. When he realized that thousands of children had just lost one or both parents, and many of them would go into foster care if extended family members couldn't take them in, he descended into a haze of anger and depression.

"They were going to have to live my life," Mickey said. It was a prospect that horrified him.

Mickey's life had been a series of let-downs, and he had been told it would end in failure no matter what he tried. With a low GPA, he wouldn't make it into college. Just to make ends meet, he often worked well past midnight, a reality that seemed like it would never end.

He wouldn't have wished that on anyone, he said. So, he decided to do something about it.

On Sept. 12, 2001, Mickey walked into a recruiting station, ready to join whatever branch would take him.

"My nation needed me," he recalled. "That part of it is true. But the whole truth isn't as patriotic. It really was a cry for help. I know that sounds dramatic, but my life was very dramatic at the time. I couldn't fathom moving on alone, and I didn't want to try."

He breathed a sigh of relief when he was accepted. Sgt. Smith, Mickey's recruiter, explained how the infantry was a band of brothers, a family. It was the kind of environment Mickey had always wanted.

“My nation needed me. That part of it is true. But the whole truth isn't as patriotic. It really was a cry for help ... I couldn't fathom moving on alone, and I didn't want to try.”

1st Lt. Matthew Mickey

His friend Buster encouraged him to go through with the process. "You and me both know you can do it," Buster said, sensing Mickey's hesitation. "Make a life for yourself."

Now, almost two decades later, Mickey has risen through the ranks to reach first lieutenant. He now works as an executive officer at the Army's Bronx Recruiting Battalion in New York, where he lives with his wife, Denise, and their 9-year-old daughter, Lily.

After obtaining a master's degree, a dream that had for so long seemed far-fetched when he was younger, Mickey says he feels like he's made it in life.

"It makes me feel great when he says that he feels complete now," Denise said, "that he feels like he is part of a team."

Soon, Mickey will be retiring from the Army, and he's started thinking about a future teaching financial education.

"I want to change lives in teaching people how to use the stock market to reach financial freedom," he told The Epoch Times. "It is scary to transition out of the Army ... [but] as long as I am helping people and or a team for a greater cause ... I will be thrilled to see what comes next."



LARA PORRIER/US ARMY

1st Lt. Matthew Mickey lives in New York City with his wife, Denise, his 9-year-old daughter, Lily, and two English bulldogs. Mickey is assigned to the New York City Recruiting Battalion, 1st Army Recruiting Brigade.



LARA PORRIER/US ARMY

Mickey helps lead training during pandemic conditions in New York City.



COURTESY OF MATTHEW MICKY

Mickey (L) in Iraq.

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK



A spectacular sunrise highlights the sublime art and architecture of the basilica.

LARGER THAN LIFE: ART THAT INSPIRES US THROUGH THE AGES

The Sublime 'Church of Gold': St. Mark's Basilica, in Venice, Italy

From dawn to dusk, the golden mosaics on the façade of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice shimmer and shine to differing degrees. The constantly shifting sunlight seems to bring endless dramatic effects to the mosaic pictures that depict mainly religious life.

The mosaics were first created in 1071, and developed over eight centuries to cover around 9,500 square yards of the basilica, inside and out, reflecting a mixture of Italian and the original Byzantine designs.

Besides the mosaics, gold decorations dominate the basilica, so much so that from the 11th century on, it was known as the "Chiesa d'Oro" or "Church of Gold."

The Architecture

St. Mark's Basilica was consecrated in 832. Late in the 10th century, the church was damaged by fire. Construction of the



A detail of the Pala d'Oro (altar retable) that houses the relics of St. Mark. Between the 10th and 12th centuries, Venetians commissioned craftsmen in Constantinople to create the ornate Pala d'Oro with over 250 enamels.

current basilica began in 1063, and the resulting Greek-Byzantine building is thought to have been influenced by the former Church of Hagia Sophia (now a mosque) in Istanbul, then known as the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine) city of Constantinople.

Today, the basilica is one of the best examples of Italo-Byzantine design. The different types of art and architecture throughout the basilica are of different eras and places, making the structure particularly unique. For instance, on the façade, ancient statues and columns stand alongside the portals that are decorated with narrow bands of carvings in Romanesque style, which was popular from the 6th through 11th centuries. And the basilica's many mosaics reflect both Venetian and Byzantine designs.

Some of the ancient and Byzantine art and architectural treasures in the basilica are original pieces from the East. For instance, on the Fourth Crusade, Venetians brought back to their city many mosaics, friezes, columns, and capitals after the Sack of Constantinople in 1204. Some of these notable items were the icon of the Madonna Nicopeia, the enamels of the golden altarpiece, and the four copper-gilded horses from the Hippodrome.

The rest of the "Byzantine" art and architecture, although Byzantine in appearance, was created by skilled Venetian craftsmen.

The basilica was the Doge's chapel until 1807, a decade after the fall of the Venetian Republic, when the basilica became the city's cathedral and the seat of its patriarch, a position similar to a bishop's.



Venetian and Byzantine designs delightfully collide on the church's exterior.



The mosaics on the building's west façade show scenes from the life of Christ and highlight St. Mark's relics.



(Left) The floor plan of the basilica is based on the Greek cross, which consists of equal-length vertical and horizontal lines. (Right) One of the majestic entrances.

Truth and Tradition

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What Our Readers Say
(after YouTube has completely demonetized us)

‘I urge everyone to financially support you to offset the demonetization efforts by YouTube. God bless!’

In the overall state of media censorship and misinformation, The Epoch Times is a Godsend. My only sources for current events is The Epoch Times and your sister station NTD. Despite the big tech censorship from platforms like YouTube, I really enjoy watching your investigative presentations by Joshua Phillip as well as presentations by Roman Balmakov. Thank you for holding true to your motto, as it seems like Truth and Tradition are scarce commodities these days.

NICK MENDOZA

Because of the banning that Big Tech is doing to a lot of people, I would stay away from YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and some of the others. Go with free speech. I really like that you're on Censored.news. Keep up with the good work and the true facts.

MARGIE MCMILLAN

I truly admire your courage in reporting the truth about what is happening in the U.S. and our world, and your defiance of the big tech censors in reporting on issues that concern millions of us, including election fraud and abuse of power by big tech. I urge everyone to financially support you to offset the demonetization efforts by YouTube. God bless!

RICHARD C

I have heard that The Epoch Times YouTube channel has been demonetized. Consider developing a channel for media devices like Roku. I believe the quality of your content will make this successful and would allow you to sell advertising with (potentially) less censorship from tech companies.

GEOFF BARNARD

I just signed up and love your news. So wonderful to read truth, not the lies and spin of MSM [mainstream media]. I am sorry you were demonetized by YouTube. You are patriots!

JULIE WIRTEL

I was discouraged to hear that YouTube is now trying to shut you down. That makes me all the more determined to support you as an independent media voice. I'm from Canada and there is virtually no independent media voice here. We even have mail delivery people refusing to deliver The Epoch Times, as if they're somehow empowered to censor what views can be disseminated. Please keep up the amazing work you all do.

BOB HULLEY

We saw one of The Epoch Times' ads on YouTube about four months ago and subscribed. You got us through the election informed and sane, with coverage of what was happening we could find nowhere else. I have shamelessly re-posted your articles on my blog, forwarded to others information for which your reporters have done all the spadework and talked at least 3 other people into subscribing. Your \$1 offer is so ridiculously reasonable we are sending a contribution for your full subscription price to cover the last 4 months (and to make up for the demonetization/censorship). You're worth it!

JESSICA RENSHAW

Hope you guys hang strong after demonetization by YouTube. Epoch Times is awesome and [I] enjoy getting updates throughout the day.

HOWARD STEIN

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