THE EPOCH TIMES



What Can Amish Values Teach Us?

Marlin Miller started a magazine unlike anything on newsstands today. Embracing traditional values and faith, it offers a light in modern times.

THALIA ZHAO

hen most people think of the Amish, the first thing that comes to mind is probably not a magazine. But Marlin Miller isn't most people.

Marlin is the publisher of Plain Values, a magazine that brings good news, stories of inspiring people doing good, and opportunities to make a difference to more than 300,000 readers nationwide, many It would take seven weeks in a NICU and a prayer before the idea even began to take shape.

of them Amish. The magazine's content is designed to appeal to the entire family and is carefully curated to support the Amish way of life distant from modern amenities.

The Ohio-based magazine has grown and expanded, even now reaching non-Amish readers who appreciate its traditional values and biblical worldview amidst modern times—something Marlin never expected.

A little over 10 years ago, Plain Values hadn't even been a thought in his mind.

It would take seven weeks in a NICU

and a prayer before the idea even began to take shape.

The Beginnings of a Family

"Sometimes the Lord calls us with a gentle nudge. Other times his calling can feel like a rush of a sudden wind when things begin to whirl around us, seemingly out of nowhere."

These are Lisa Miller's opening words to an article published in the October 2020 edition of Plain Values.

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Practice Makes Perfect: Lives Well Lived

The principles of practice apply to relationships as well as craft

JEFF MINICK

Some readers will know this old joke. A visitor to New York City gets lost going to a concert and asks a man carrying a violin case, "Sir, can you tell me how to get to Carnegie Hall?" The man smiles at him and responds, "Practice, practice, practice."

In "Outliers: The Story of Success," Malcolm Gladwell asked a differ-

ent question: "How do some individuals win fame and fortune?" He found the answer in such places as their culture and the circumstances of their childhood, their passion and drive, their personal habits and experiences, and even the dates of their birth.

Gladwell also points out as one factor for success the "10,000-hour rule,"

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By making sure to spend time with our loved ones on a consistent basis, we deepen our relationships, little by little.

RONNACHAI PALAS/SHUTTERSTOCK



Practice Makes Perfect: Lives Well Lived

Continued from Page 1

an idea he popularized contending that many entrepreneurs, artists, musicians, and others who devote themselves to a goal or a craft may, after years of intensive study and practice, achieve their ambitions.

Florida State University's professor Anders Ericsson was one of the first to devise the 10,000-hour rule. In addition, however, he determined that a good teacher or mentor could contribute immensely to a pupil's success. The young woman wishing to become an ophthalmologist must train for four years after medical school and will come close to Gladwell's magical number, but if she's fortunate to learn from excellent teachers during that training, they may also play a part in her rise to the top of her field. But what about the rest of us? Do these principles apply to us?

Everyday Outliers

Let's say a 36-year-old Texas man, Jim, has worked as a garbage collector for 16 years. Five days a week he rides through his town, sometimes driving the truck or hanging from the back to collect trash. The 10,000hour rule has no real bearing on his skill set. Jim learned all he needed to know his first year on the job. Since then, he has performed admirably, received several wage hikes and health benefits, and plans to work until he can retire.

Every evening when Jim returns to his family, he spends a little time on the porch, strumming his guitar and singing. He learned to play in high school, and for several years he took lessons from a woman whose music he much admired. These halfan-hour stints on the porch four and five nights a week haven't brought him 10,000 hours of practice, but he's competent, knows scores of songs, some of which he's written, and brings delight to his wife, his three children, and the widow who lives next door.

Sarah, Jim's wife, was 14 when her mother died. She spent the next six years helping her dad raise her four younger siblings, graduated from high school, and earned her associate's degree in early childhood education. She worked at a local Montessori school until her first child was born, and then became a stay-at-home homeschooling mom. Every day she puts into practice all those years of mothering and education, and hopes to raise her children to be lights in the world.

This couple will never acquire the fame Gladwell selected for those celebrities in "Outliers," but still we might ask: Isn't theirs

Relationships and Quantity Time

"Practice, practice" also applies to our relationships with family and friends. We may not think of relationships in this light, but the more time we spend with a friend, a relative, or a spouse, the greater the opportunity we have to deepen those relationships. Our connections may be imperfect, of course, but with enough "practice" we can be loved and loving. By putting in time with another, whether it's someone we've just met and find attractive or a friend of many years, by practicing connection, the minutes, hours, and days are the building blocks of a home we share together.

So the 10,000-hour rule is relevant here. Just as Gladwell's outliers put in time, energy, and passion to win renown, we too



If we pay attention, the wisdom of others can enhance our chances for success in making connections

can give ourselves to those who attract us, practicing and learning the arts of love along the way.

Some 20 years ago, our culture stressed the importance of spending quality time with those we loved, especially our children. Seeking to help and guide women working outside the home, commentators and counselors wrote a multitude of articles on how to make the most of the hours spent with our children. Attend their soccer practices and games, give them assistance and encouragement with their school homework, and sit down and listen to them, and you can make up some of those missing hours.

Quality time is well and good, but we should also recognize the importance of quantity time. That afternoon you spend on the porch shooting the breeze with a friend about nothing in particular is valuable. You're "practicing" your friendship. That evening you and your spouse spend reading books on the sofa, perhaps occasionally pausing to read aloud a passage you want to share or simply discussing some mundane matter, adds to your marriage, even in some small and seemingly in-

We can everywhere if we look for them.

significant way.

Just as Jim and Sarah learned some of their skills from teachers, we can do the same, even with—perhaps especially with—

relationships. We may not hire someone as we do to teach us the fundamentals of playing a guitar or sit in a classroom learning about early childhood education, but if we pay attention, the wisdom of others can enhance our chances for success in making connections. In talking to a 60-something husband and wife, for example, a newly wedded couple might learn, as my wife and I once did, that the most important thing in a marriage is respect for the other.

Others look at certain men and women, and wish to mirror their actions and virtues. They see a daughter caring for her sickly mother, or a son nobly doing all he can for a father with dementia, and they take that example and make it their own. Again, though they might not think of it in this sense, they are practicing virtue and so becoming better human beings.

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Anders

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accomplished

Recognizing that older people in particular have wisdom to impart that is frequently unsought or unheeded by the young, The Epoch Times has added a special column titled "Dear Next Generation." Here every week those with a few years on them and a lifetime of experience write encouraging short essays to the young, giving them guidelines on resilience, courage, love, and other topics. Some younger readers have responded to these notes of advice with personal notes of their own, thanking these writers for their help.

We can find teachers everywhere if we look for them.

Practice, Pursuit, Passion

Though Gladwell wrote "Outliers" to reveal why some people succeed in extraordinary ways, the fact is we can do the same. To learn a foreign language, to become amateur painters, to develop a greater empathy for others: all these require practice, the willpower and the passion to pursue a goal, and the willingness to find guides who can help us along the way.

The Dalai Lama once wrote: "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion."

There's that word—practice—again. Practice may not make us perfect, but it can bring us unforeseen talents and trea-

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. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust on Their Wings," and two works of non-fiction, "Learning as I Go" and "Movies Make the Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.

How a Foster Mom's 'Welcome Packages' Are Helping Teen Girls

LOUISE BEVAN

Single foster mom Brittany Burcham of Birmingham, Alabama, started fostering teens in 2019. She provides safe refuge for teenage girls who have been taken into protective state custody. Knowing that her placements would be scared and disoriented, Burcham decided to put together a "welcome package."

Her heartwarming videos share her routine for emergency placements, to put nervous kids at ease and sidestep the firstnight awkwardness, and are even inspiring others to consider fostering.

First, she assembles a basket—including personal care items, a blanket, and fluffy socks—to replace all the essential items a teen may have forgotten when packing.

"When a kid is given a trash bag and told to pack their items [in] 10 minutes, most of them do not think about deodorant or a toothbrush," the 35-year-old told BuzzFeed. "They're grabbing clothes, sentimental items, and their makeup."

Burcham makes sure to gift all her placements a new bag upon arrival.

"These kids aren't trash," she said. "Their clothes and sentimental items aren't trash. ... So, if a kid comes with trash bags, they leave with a nice big duffel bag that gives them the dignity they deserve.'

The savvy foster mom also keeps a "foster closet" stocked with essential items, underwear, socks, razors, and hair products. In a video viewed more than 15.5 million times, Burcham shared her first-night routine for an emergency placement.

After introductions, Burcham asks the foster children if she can run a load of laundry for them. Next, she takes them to her local Shake Shack for a meal in a safe, open

"We can eat and casually talk under twinkle lights on the patio, and it helps them relax and open up," she told BuzzFeed.

Conversation topics often include school, friends, TV shows, and TikTok dances. Burcham also has a box of conversation cards with prompts such as "dream job," or "superpower," to help each teen share more about herself.

The pair will wind down with some TV before bedtime. Burcham will discuss the foster care journey if, and only if, her teens bring it up on their own.

Many supportive well-wishers shared in the comments section that they would consider fostering, based on Burcham's inspiring tips. A number of people who had been in foster care also said they wished they had had a caregiver as kind and thoughtful as Burcham.

Shake Shack responded by sending the foster mom a gift card to cover every first meal for her teens in the future.

Despite her now-winning formula, Burcham was terrified of making a mistake the first time she welcomed a placement in October 2019, a 13-year-old girl who had been removed from an abusive home. Yet the pair went shopping for Halloween costumes and Burcham realized the teen was just as nervous as she was. A guiding principle was born. She told

BuzzFeed, "You're going to do something



Burcham (L) with her

Brittany

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRITTANY BURCHAM

Even though indiant know me you still took me inggod made me feel like I was at home and ; thank you for that

Thank you so much for taking me in when no one else would and making me feel loved, i really appreciate you alot and in hope i can stay with you until i find someone.

A thank-you card that Burcham received from one of the children she fostered.

weird or wrong, but in the end, if you lead with love, the kid will feel that."

Burcham told Newsweek that she started out as a court-appointed special advocate (CASA) for a child in foster care. Moved by the impact she could make, especially on teens, she applied to become licensed as a foster parent after moving back home to Alabama.

For anyone interested in helping, who isn't able or ready to foster, Burcham suggests becoming a CASA or mentor for kids in the system.

"There are not enough foster homes for

teenagers," she told Newsweek. "People are scared of teens or just don't really know anybody who fosters teens, so I wanted to show the positive things that fostering teenagers brings and hopefully encourage others."

She hopes that her videos will teach others that we "don't ever stop needing a parent, and teens still need love and guid-

"They deserve to grow up being treated like the amazing humans they are," she told Newsweek. "I hope more good foster parents step up to be that person for them."

DEAR JUNE On Family and Relationships



When a Loved One Is Dying

I have a dying wife. Like many people this happens to, I am broken-hearted over this. She has many health issues and at 71 she could make a difference, but won't. She eats sugar in all forms and will not stop. I don't help matters because I buy it for her so she won't blow a fuse. The fuse is the issue. She wants to die and I can't stop it. I am 76 and although diabetic, I have good control and great labs. I try to stay calm and turn a blind eye to the namecalling. I need a tool of advice to cope.

→ Dear Gary,

I can understand your heartbreak. Watching some we love suffer is so hard, especially when you are their full-time caregiver, which it sounds like you are.

When a loved one is dying, it is most important to give them dignity, ease their pain and suffering as best we can, and seek solace.

I think you are right to turn a blind eye to the name-calling. It is a reflection of her pain and very probably also fear. I would guess the sugar consumption | this phase?"

also stems from the same discomfort and is her coping tool. So my suggestion is to focus on what I mentioned above and in doing so, the issues with temper and sugar should naturally become less of a stress point.

Let's start with solace for you. If you are not already doing so, take care of yourself. Exercise, time in nature, reading, visiting friends and family, whatever it is that allows you to relax and temporarily

For your peace of mind, I would let go of concern for her physical health and instead focus on her emotional and even spiritual well-being. I say this because it sounds like your concern for her physical health is causing you pain but it is not something you can control.

So I think it is fine in this instance then, yes, even if sweets are not healthy and even if they are making her feel physically worse.

I realize this may seem counterintuitive because sweets are not healthy and probably making her feel worse physically, so let me explain more. In most cases, we should do our utmost to help our loved ones be healthy in body as this is certainly part of caring for someone. But the approach of death is a special chapter of life when it becomes more important to focus on their heart and soul.

When you say she wants to die and you can't stop it, I hear a husband's sadness that he cannot protect and shelter his wife from hardship—something you may well have been able to do throughout the course of your life together. But you can still be her rock. To do this, I would start by accepting

her as she is, even her wish for death. It might help you to consider this: While it is important to take care of ourselves in the hope that we can avoid illness and prolong our lives, there is also the truth that death is ultimately beyond our control. I know people who can sense when

a baby is coming and some can sense when death approaches, and perhaps this is the case for your wife. So it may not be that she has given up on life, but that she is preparing for what is to come and is struggling with this preparation. At every stage of life, we have inner work to do. As the body weakens, this inward work becomes important. As

the caregiver, your question might be: "How can I best support her through

Let her have as much independence

Consider ways to bring sweetness and moments of respite into her life.

Part of the answer includes letting her know that you are willing to listen if she wishes to talk about what is going on inside, about her feelings about death.

Your wife may not wish to talk, and perhaps the cookies serve to keep fear and helplessness at bay and she does not feel strong enough to face them. So again, you can be her rock, loving and supporting her decisions amidst

Ease Pain and Suffering

In thinking about your question, I watched a 2015 TED Talk, "What Really Matters at the End of

Life," given by a palliative care physician who said that baking cookies was one of the primary interventions at the hospice center he was then directing. He advocated bringing as much sensorial delight as possible to those in hospice care, moments of relief so they can briefly feel the sweetness of life. So on that note,

you could even buy your wife her favorite cookies. If you want to take it a step further, on the heart and soul. serve them on a nice plate with some flow-

ers alongside. Or maybe surprise her | one can be full and rich in love for with a new kind of cookie you think she might like.

And consider other ways to bring sweetness and moments of respite into her life. Some ideas are to cook her favorite foods, play her favorite music, read aloud to her poems, jokes, news, good literature—whatever she finds enjoyable. Or look at old photos and go down memory lane together.

And if the situation permits, does she have any last wishes to see someone or

as possible and when you need to care | and health topics.

for her, do so with respect and even

Some practical ideas to uphold dignity are to try to keep her living area (and her when the time comes) as clean as possible. Buy fresh flowers if and when the budget allows; see if she would enjoy getting her hair and nails done. Having a body and home well cared for can help calm the heart.

And having a calm heart, peace of mind, and an uplifted spirit are, in my mind, the essence of dignity.

ple of thoughts. First, in researching your question I discovered that there are a great number of books written to help the dying process; I don't have one in particular to recommend, but perhaps among your circle of friends, or even your wife's medical team, someone will know of one that is right for you.

Secondly, there are many stories of people who have been resuscitated

after having been de-

aside and the spirit is

then arrayed in new

RUSLAN HUZAU/SHUTTERSTOCK clared clinically dead, and a common theme in their account of the experience is that their consciousness remained, sometimes outside the body. An image I heard in a poem when I was young is that our human body is akin to a set of clothes put on by our spirit or soul. When the clothes are worn out they are laid

The stage of life where we approach death is an important and special one—a time to focus

But until your wife is called to her next

chapter, I hope this

both of you. Sincerely,

Do you have a family or relationship question for our advice columnist, Dear June? Send it to DearJune@EpochTimes.com or Attn: Dear June, The Epoch Times, 229 W. 28th St., Floor 7, New York, NY 10001.

June Kellum is a married mother of three and longtime Epoch Times journalist covering family, relationships,

The United Front

Parenting teenagers is an adventure

BERNADETTE BONANNO

I am not sure exactly when, and there weren't any eyewitnesses to prove my theory, but there was an alien invasion into the-bestlittle-boy-in-the-whole-wide-world. I can assure you of that. Understandably, our life was a bit chaotic with four mischievous little boys, but it was great. I could basically solve any problem with a cookie and a book. That is, until it happened.

I mean the invasion into 11-year-old Jesse, our eldest son. You know, the-best-little-boyin-the-whole-wide-world. I nicknamed him "Bud," because every day he cheerfully helped me with his three younger brothers, our dog, and cat.



SUZANNE TUCKER/SHUTTERSTO

The teen years call for shifting gears in parenting tactics.

on his hip, Jesse was chock-full of great ideas and could make the daily routines of life entertaining.

Then everything seemed to change. One hand on his hip became two, and cheerful willingness became bold disobedience. I was totally unprepared, like a carpenter without tools. But help was on the way.

It was a Saturday morning. I was giving our neighbor, Vince, a haircut on our back porch. Vince is 10 years older than my husband, Mike and me. Although his children were Born with big brown eyes and one hand the same ages as our boys, that 10-year dif-

ference gave him wisdom I was hoping to tap. So, I shared my dilemma with Vince. Actually, I blubbered all over him as I cut his hair

and fell apart like pulled pork in a crock-pot. Poor Vince, he couldn't get away. I was cutting his hair! I told him about Jesse's disrespectful back-talking, the endless arguments Mike and I were having, and my fear that the other three boys would start imitating their big brother's behavior. Looking back, I admit I sounded like Chicken Little, "Oh Vince! The sky is falling!"

Then he murmured: "Don't you remember the united front? You know, our parents—the united front." At first, I didn't get it. Vince didn't even know my parents. Then he continued: "Did we ever get between our parents? Did we ever play one parent against the other? No. They never gave us the op-

Vince was right! Growing up, I wouldn't dare to think a bad thing about my mom in front of my dad for fear he might hear my thoughts. Complaining about my dad to my mom would have been equally futile. There was no dividing and conquering. Not

That haircut changed everything. I couldn't wait to talk to Mike. Because our boys were little, we couldn't leave them alone without a sitter. So, we started walking around our backyard and on the street in front of our house. This way, we could speak privately while we mapped out our parenting battle plans.

In the beginning, the boys watched from the window and waved, wondering what in the world we were doing. Vince would occasionally lean out his front door with a smile and say, "I see you're wearing down the pavement again." He knew exactly what we were doing. We were becoming a team, "the united front." It sounds good. Right? Believe me. It was tough.

Since that haircut, we've taken thousands of walks—some short and some very long. We walk until we come up with a plan we both agree on. As you can guess, the aliens came back for the other three boys. Thankfully, it was one at a time, and with all our "pavement training," each invasion got a bit easier. We were relieved when the aliens returned our boys and departed for good. I think our boys were as well!

Bernadette Bonanno lives in Albany, N.Y. She can be reached at bernadettebonan-



The Miller family: Lisa and Marlin (seated), and their children.

What Can Amish Values Teach Us?

Marlin Miller started a magazine unlike anything on newsstands today. Embracing traditional values and faith, it offers a light in modern times.

Continued from Page 1

Lisa is Marlin's wife and a full-time mother to the Millers' four children. She and Marlin wrote this article together, titled "Our Story," to recount the journey of how the Miller couple became the Miller family.

The calling she spoke of was the calling to adopt many children. Ever since she was a child herself, there was nothing more Lisa wanted than to create a home that would be a nurturing place for children who needed to be loved and valued. And in 2007, five years after she married Marlin, she knew that she finally had the foundation to support her lifelong dream.

"We filled out our adoption home study initially, and then two weeks after our adoption home study was approved, we were matched with our oldest son. He was about 3 1/2 years old and had been in several placements [before] he came to us," said Lisa.

Though adoption came with its own set of challenges, it also came with its unique set of joys, which the Millers shared with their son each step of the way. In fact, they found their first adoption so rewarding that two years later, in 2009, Marlin and Lisa began to talk about adding another member to their family. It was hardly a few days after that conversation when the Millers received a fortuitous phone call asking if they would consider a daughter.

"She was matched with us before she was born. We knew she was going to have Down syndrome, and that she was going to need some surgeries," Lisa said. "She was born early and was in the NICU for seven weeks. We almost lost her a few times."

Fortunately, their daughter was able to come home at the end of those seven weeks to become the fourth member of the Miller family. After beginning her life with a tough fight for her own existence, she's now 11 and full of energy.

But the medical bills from those seven weeks didn't come cheap for the Millers. After the addition of their daughter, they sold the home they had built six years earlier and bought a small fixer-upper so they could be debt-free and so that Lisa could become a full-time mom. Moreover, they had to find some way to keep up with the financial costs of their new family.

"I very quickly began praying," Marlin said. "OK, Lord, so you're going to bring us these kids—and I knew well enough that our time in the hospital was expensive, so my prayer quickly became, 'OK, Lord, please help me and show me how to provide for what's coming."

A Solution Hidden in Plain Sight Before long, Marlin found the answer to his prayer.

"I was a sales rep with a local newspaper [at the time.] And because I grew up Amish, I can talk Dutch, the language of the Amish community. Probably about 70 percent of my client base was Amish,"

The third pillar for the magazine's content was to highlight good works being done both at home and around the world.

The Millers live in Ohio, which is the U.S. state with the second-highest Amish population, at more than 78,000, and boasts the highest number of Amish congregations in the nation. Though the Amish tend to shy away from modern technologies in favor of simple living, they do still interact with non-Amish—or "English"—as valued customers, partners,

and friends. In his dealings with his Amish clientele, Marlin began to notice a pattern: While Amish clients would often place ads in the paper he worked for, many times the product or services they advertised were only relevant to Amish buyers. However, since the newspaper priced ads based on

total circulation, his Amish clients were forced to spend extra money to reach a population that didn't care about what they were selling.

"So the inspiration for the magazine was, what if we could purify that Amish mailing list or market?" said Marlin. "We could purify that market and go back to the Amish business[es] and say, 'Hey listen, we have an advertising product [where] 100 percent of your money is going to bring [you] more value because it's going to hit your entire market."

After putting all these pieces together, Marlin ran two pilot issues as a test with promising results. Through these results, the path forward suddenly became clear: He would make a magazine specifically for the Amish and other Plain people— Christian groups such as the Amish who live simple lives outside of the bustle and opulence of contemporary convenience possibly the first ever.

"So I told [Lisa] that I think this idea is going to hold water," said Marlin, "I think the bucket's going to hold water but we have to retool it. We have to make the magazine a better product. And so we basically thought through and prayed through what the best [content to give] our readers is."

Together, Lisa and Marlin came up with three pillars for the type of content that they wanted their new magazine to contain. The first two pillars of content drew from the Millers' own experiences—they looked for content that would show the dignity of children with special needs, as well as content that would illustrate the beauty of adoption.

"One of the things that I told [Lisa] was that I really wanted to be a part of—big or small, it didn't matter—but I wanted to be a part of an adoption of another child with Down syndrome or some special need," said Marlin, "hopefully to be able to connect the child and the family."

The third pillar for the magazine's content was to highlight good works being done both at home and around the world. especially situations in which people trying to do good may need prayers, donations, or volunteer assistance.

"We wanted to [be] that connector between people who don't have a smartphone [and the causes they care about]," said Marlin. "We want to share stories about that work that the Plain people could get behind."

It was also important to Marlin that all the magazine's content be presented through the lens of a biblical worldview. "We knew that biblically-centered work

would resonate with the Amish, for the most part, because that's really how they try to live their lives," he said. Under the guidance of these content

principles, Marlin officially established Just Plain Values in 2012 after quitting his job in sales. The publication was named after the Plain people and would be rebranded to become Plain Values in early 2020.

"It was kind of fun telling people that we were just 'Plain Values,' and I'd have to add: no, that's now simply, 'Plain Values," said Marlin.

A Magazine for Good News

At first glance, Plain Values may not seem like a magazine for the Amish. In fact, with its chic geometric design and matte cover, it could easily be mistaken for an artbook or photography magazine. Each monthly issue is substantial, containing



Winesburg, Ohio. The Millers' personal family story is closely tied to Plain Values' coverage. Among the many inspiring articles are stories that show the dignity of children with special needs and the beauty of adoption.

The Amish are noted for their industriousness. Marlin noted they are also very charitable and readily share with those in need.

one or two in-depth feature articles along

people who are making the world a better

2021 issue, for instance, spotlighted Wide

brings "hope, dignity, and love to orphans

As to how Plain Values finds all these stories of wonderful people and wonder-

ful work to fill each issue, Marlin says that

it's really a matter of always being tuned

"I am always watching. [Lisa] is always

watching," he said. "I feel like we try to

our Amish readers would really enjoy

you will.'

watch for news or work that is a little dif-

ferent or a little unique, and that we think

learning about. So it's this ongoing hunt, if

"Normally he's sharing about a really

on the ground in their unique area," Lisa

added. "It's such a joy to be able to share

normally wouldn't find them, unless they

[these organizations] with people that

were actually on the internet doing a

search for something specific like that."

Many of the columns in Plain Values

have been curated to support different

aspects of Plain living, from homestead-

ing and recipes to outdoorsmanship and small-business news. One column for

widows-written by a twice-widowed

lady—helps them reconcile their loss

of puzzles and games as well; a recent

and find strength. Children get a section

edition had a crossword with Dutch hints

"I know that the little kids will fight over

[the magazine], and I've heard that people

up into their 90s and even beyond read

it cover to cover," said Marlin. "They look

Interspersed throughout the magazine

are donation cards and many opportuni-

ties to contribute to trustworthy chari-

table causes, both globally and locally.

titled "Prayers for the Nations," which

focuses on the ongoing humanitarian

efforts in a specific nation, as well as the

people who these efforts help. A "Funds

and Benefits" section of each magazine

also highlights fundraisers in the local

community by families who may need

"About a month ago, there was a pretty

tragic accident [with] a pickup. The driver

back, they were on their way to a job, and

I think somehow, he ran into the back of

a parked semi," said Marlin. "It actually

killed the Amish guy in the front seat and

The Amish man who had died was only

dren. Many community fundraisers were

held for the community, and a request for

help in Plain Values was put in. As a result,

checks to support her family through this

his widow received several substantial

"It's pretty common for someone to

have cancer and come out of that situa-

and you know, they put on a fundraiser

PLAIN VALUES

tion [with] a half a million dollars in bills,

and they raise every dollar they need and

32, and left behind a wife and three chil-

really, really wounded everybody else in

was driving three or four Amish in the

financial assistance or prayers.

the back."

difficult time.

and English answers to help them prac-

tice their vocabulary.

forward to it every month."

incredible organization that is ... the boots

in to what's going on around him.

with a rotation of regular columns.

In line with their content pillars, the

feature stories typically center around

place in their own way—the February

Awake International, a nonprofit that

with disabilities in Ukraine."



"[The curriculum] went through an additional screening process. You had to be cautious about what content and books you were using," said Lisa. "It was kind

"I don't want to say that it's a caricature of This same mentality carries over to the the Amish market, but things like 'Amish editorial team at Plain Values as well. services to the Amish in reality at all," said Marlin. "Because they're not like that." within their own geographically clustered of Amish sometimes have different atsettlements, it can be difficult for the non-Amish to have an accurate understanding be separated or integrated with modern of what the Amish are truly like. During society, which means that creating conhis years of working with the Amish, Martent appropriate for all Amish readers is lin has been routinely impressed by not

just their generosity, but also their incred-"The Amish have a work ethic like you just can't imagine. They work like crazy to serve to the very best of their ability," he said. "Because of that, there's a lot of

However, this sense of hustle is tempered by a selfless attitude that places others first.

more," said Marlin. "[The Amish] are not

the type of people to have wealth and not

share with neighbors in need. They're

incredibly charitable people."

ible industriousness.

wealth [in the community]."

A Demographic Like No Other

Mafia,' those TV shows don't do any

Since Amish people mostly interact

"I think a lot of the folks in business that are Amish understand what Zig Ziglar used to say, 'If I can serve them and I can help them, I'll be taken care of." said Marlin. "The focus is on an outward, 'How do I serve? How do I bring them the very best thing that we can?' and they put their own needs on the back burner. They understand how that works."

Because of these qualities, people of all different backgrounds usually love to do business with the Amish. While many Amish are farmers, some of them have occupations in construction, woodworking, leatherworking, shopkeeping, and other more traditional enterprises.

"On top of that, they're doing it with an eighth-grade education, and they are brilliant businessmen," said Marlin.

The Amish custom for education only goes up to the eighth grade; afterward, students graduate and begin building their own livelihoods. Although there are Each issue of Plain Values contains a piece quite a few Amish parochial schools that go from kindergarten to eighth grade, the public school system in Ohio supports Amish students as well. "We have a set of public schools under

our district that are all Amish students. They're all Amish, and their families wanted them to receive a public education," said Lisa. "But they only go through the eighth grade and then they graduate. Before she became a full-time mother, Lisa was a teacher at one of these Amish public schools.

"When I first started, I was in the one school that didn't have electricity," she said. "I only had one little reading lamp and I had to hook it up to an RV battery. I would have to take the battery home and charge it up."

"And of course, forget about air conditioning," added Marlin.

"We had to put our lunches in a box on the radiator so that by lunchtime, they'd be warm," said Lisa.

As for what's taught to the students, Amish public schools still had to follow the overall curriculum set by the local school board. However, the schools themselves had the power to strike out certain parts of the curriculum that were not in line with Amish sensitivities.

of that mindset across the board, to be mindful of their culture.

Sensitive topics, such as pregnancies and reproductive health, have to be navigated with the correct euphemisms and discretion. What's more, different congregations titudes toward just how much they should often a delicate task. One difficult content decision happened

relatively recently with the May and June issues of 2021. The feature articles of both issues were about labor trafficking and sex trafficking—a rare deviation from the magazine's family-friendly credo.

"It's only been in the last couple years that Amish families are allowing their kids to get smartphones," said Marlin. "About three years ago, a guy called me up and said, 'Hey, we are concerned.' He was in a local government position in his county, and he was concerned, along with his own sheriff, with the Amish kids that were getting smartphones."



I think a lot of the folks in business that are Amish understand what Zig Ziglar used to say, 'If I can serve them and I can help them, I'll be taken care of.'

Marlin Miller

A smartphone offers a gateway to the colorful world of the internet, where people aren't often who they say they are. For Amish children, who might only have limited exposure to the internet before their smartphones, this may come as an unpleasant surprise—and many times, as this government official told Marlin, it came as a lesson that Amish children learn only too late. Their innocence and naivete often make them easy targets for traffickers that are looking to groom young children into becoming labor or sex slaves.

"I spoke with probably about six or eight different Amish preachers, and bishops, and folks that I trust, and I would share what I was looking at and trying to pray through," said Marlin. "Every single one of them said: 'Marlin, you have to do it. If it makes a difference for one kid, you just have to do it."

In the end, responses to the two features were very positive, with parents being thankful that the magazine has provided valuable information to keep their children safe.

"It's been received overwhelmingly [well]," said Marlin. "We have had people call in to share stories that they were sexually abused. And I don't want to sound cliche here, but [it makes me feel that] our work actually means something to our readers."



Plain Values highlights good works being done in the U.S. and around the worldcauses and organizations that are also in need of assistance that readers can support. (Right)

In the last couple of years, Marlin says, Amish kids have been allowed to get smartphones—giving rise to issues that Plain Values decided to address, in order to help educate readers and



The Amish are involved in a variety of occupations, from farming to making food products to woodworking

Looking to the Future

Now in its ninth year, Plain Values has had a bigger impact than either Marlin or Lisa had expected. One of the biggest successes was that the magazine has played an important role in several adoptions, fulfilling Marlin's initial goal for the magazine.

"Just this last weekend, we met two families that adopted children because of Plain Values. They're both Amish from Indiana, and they were in for a big adoption gathering, and we've wanted to meet them forever," he said. "It was wonderful to be able to spend time with them."

But the readers weren't the only ones adopting—as the magazine was growing, the Miller family grew as well. The Millers joined the National Down Syndrome Adoption Network after adopting their daughter and soon brought home two more sons, both with Down syndrome. Their eldest son was also formally diagnosed with autism in his teenage years. "Our oldest son, he did not have a diagnosis attached to him when he was placed with us at age 3 1/2—" she stopped

As if on cue, the three younger Miller children ran into the room, interrupting Lisa. They spilled onto their parents' laps, giggling all the while.

mid-sentence. "Oh I'm sorry, it's total

"We would love to help bring a new appreciation that kids who have special needs are not the ones we should be getting rid of," said Marlin. "They're the ones who bring spark and joy. They are what teaches us and show us that everybody [God] creates has value."

To that end, the Millers launched their own nonprofit, Room to Bloom, in October 2020 to connect orphans with special needs to adoptive families and advocate for the dignity of people with special needs around the world. Plain Values is now owned by the nonprofit, and Plain Values readers have the ability to donate directly to Room to Bloom to help children in need. Over the past eight months, Room to Bloom has raised more than \$200,000 for children with special needs.

"The impact that we've been able to make, that [God] has made through us, I should say, is more than what we would've ever seen [coming]," said Marlin. And there looks to be even more to come. In the past few years, Marlin has seen a steady trend of non-Amish readers inquiring about—and subscribing to—

"When we started, I had no idea that anybody outside of the Amish community would ever want to get our magazine," he said. "Now it's been this ongoing thing that every month, we get a couple hundred people that email or call in saying, 'Hey, I saw this magazine! How do I get this thing?"

Plain Values.

Though Marlin can't point to any sort of demographic trait that these callers share, he says that these readers share a desire for media that emphasizes traditional values and a biblical worldview.

"I think if I had to pick something, the common thread would be that a lot of families that are coming to Plain Values are tired of not being able to trust the media that they see every day. And they're tired of all the bad news, and they're looking for encouragement," he said.

As for the magazine's future content direction, Marlin wants to encourage a return to moral living and emphasize family values.

"[I want] to encourage people all over to come back to a biblical worldview and understand that God built the family. He designed the family, and it is very much a signpost to himself," he said. "And the role of the dad and the role of the mom, and the love that they share and then how they bring up the family inside of that there's just no better way to live! It's how we were built to live."

To learn more about Plain Values, visit PlainValues.com

Plain Values is a media partner of The Epoch Times.

Shawn and Tanda Maguire with their son, Hayden, and late daughter, Berklee.

Family Who Lost Daughter in Home Explosion Says 'God Made a Way' to Heal Them







(Above) The late Berklee (Above left) The Maguires's nome before the explosion. (Left) The explosion, caused by a propane leak, leveled the nouse in an instant.

The blast was so immense that it blew out the windows of the Maguires's neighbor's house.

LOUISE BEVAN

aced with the impossible task of healing after losing their teenage daughter in a deadly home explosion, a family from Oklahoma trusted in God to pave the way. Through faith and the immense support

of family and friends, Shawn and Tanda Maguire and their 13-year-old son, Hayden, made sense of their grief and found a way to anchor hope to something greater.

Sharing their family's story with The Epoch Times, the couple said God made a way for them "to have hope beyond this life."

"The way that God moves through us in helping others is unprecedented," Shawn

"I can't imagine doing this without [God]. I have a passion for helping men step into their God-given authority to sacrifice for their families, lead them well, push back the darkness, reject passivity, lead courageously, and live for the greater calling God has on their life."

The night before the explosion, on Sept. 23, 2020, Tanda, 42, collected her daughter Berklee, son Hayden, and some friends from their church youth group. Berklee was more joyful than usual.

"She told me about how much she loved two of the worship songs they sung that evening and even complimented her younger brother on the way home, which can be abnormal for a 14-year-old," she said. Tanda told her kids she loved them and headed to bed early, as Berklee's singing filled the house.

The next morning, Shawn slept in until 7 o'clock. "I just walked to make coffee, and then pushed the button," he recalled. "Everything exploded."

The explosion, caused by a propane leak, leveled the house in an instant. The blast was so immense that it blew out the windows of the Maguires's neighbor's house.

Shawn said the impact of the blast felt like "being electrocuted." He was buried alive, not knowing that the explosion had taken his daughter's life instantly. Berklee—whose name means "reflection of God's personality"—had celebrated her birthday just five days before.

Tanda and Hayden had sustained extensive second- and third-degree burns.

Shawn begged the assembling rescue parties to locate his family. "I was just crying out to God, crying out like, 'Help, help us, help us," he recalled. "I was smoking when they found me. And everything that I knew to be my house in my life was gone.

As first responders arrived, the reality of their immeasurable loss dawned upon

Moments after the explosion, someone told the family they saw Jesus. "Somebody aid He was walking through the rubble. Jesus looked at Berklee and said, 'I'm taking this girl home," said Shawn, quoting the healing words that have helped his family

make sense of their loss. Riddled with grief, Shawn's friends prayed and read Scripture as he struggled to sleep in his hospital bed. His mother, Diane, attended his bedside during the daytime, recording what she believed might be her son's last words. Shawn, a trained Christian counselor for almost three decades, spoke of God's love. He spent months in hospital for his ex-

tensive injuries. Tanda and Hayden—whose name means "mighty warrior for God"—were discharged after five days in the hospital. Hayden returned for skin grafts on his arms, legs,

The family cannot conceive of surviving without God's grace and the support of the people around them; within 36 hours of Tanda and Hayden's discharge, the family had a fully furnished rental house donated with a stocked pantry and closets and even a car on loan.

"The support from our friends, family, and community was and continues to amaze us," Tanda said. "And this was just the tip of the iceberg. Anything we had need of was provided, from the smallest detail to the biggest items."

As the family started to rebuild their lives, Berklee remained at the forefront of their minds. Just three months before the explosion, Tanda had spoken with Berklee about

"We talked about why we cannot put our hope in this life because it never satisfies, and we will always be let down, and only the hope of eternity can truly satisfy," said Tanda, adding that her daughter wished to have a deeper relationship with God.

Tanda, who committed herself to her faith at 21, "wrestled with, questioned, and screamed at God" over the loss of her daughter, but said it was never an option not to have faith in God.

"If anything, this has increased my faith, because now I long for Heaven like never before," she said. "I have never been able to doubt that He is real, that He sees us."

Family, church, and community have made recovery possible.

A homeschooled student, Berklee loved singing, theater, volleyball, and helping others. She organized a Christmas play for senior citizens at the family's local Salvation Army three years in a row and offered free face painting for neighborhood kids at their birthday parties. She suffered chronic pain and allergies but was always thinking of others. Her dream job was to work at a summer church camp for kids.

While desperate for his daughter back, Shawn has chosen to concede to God's plan, pledging to channel his grief into being a better husband and father. He has pledged to "love well," make more accommodations, and listen to his loved ones even more than he used to.

Family, church, and community have made recovery possible.

"We were not meant to live life alone," said Tanda. "We were created for relationships, so the more you feel tempted to isolate, my advice is to do the opposite. Reach out and let others walk beside you."

"Life is hard," Tanda said. "That's why I am so thankful that Jesus made a way for us to have hope beyond this life."

The Maguires have recently purchased a new home, near friends in northeast Oklahoma City. Shawn, who has devoted his life to faith-based marriage and family therapy with Oklahoma's New Vision Counseling, is leaning upon colleagues for strength. He has also started a podcast.

"I'm just taking hold in saying, 'God, I want to replace this agony and suffering and loss with a joy unspeakable," said Shawn, who now suffers from PTSD.

As a person who's had every material thing ripped away and who was left bloodied and dying, Shawn encourages others that they don't have to know the next step, and they don't even have to believe that they can get through it. Remember to just "get up and go back to God," he says, and never forget to sow the seeds of eternal love in other people's lives.

"Just know the love far outweighs the hurt," he added.

"If you continue to let God heal you, and you live from a place of having love, having been loved by God, then you can live from a place of love. Having love to give instead of desperately needing love to get."

Drug Addiction, Wins Back Custody of Her Son **LOUISE BEVAN** Tyce, and left the father, but her addiction had spiraled out of control. A woman from a loving home followed in

Mom Overcomes

her father's footsteps when she became addicted to drugs. She was homeless, a ninetime felon who did jail time, and eventually lost custody of her son. But she found a sponsor and channeled her faith into a

Today, Shay Walters, 30, celebrates her family, God's grace, and the gift of sobriety. Growing up with her parents and two sisters in a small town in Ohio, Shay watched her father succumb to addiction and criminal activity. But he loved them, she told The

recovery plan.

Epoch Times in an email interview. Shay's mother, on the other hand, was the "true definition of a lady." She attended to all the household duties and cared for her three daughters.

In Shay's freshman year of high school, her father went to jail on drug charges. During that year, Shay wanted to be "de-

fiant." The 15-year-old had a 19-year-old boyfriend and started experimenting with drugs and alcohol.

"I wanted to be known as the 'rebel," said Shay, who describes addiction as a disease of perception. "[But] as my friends who experimented with me would eventually stop and go to college, I would be headed down a completely different path."

Shav's addiction escalated from weekend drinking to marijuana and Class A drugs. At 17, she realized that she would get sick without pain pills. In the same year, she became pregnant. During this time, her high-school boyfriend became physically abusive. The teen endured punches and backhands, and sustained a broken nose and a chipped tooth.

At the age of 18, Shay gave birth to her baby boy,

"You would think the love I had for my

baby would be enough to make me realize I wanted to do better," she said, "but I truly cannot put into words what my mind was like back then."

this time, also started getting into trouble with the law. Injecting harder drugs such as heroin and crack cocaine, she was fueling her habit by stealing and selling drugs.

At this time, Shay hit rock bottom.

less, I was all alone, and I was completely broken," she told The Epoch Times. "My son was better off without me, and I was better off dead.'

Shay served just two years of a 22-year

she is still my sponsor today," said Shay. "When I realized there were people just like me that beat addiction and were living productive, happy lives, I knew with God's help I could too.'

She stayed true to her word and her 12step program. Today, Shay, who has been sober for more than five years, runs the inspirational blog From Prison to Purpose, and is the co-founder of Peer Solutions outpatient center in Parkersburg, West Virginia.

married, and is a mom to four beautiful children. In a moving Facebook post, she paid tribute to her first born's journey.

Shay, who was getting into fistfights by

Tyce witnessed overdoses and ambulance rides, had screamed for his mom through jail glass, and was in a car wreck, all before the tender age of 6, according to a Facebook post. With Child Protective Services on Shay's case, her family filed for emergency custody, taking Tyce into their care on Shay's 25th birthday.

"I had failed as a mother, I was home-

However, during this rough patch in life,

Shay said that God saved her by allowing her to get in trouble with the law.

prison sentence, during which time she met a woman who held recovery meetings inside the institution. "She taught me how to live sober, and

A determined Shay then made a firm resolution: Come what may, she would never put drugs in her body again.



"He is 12 today," she posted. "He lives with me. He attends a private Christian school. He is on the honor roll. He gets prayed with every night and his mommy is there to wake him up for school every morning.

"Thank you, God, for allowing me to be a mother to this sweet boy every day," she wrote. "It's the sweetest gift of my sobriety." Reflecting back on her journey to sobriety, Shay believes that faith has been the foundation of her recovery. She now attends church twice a week and surrenders her life to God, saying, "He does a much better job at running the show than I ever did."

She also knows she is blessed to have a family that never gave up, and constantly tells her how proud they are of her journey. "If anyone would have known me then,

you would have never believed that I would become the woman I am today," Shay told The Epoch Times, imploring others to show kindness to themselves and other people who may be struggling.

Sharing advice to those who are struggling to overcome an addiction of their own, Shay said: "God loves to make an example out of us to show His grace and power, and people love a comeback story. Find someone who has what you want, and ask them how to get there ... Humble yourself and ask for help. ... You aren't less than, and you can use your struggles to help change this world."

Shay Walters with her family.

Today, Shay, who has been sober for more than five years, runs the inspirational blog From Prison to Purpose.

Andrea Bocelli's Tribute Song to His Mother

LOUISE BEVAN

World-renowned tenor Andrea Bocelli has shared a beautiful version of the 1940s song "Mamma," in honor of his own mother and a brave decision she made six decades ago.

When doctors advised her to terminate her unborn baby due to their fear he would have a disability, Edi Bocelli refused. The tenor's gratitude and reverence can be felt in every sweet note of the song.

Sharing "Mamma" on YouTube ahead of this year's Mother's Day, Bocelli's rendition also features on his 2008 album, "Incanto." In honor of his mother, Bocelli wrote in the description of the video: "She who, through

divine grace, lives the generous mystery of birth, the sacred plan of giving shape and consciousness to clay."

Born in Tuscany in 1958, Bocelli, now 62, struggled with poor sight from birth. Later diagnosed with congenital glaucoma, he went completely blind at 12 after an accident at a soccer game.

"I cried, but only for a short while," Bocelli told The Big Issue in 2019. "I then set aside any form of self-pity and decided I needed to be positive and optimistic about life, finding ways to explore it."

The award-winning singer said he owes his parents, Edi and his late father, Sandro, "an awful lot," for molding his character and

> Tenor Andrea Bocelli performs at Madison Square Garden in New York on Dec. 13, 2017.

The tenor's

and reverence

gratitude

can be felt

sweet note

of the song.

in every

Share your stories with us at emg.inspired@epochtimes. com, and continue to get your daily dose of inspiration by signing up for the Epoch Inspired newsletter at TheEpochTimes. com/newsletter

offering him an education during his life. "Among the many teachings I received, I would mention the determination not to give up," he reflected. "This is what my parents showed during my mother's preg-

nancy when the doctors advised her to have

an abortion, because the baby would be

born with severe illnesses. "She ignored their advice and carried on with my father's support," Bocelli said. "Without their courage and faith, I would not be here today to tell the story."

His own survival story has informed the tenor's pro-life views, and his desire to encourage any expectant mothers facing uncertainties to have courage.

"I am in favor of life," Bocelli told The Telegraph back in 2011. "And of course, personally, I do not share the idea of being able to interrupt life arbitrarily ... As much as I can, I show them an example and act as a role model, because I believe this is the only way."

A few years ago, Bocelli retold his moving story of "a woman and a child" to his audience, saluting the woman's bravery in refusing abortion.

He narrated the story of a young pregnant woman hospitalized for what the medical staff assumes to be appendicitis. Once the doctors applied some ice on her stomach and when the treatment ended, they suggested that she abort the child as he would be born with a disability. However, the woman didn't pay heed to the advice and continued with the pregnancy and the child was delivered.

"That woman was my mother, and I was the child," he revealed. "Maybe I'm partisan," he added, "but I can say that it was the right choice."



DEAR NEXT GENERATION

An Incident During Basic Training

→ Advice from our readers to our young people

As a subscriber to The Epoch Times, I read with interest your published letters from readers offering their advice or experiences to the younger generation. It brought back an incident that I was involved in during basic training, July 1966, at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, that may be of interest to your readers.

With the Vietnam War raging, I put myself in a position to get drafted by dropping out of college in order to save my country against the spread of communism throughout Southeast Asia. Playing cards over a blanket-covered footlocker wearing

just my skivvies and my dog tags, I noticed a fellow recruit staring at my dog tags. At that time the religion of the soldier was stamped into the dog tag along with the name, serial number, and blood type. Jewish was stamped on my dog tags.

When I asked him what he was staring at he said: "Are you a Jew?" At that moment one thought raced through my brain: "Great, my second week in basic training and now I have a problem because I was Jewish." I told him I was indeed a Jew and why are you so surprised? He then told me that his father told him that "all Jews had horns on their heads and a hooked nose." It was at that moment that I knew, regardless of the results, I needed to correct this misconception regarding our race and

with some trepidation but with resolve I told him, "Your daddy was wrong. You are looking at a Jew and I do not have horns on my head or a hooked nose."

It was obvious to all that sat around that footlocker that this poor lost soul who was continuing to stare at my face was conflicted over what his daddy told him. I could see the confusion on his face as I knew he was thinking that if what his daddy told him about Jews was wrong, then what other things did his daddy tell him that were also wrong?

I told him that we are all equal under God and that to find ourselves here at Ford Leonard Wood, taking up the banner to serve our country by agreeing to stand a post to defeat communism truly makes us all brothers. I don't know if this man was sent to Viet-

—Steve Lurie, Illinois What advice would you like to

give to the younger generations?

nam or if, God forbid, his name is written

on the wall in Washington, but I do know

that at that moment in time there was one

individual that I can attest to who was no

longer an ignorant bigot but my brother.

We call on all of our readers to share the timeless values that define right and wrong, and pass the torch, if you will, through your wisdom and hard-earned experience. We feel that the passing down of this wisdom has diminished over time, and that only with a strong moral foundation can future generations thrive.

Send your advice, along with your full name, state, and contact information to NextGeneration@epochtimes.com or mail it to:

Next Generation, The Epoch Times, 229 W. 28th St., Floor 7, New York, NY 10001

Teaching Literature at Home

A conversation with Adam Andrews of the CenterForLit

BARBARA DANZA

Homeschooling parents may find the prospect of teaching their children to read a straightforward endeavor. When it comes to teaching their children literature, however, many find themselves ill-equipped.

One resource worth consulting is the CenterForLit, an organization that provides educators and reading enthusiasts tools and guides for exploring and enjoying literary classics. Adam Andrews and his wife, Missy, are the co-founders of CenterForLit, as well as homeschooling parents. I asked Andrew for his advice on teaching literature at home.

The Epoch Times: What inspired you to start the CenterForLit?

Adam Andrews: My wife and I founded CenterforLit in 2003. As professional educators as well as homeschool parents, we saw knowledge of the Great Books in decline all around us. Neither parents nor teachers had been trained in the basic techniques of reading and discussing classic literature; as a result, students were growing up without a sense of their place as human beings in a cultural tradition. We think this cultural sense is very important and that teaching students to read the Great Books is one of the most powerful ways to pass it on.

The Epoch Times: Many parents are embarking on the homeschooling journey for the first time this year and are stocking their home libraries. What advice would you offer a parent who isn't a literature expert but wishes to offer his or her children the very best books? **Mr. Andrews:** It's important to note that our civilization has been producing Great Books for thousands of years. No student will ever read them all. Luckily, a literary education by our definition doesn't require this because education isn't a curriculum or a booklist; it's a moment of self-realization. It can happen on book No. 50, book No. 1, or outside of the classroom altogether. At CenterForLit, we help teachers use the Great Books one at a time, as discrete opportunities to con-

front students with their own humanity. Since this is the most important goal, it turns out that how you read books is at least as important as which ones you read. Focusing on the proper techniques of careful reading produces mature thinkers who can benefit from all types



"Always begin with great children's stories," advises Andrews.

of literature, regardless of its quality.

These techniques include recognizing the structure of the work before them; identifying the parts of the whole and their relationships with one another; understanding the author's style and its thematic significance; putting the work in the historical and personal context of its author and his time; comparing the themes of the work with those of contemporary works by the same author and other authors; and, finally, assessing the work's implicit and explicit answers to certain universal questions about the nature of man, God, and reality. Center-ForLit trains teachers in these techniques via its well-known seminar Teaching the

Applying these techniques to any book can yield a profound discussion, no matter what book you choose. This isn't to say that some books aren't better than others, of course. CenterForLit publishes recommended reading lists for students of all ages, along with teacher guides to help parents and teachers lead Socratic discussions of the best books ever written.

The Epoch Times: Why is it important to focus on literature as an educator? **Mr. Andrews:** The capacity for selfknowledge is the thing that makes us human. Since education is the cultivation of mature humanity in students, we conclude that education happens when a student catches a glimpse of himself as a thinking creature. In the best-case scenario, this glimmer of self-knowledge leads him further, to understand himself as an imperfect creature—a sinful creature, desperately in need of grace. We

believe that any experience, academic or otherwise, which creates the conditions for this type of self-knowledge is a worthwhile education, and that all the book learning in the world is useless if it doesn't create these conditions.

It turns out, however, that the Great Books of our tradition have been creating the conditions for self-knowledge in all types of readers for thousands of years. They are tried and true, the most reliable educational tools our civilization has ever produced.

A literary education, then, is simply a journey into self-knowledge using the occasions afforded by the Great Books. This is the reason we focus on literature: It provides the best opportunities for self-knowledge—and thus for real education—that an educator can possibly find.

The Epoch Times: How can parents get their kids excited about reading the classics—particularly those that make for challenging reads? **Mr. Andrews:** The best way to get kids

excited about the classics is to realize book written for grown-ups." It turns out that some of the best books in history were written for kids. Teaching kids to read these books well will create a taste for great stories in their minds and hearts. Then, as their reading level increases, that preference for quality will make more difficult stories seem just as exciting. Always begin with great children's stories!

The Epoch Times: How do you recommend parents approach teaching literature at each stage on the educational journey, for example, at the elementary level, middle school level, and high school level?

Mr. Andrews: The most important thing to remember when teaching literature is that the techniques of good reading remain the same as the student matures. This is because all stories, regardless of their reading level, share the same basic structure. Bedtime stories for second graders have all the same features, that is, as Shakespeare's "Hamlet" or Dostoyevsky's "Crime and Punishment."

A literary education, then, is simply a journey into self-knowledge using the occasions afforded by the Great Books.

Adam Andrews

This in turn means that the same teaching strategies work as well with picture books as with Shakespeare plays. In particular, the same set of questions may be asked of both types of books in order to lead the student into understanding and enjoyment. Once a teacher knows what these questions are, he or she can easily teach an elementary-level book and a high school-level book with the same confidence. The discussions that emerge from this single set of questions will vary based on the depth and complexity of the books themselves, but the teacher and her students can focus on repeating the same classroom techniques over and over again. CenterForLit has developed and published these questions as part of its Teaching the Classics training seminar.

The Epoch Times: What book have you most enjoyed studying with your chil-

Mr. Andrews: With our young children, we love books like "All the Places to Love" by Patricia McLachlan and "Owl Moon" by Jane Yolen. Our middle school students love the works of Gary D. Schmidt, such as "Anson's Way" and "The Wednesday Wars." At the high school level, we never skip "Little Dorrit" by Charles Dickens or "Till We Have Faces" by C.S. Lewis.

The Epoch Times: If you could offer one piece of advice to new homeschoolers, what would it be?

Mr. Andrews: I would encourage new have made a great decision, even when they feel overwhelmed and underprepared. Parents are by far the best teachers, regardless of their formal training or professional experience. There is a world of high-quality resources available online if subject matter expertise is needed—including online classes from CenterForLit for students in grades 5 and up—but the most important part of any child's education is time spent with his parents. By choosing homeschooling, you have given him a permanent advantage.

Operating from a place of fear or anxiety will not benefit your homeschool. Work on your mindset to replace fear with joy, enthusiasm, compassion, and curiosity.

Know Your 'Why'

Take the time to think about and clearly define why you are doing this in the first place. While it may feel second nature to you now, when you come to the most challenging parts of this journey, it helps immensely to have a clear picture to review and remind yourself of the big-picture reasons you're going through all this trouble.

Write it down, draw pictures, create a vision board—whatever works for you—just capture your clear thinking, your resolve, and your sense of a greater calling leading you to take this step. You'll be so glad you did.

Start super slow—with the first day resembling more of a celebration than a school day. Take time to establish simple routines and a daily rhythm, enjoy your newfound freedom, and gradually build upon what works over the course of weeks and months.

Set yourself and your children up for success by keeping things simple.

Stay the Course

Thomas Edison once said, "Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up." I don't know any homeschool parents who hadn't questioned their choice or whether they should give up. Especially in the very beginning, when the going gets tough, keep

It may take a year or more to begin to feel like you might actually know what you're doing or that this crazy experiment may actually work. That's normal. Just keep at it. Learn along the way. Get to know your children's learning styles and interests as deeply as possible and adjust your plans accordingly. You'll eventually find your groove and be very thankful you didn't quit.

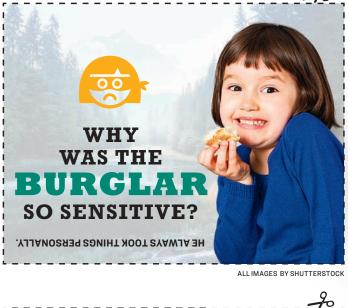
Have Fun

The freedom you're taking hold of, the duty you're being called to, and the blessings you're courageously welcoming into your family will be felt for a lifetime. There has never been a better time to take on this work. Enjoy every minute.





BONNIE TAYLOR BARRY/SHUTTERSTOCK





This

n July 28, 2005, scientists proclaimed the discovery of a 10th planet. It was later determined to be a dwarf planet. According to NASA, a dwarf planet is "a celestial body that orbits the sun, has enough mass to assume a nearly round shape, has not cleared the neighborhood around its orbit and is not a moon." They named this one Eris.

Eris's classification as a dwarf planet led planetary scientists to re-classfy Pluto as a dwarf planet as well because they shared similar characteristics. Whether or not Pluto is a planet is still questioned by some.

By Aidan Danza, age 15

NATURE'S WOODWORKERS

n nature, we have quite a few animals who depend on wood, specifically trees, for their

daily existence. The woods are where they what they eat, and their entire life. Some animals. however, take it a step further. Instead of working around the tree's natural form, they will use it to their advantage or tear it down completely to use as they please.



THE BEAVER

until it loses stability and falls.

Nature's lumberjack, the beaver cuts down

the beaver gnaws like people do with apples,

although usually into only one side of the tree,

Interestingly, the beaver controls which

trees to use for food and housing. With its teeth,

toward the water. It will make one large cut, then another on the opposite side of the tree. If the second cut is above the first, the tree will fall in the direction of the first cut, and vice versa when the second cut is below the first.

Beavers eat the inner bark of trees, and they also dam rivers with trees, making lush wetlands and flooding forests, so the beavers can more easily access more trees. Even the beaver's house is made of wood.

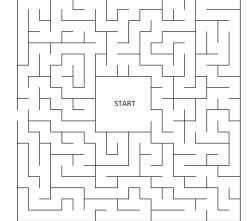
THE WOODPECKER

The woodpecker doesn't perform woodworking at such a scale as the beaver, but it's still

extraordinary in what it does. The woodpecker eats grubs, which reside inside certain trees. To get to them, the woodpecker will chisel into the tree with its sharp bill, exerting enormous forces on its small head. To combat this, the woodpecker has been given a thick skull, along with a tongue that is long enough to reach into the holes that the woodpecker makes, and also rolls up between the skull and skin to counteract the forces that occur when the woodpecker pecks. Woodpeckers also use their bills to chisel holes to raise their young in.







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



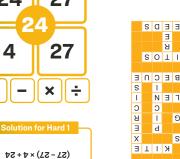
Solution For Easy 1

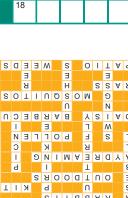
6+E×(7-6)



Solution for Medium 1 9-8-81+61







- 1 "Field of Dreams" sport (8) 3 It may visit your flowers (9)
- 4 "Let-us-spray" device (9)
- 6 Jog, for example (8)
- Outdoor meal (6)
- 10 Backyard apparatus (8)
- 13 Hedges (6)
- 14 They may have their own houses in the backyard (4)
- 16 Shade giver (4)





2 They might get in your garden (7) 5 Toy with a tail (4) 7 Alfresco (8)

11 Common allergen (6)

12 Backyard flower (5)

9 Absentminded activity (11)

15 Backyard biters (9)

17 It may need to be mowed (5)

13 Where hotdogs get cooked (8)

18 Place for a barbecue (5)

19 Dandelions and wild plants



BARBARA DANZA

he number of families choosing the path of homeschool contin- **Temper Your Fear** may hear the claps and cheers of millions of experienced homeschooling families who know well the great blessing newcomers are bestowing upon their families with this choice.

Of course, the homeschool route isn't the easiest road, and starting out into the unto take back the reins and steer their own with crayons, and more—you can guide

children's education and development, here is some advice.

ues to skyrocket, according to Iknow that the responsibility you are taking experts. If you listen closely, you on isn't one you take lightly. Take the fear every parent has of "messing up" their kid and multiply that by 100 for the new homeschooling parent. I encourage you to let go of your fear. You

are more equipped and capable of the task at hand than anyone else on the planet. In the same way you nurtured and supported your known tends to be the hardest part of the children as they learned to talk, walk, eat, journey. So, for those brave parents choosing drink, get dressed, brush their teeth, color them in learning about and delightfully exploring any subject. The only expertise required is inherently in you, and you've been

applying it since your first child was born.

Resist the temptation to start out on day one going full throttle—diving into every subject under the sun and feverishly working through the volumes of curriculum you

While this article focused on avoiding pitfalls, please know that this endeavor should be fun! Enjoy this precious time with your kids. Make learning feel like playing. Bake the bread. Go on field trips. Read all the books. Conduct all of the experiments. Hang artwork everywhere.

LIFE & TRADITION THE EPOCH TIMES Week 30, 2021



NOW HIRING JOURNALISTS

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