

THE EPOCH TIMES

LIFE &

TRADITION



‘I Think I Can’

The Importance of Self-Discipline, Habit, and Perseverance

Self-discipline:
A key ingredient
for success.

JEFF MINICK

Self-discipline, which walks hand-in-hand with perseverance, is a key ingredient in the formula leading to success and happiness.

In his book “A Guide to the Good Life: The Ancient Art of Stoic Joy,” William B. Irvine again and again examines the advantages bestowed by self-control. His chapter titled “Self-Denial” addresses the benefits the ancient Stoics found in denying themselves certain pleasures—for example, abstaining from eating rich foods in favor of more common fare and finding rewards in that act of denial.

“Water, barley-meal, and crusts of barley-bread,” Seneca tells us, “are not a cheerful diet, yet it is the highest kind of pleasure to be able to derive pleasure from this sort of food.”

Unfortunately, ours is more an age of

self-gratification than of self-denial. We see running shoes in a store at the mall, decide we absolutely must have them though three other pairs are collecting dust in our closet, and out comes the credit card. We’re trying to cut down on our alcohol intake, but it’s been a rough week at work, and we tell ourselves we deserve this 12-pack of Heineken. We are determined to lose 10 pounds before our upcoming beach vacation, but that Hot-And-Ready pepperoni pizza from Little Caesar’s proves irresistible.

Like Scarlett O’Hara in “Gone With The Wind,” we blithely tell ourselves, “Tomorrow is another day.” And like Lord Darlington in Oscar Wilde’s play “Lady Windermere’s Fan,” we find that we can “resist everything except temptation.”

Resisting Temptations

Of course, plenty of people do practice self-discipline, foregoing immediate



Plato once wrote, ‘The first and greatest victory is to conquer yourself.’

pleasures in hopes of future rewards. A 60-year-old couch potato looks in the mirror, doesn’t like what he sees, joins a gym, and exercises there six days a week for the next year. A married father of two little girls leaves the house at dawn every working day to build houses and provide for his family. A college kid fends off pressure to join his buddies for a Friday night of drinking at the local tavern to instead study for his chemistry test on Monday. He might find, as Seneca said, “pleasure from this sort of food.”

That college student is exercising another component of self-discipline: delayed gratification. He’s looking at the big picture rather than the here and now, hopeful that his battle with the books will bring him a degree and a satisfying job.

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A Firefighter’s Sacrifice, Remembered and Honored

Frank Siller is walking 500 miles to honor his brother’s memory, and that of other first responders

MICHAEL WING

New York firefighter Stephen Siller was on his way to play golf with his three brothers when he received the call on that fateful day: Sept. 11, 2001.

He drove his truck to the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, strapped on 60 pounds of fire-fighting gear, and set out on foot, running almost two miles underground, to meet his company at the site that came to be known as Ground Zero.

“He came out the other side, went up West Street ... and into what we believe was the South Tower, because that’s where his whole firefighter company was,” Stephen’s older brother, Frank Siller, said.

“And so, he never came home.

“While he was helping save other people’s



While he was helping save other people’s lives, he gave up his own.

Frank Siller

lives, he gave up his own.”

After Stephen’s family found out about what he did, they decided to honor his memory, and those of countless other first responders who’ve sacrificed their lives, and started Tunnel to Towers—a foundation that builds homes for first responder families who’ve lost loved ones or sacrificed in the line of duty.

In that effort, on Aug. 1, 2021, Frank set out to walk over 500 miles to honor his brother and those who died on 9/11. Starting from the Pentagon where he laid a wreath, Frank started marching toward Shanksville, Pennsylvania, and will reach his final destination, Ground Zero, for the 20th anniversary of 9/11.

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COURTESY OF TUNNEL TO TOWERS FOUNDATION



Stephen Siller lost his life while trying to save others on Sept. 11, 2001.

‘I Think I Can’: The Importance of Self-Discipline, Habit, and Perseverance

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I once knew a man who saved up his money to buy a car rather than purchasing it on credit. He didn't want to pay interest, he figured offering a cash payment in full allowed him more room for dickering with sales personnel, and he was willing to postpone his pleasure of ownership to achieve these goals.

That's delayed gratification at work.

The Slog
Another key component to the machinery of self-discipline, restraint, and delayed gratification is perseverance.

Sometimes, when we pursue a goal, we may feel as if we're trudging through a pond of wet cement. Each day becomes an ordeal of inching forward, a trial of effort that can often seem pointless and futile.

When my wife and I owned a bed-and-breakfast and bookstore in the Smokies, there were days, even months, that brought disappointing revenues, costly repairs, and unexpected personal expenses. Many other small-business owners have undergone similar hard times. This daily grind can lead to despair and surrender.

The same holds true in other endeavors great and small. The man who gives up smoking cigarettes knows he must not only get past the first day or even the first week without tobacco, but that he must persist until the habit is broken. The graduate student who also works a full-time job must discipline herself to write papers and take tests after her hours at the office, and possess the stamina and grit to hold fast until she attains her degree.

Our trek may be long and tough, and only those travelers who stay on the path and keep pushing ahead will finish the journey.

The Great Tool: Habit
Plato once wrote, "The first and greatest victory is to conquer yourself."

And one powerful tool we can employ to make that conquest a success is habit.

It's unlikely that the wealthy entrepreneur who attributes part of his success to rising before dawn followed that schedule his entire life. At some point, he realized the value of exchanging sleep for the solitude of those early morning hours, and by an act of self-discipline, roused himself from his bed to work and think while others slept.

In a similar way, the young mother who rises before the rest of the family for prayer and meditation is denying herself extra sleep because she recognizes the benefits of that solitary time.



CAROLYRES/GETTY IMAGES

Our trek may be long and tough, and only those travelers who stay on the path and keep pushing ahead will finish the journey.

When an act of self-discipline becomes a habit—making those trips to the gym, fasting two days a week, cleaning the kitchen on a daily basis—then habit in many ways replaces the need for self-discipline. We no longer have to force ourselves to perform some conscious and often painful task. We simply do it as a part of our daily routine.

Some Tips
Though the following quote is often misattributed to Aristotle, it is actually taken from Will Durant's "The Story of Philosophy": "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

To develop a new habit, a beneficial habit, requires self-discipline and perseverance, and some carefully considered strategies.

First, we must be as optimistic as possible

when we set out on our journey. Remember the children's story of "The Little Engine That Could"? As that tiny engine pulled a freight train up a mountain, it chanted this mantra over and over again: "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can." If we are to succeed, we need to repeat those same words to ourselves.

We should also recognize that in improving our self-discipline we are both teacher and student. After all, discipline is derived from the Latin, which meant among other things "student." When we impose restraint, we may feel as if we've become a battleground between desire and will. It helps if we transform that battleground into a classroom, teaching ourselves the value of restraint and self-denial.

Beginning small can also help us find success. If you decide you want to lose weight, then set a reasonable goal of pounds lost per week and slowly cut out certain foods from your diet. If you want a more productive workday, set yourself a goal of checking your email hourly instead of every 15 minutes.

Expect failures and setbacks, and use your self-discipline to get you back on the right path. "Fall down seven times, get up eight," runs an old Japanese proverb, and self-discipline is a key ingredient for getting to our feet again. Many entrepreneurs

have gone broke only to come back and succeed. My friend John, who lives these days by playing the stock market, loses all the time, but he also wins because he stays in the game and keeps playing.

Winning the Game
When we practice self-discipline, when we conquer ourselves, an irony comes into play: that conquest of self makes us stronger. We're like bodybuilders at a gym; we start with the small weights and, over the ensuing months, take on heavier loads.

Our small acts of controlling ourselves—leaving the mint chocolate chip ice cream in the grocery store freezer, weeding the garden when we'd rather be watching television, forcing ourselves to clean out a closet—eventually enable us to achieve greater goals through the exercise of self-discipline.

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 nonfiction, "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.

Raising Children to Be More Than Peppa Parrots

ANNIE HOLMQUIST

Peppa Pig, a British children's cartoon, has taken America by storm, so much so that children are absorbing the British accent its characters feature, a recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* explains. Parents are reporting that they've become "Mummy," Santa has morphed into "Father Christmas" for whom children must make mince pies, and mature phrases such as "how clever" pervade toddler dialects. In other words, today's children have experienced full-on Peppa absorption.

“**Two institutions at present control our children's lives—television and schooling, in that order.**

John Taylor Gatto

On the surface, such absorption is cute, a phase through which children—particularly ones who have weathered the pandemic lockdowns in front of the screen—must pass before they mature and grow up. But such absorption provides a reminder for us as adults. Peppa Pig may be harmless, but the other influences our children are absorbing often aren't, and making sure our children are absorbing good influences is one of the primary roles of a parent.

The "absorption approach" to child-rearing was promoted by political theorist W. Cleon Skousen in his 1962

book "So You Want to Raise a Boy?"

"It's the idea that we should surround our children with the kind of adults we would like our children to emulate," Skousen said. "Adults who will exhibit the love, interest, kindness, leadership, and ambition which inspire children to become like them and thereby absorb them into the exciting, wonderful precincts of the adult world."

Breaking Skousen's comments into bitesize pieces creates a picture of the influences adults should seek to be, as well as place, in the lives of their children.

Love
Parents and adults who shower children with hugs and kisses immediately come to mind. While such love is good and essential, we should also balance that with the tough love that involves speaking hard truths and giving correction. The children who only receive pampering will absorb the mentality that they can do no wrong.

Interest
In a world where most people are simply interested in their phones, finding adults who will encourage a child's interests in other directions can be a challenge. Yet they're out there. Look for influences who are excited about learning, are eager to introduce your children to good books, are avid readers themselves, and are quick to share what they read with others. Let your children absorb the influence of adults who ask questions of

children and challenge their little minds to think outside the box.

Kindness
Whether parents or grown-ups in general, it's easy for adults to overlook children and not take time for them. But a kind individual will do just the opposite. They won't necessarily make children their primary focus, doting on them as if they're the only thing in the world, but they'll talk to them, share special times with them, and in general, be individuals whom children have no trouble approaching.

Leadership
Contrary to what we often see coming out of our so-called leaders in Washington, true leaders don't thumb their noses at their own rules, but are instead humble about their mistakes and are willing to apologize when they are wrong. Surround your children with influences who don't just give orders and then do the exact opposite, but who exhibit strong conviction and follow through on those convictions, even when difficult.

Ambition
Those with good ambition strive after worthy goals, rather than playing the victim. If we want our children to make something of their lives rather than just riding on the coattails of others, then we should introduce them to individuals who aren't lazy, but who are willing to step up, meet the challenge, and make a difference in this crazy world of ours.



▼ We can strive to surround our children with kind adults who will ask them questions and encourage their interests. RIDD/SHUTTERSTOCK

Sadly, it can be difficult to allow our children to absorb these types of influences in their lives, mainly because their time is demanded by two main sources. Former teacher of the year John Taylor Gatto described this scenario well in a speech entitled "Why Schools Don't Educate":

"Two institutions at present control our children's lives—television and schooling, in that order. Both of these reduce the real world of wisdom, fortitude, temperance, and justice to a never-ending, non-stopping abstraction. In centuries past, the time of a child and adolescent would be occupied in real work, real charity, real adventures, and the realistic search for mentors who might teach what you really wanted to learn. A great deal of time was spent in community pursuits, practicing affection, meeting and studying every level of the community, learning how to make a home, and dozens of other tasks necessary to become a whole man or woman."

The good news is that times have changed in these past few years, with circumstances adjusting so that parents can have more control over at least the schooling aspect of their children's lives. With that in mind, let's resolve to not just allow our children to waste time absorbing influences such as Peppa Pig; instead, let's surround them with influences that'll make our children face the world with character and courage as adults.

Annie Holmquist is the editor of Intellectual Takeout and the online editor of Chronicles Magazine, both projects of the Charlemagne Institute.

EDUCATION

When Is the ‘Best’ School Not the Best?

LEONARD SAX

Which school is the best school for your child?

Over the past 20 years, I have visited more than 460 schools: urban, suburban, and rural; public, private, and parochial; serving affluent, middle-income, and low-income communities. I have led workshops for teachers and spoken to parents. I have learned that middle-income and affluent parents tend to define "the best school" as "the school most likely to get my child into Princeton, Stanford, MIT, or another top-rated university."

When considering a school, even a kindergarten or pre-K, the first question these parents are likely to ask is "Where do these kids go after they graduate?"

We now have long-term longitudinal cohort studies in which researchers have followed students for up to 50 years after graduation, studying the effects that different school types have on different outcomes. We also have extensive research on the effects that different schools have on parameters such as anxiety and depression.

The results are surprising.

Forty years ago, when I was earning my doctorate in psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, the research seemed clear. Studies then showed that kids who attended schools in low-income communities were at higher risk for substance abuse, anxiety, and depression, compared with kids who attended schools in more affluent communities. Suniya Luthar, then at Columbia University, was among the first to document a change. Beginning in the late 1990s, she found that the previous association had flipped.

In a seminal study published in 1999, Luthar and her Yale colleague Karen D'Avanzo documented that affluent kids were now at higher risk for substance abuse, and scored higher on measures of anxiety and depression, compared with low-income kids. Multiple subsequent studies, including several authored by Luthar, replicated and extended this finding. In 2009, researchers at New York University coined the term "affluenza" to describe this new phenomenon: upper-middle-income and affluent kids are now at greater risk for psychiatric disorders and substance abuse compared to their low-income peers.

More recent research, however, has led to a significant revision in our understanding of what's going on. In 2018, Luthar and her colleague Nina Kumar published new research showing that the risk associated with affluence derives not from household income per se, but from the school. They found that schools that prioritize getting into top universities, schools that place a premium on superior academic and extracurricular performance—so-called high-achieving schools—are now associated with increased risk of anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. The risk associated with these schools is separable from household income. Low-income kids who attend high-achieving schools are at increased risk, similar to their affluent peers. Affluent kids who attend schools that aren't considered high-achieving aren't at risk. The toxicity apparently comes from the school, not the income bracket.

On the surface, the research seems to suggest that maybe we shouldn't send our kids to a high-achieving school, a school that encourages superior academic and extracurricular performance. But that doesn't sound right. Aren't we supposed to encourage kids to strive for excellence?

In a recent review of the research—bluntly



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What are consistent predictors of health, wealth, and happiness long-term? According to studies, honesty and self-control.

titled "High-Achieving Schools Connote Risks for Adolescents"—Luthar and her colleagues summarize the findings: kids attending high-achieving schools are indeed much more likely to become anxious or depressed compared to kids who don't attend such schools. Luthar and coworkers try to understand what elements of a high-achieving school are responsible for the toxicity. They highlight social comparison.

When a child or teen's sense of self-worth depends on the magnificence of their accomplishments, that kid becomes fragile.

These schools, intentionally or not, typically foster a competitive environment in which kids are constantly comparing themselves with one another. Who won the award? Who was accepted at which university? And instead of parents shielding their kids from the stress of comparison, "both generations buy into the pursuit of doing ever more to achieve." When a child or teen's sense of self-worth depends on the magnificence of their accomplishments, that kid becomes fragile.

When I share this research with parents, some parents respond: "Well, that's the price of success. You have to be tough to succeed. I'm willing to accept the risk of some stress in the short term if it increases the odds of my child's success in the long term."

Those parents are assuming that attending a high-achieving school predicts better outcomes later in life: more wealth, better health, and happiness. But the research contradicts that assumption. It's true that affluent kids are more likely to become affluent adults, compared to low-income kids. But after controlling for household income, attending a high-achieving school doesn't increase the long-term odds of success. On the contrary, when researchers tracked down students 11 years and then 50 years after high school graduation, they found that attending a high-achieving high school was associated with lower educational and occupational achievement, compared to students with the same household income who attended schools with average achievement profiles.

Citing this research, Luthar and colleagues conclude that "continual social comparisons with mostly high-achieving peers may explain the long-term negative effects of participation in the high-achieving school race-to-the-top."

If getting good marks at a high-achieving school doesn't predict good outcomes long term, what does? I devoted two chapters of my book "The Collapse of Parenting" to reviewing every long-term longitudinal cohort study that bears on this question. The answer is consistent. Character and conscientiousness—meaning honesty and self-control—predict health, wealth, and happiness long-term. Boys who are rated as helpful by their kindergarten teacher earn more money 30 years later compared to boys rated less helpful. Children who exhibited better self-control at age 11 were much more likely to be healthy and doing well financially when investigators tracked them down 21 years later, at age 32. Young people who

are more conscientious are less likely to be divorced 30 years later; conversely, young people who are less conscientious are more likely to die prematurely.

Getting good marks at a high-achieving school doesn't predict long-term health or happiness, but being conscientious and helpful predicts both.

It follows from this research that if we want our child to be healthy, well-off, and happy as an adult, our top priority as parents shouldn't be to enroll our child in a high-achieving school; instead, our first priority should be to teach our child to be helpful, honest, and self-controlled.

How to do that, exactly?

Luthar and coworkers recommend explicitly prioritizing character and conscientiousness over performance. Tell your child "I would rather you get a 'C' on the test honestly than cheat and get an 'A.'" Luthar and colleagues also recommend that parents should "watch for their children becoming overextended and exhausted and help them to reduce commitments if necessary."

Many middle-income and affluent kids are immersed in a toxic culture that pushes them to perform. Parents may have to intervene, to limit activities and commitments, to ensure that kids aren't overextended.

Schedule time off to do fun things with your kid. And time off should be time OFF, not another kind of performance. Dance, sports, and the arts should be leisure activities, not additional opportunities to wow the audience or burnish the resumé.

Limit children's use of social media, which—according to one national survey of 9- to 15-year-olds—is first and foremost about social comparison. Recall that social comparison is the mechanism by which Luthar and colleagues believe that high-achieving schools work their mischief.

I want you to know that I have skin in this game. For nine years, beginning in pre-K, my daughter attended a highly selective, high-achieving private school in an affluent suburb. This school boasts many graduates who go on to Princeton, Stanford, etc. Although my daughter was doing well academically, my wife and I made the decision in 2019 to move her to a less competitive school, one with an explicitly Christian (Protestant) focus. Our daughter is beginning her second year at the new school, and all of us—myself, my wife, and my daughter—agree that it has been a change for the better. Less stress. Less drama. More focus on who you are—Are you kind? Are you a good friend?—rather than on what you do or on how amazing your achievements are.

Maybe we need to change the way we think about what school is for. Maybe school shouldn't be primarily about getting into an elite university. Maybe it should be about fulfilling your potential and being connected to family and community. Which, for some of us, may mean enjoying a stable marriage. In an analysis of national data, IFS researchers found that 63 percent of adults who attended Protestant private schools reported that they were in stable marriages (never divorced), compared with 53 percent of those who attended secular private schools, 49 percent of those who attended Catholic schools, and 42 percent of those who attended public schools. Furthermore, 61 percent of adults who attended Protestant private schools said that they now attend church or religious services regularly, compared with 21 percent of those who attended Catholic schools, 5 percent of those who attended public schools, and 4 percent of those who attended secular private schools.

I recognize that my daughter's chances of going to Yale may have diminished as a result of the change of school. But I am convinced that her chances of being healthy and happy in 10, 20, or 30 years have improved.

This article was originally published by the Institute for Family Studies.

A Firefighter's Sacrifice, Remembered and Honored

Frank Siller is walking 500 miles to honor his brother's memory, and that of other first responders

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"I hope to shine a big light on what happened 20 years ago, that we lost 2,977 Americans, many of whom are first responders," he said while walking.

Preparation began months earlier, though; thus far, he's been averaging 13 to 15 miles a day on his journey some 40 days to Manhattan. So far, he's right on schedule.

Frank arrived in Shanksville, Pennsylvania—where Flight 93 went down that fateful day—on Saturday, August 21.

Tunnel to Towers hopes to muster 1

million supporters, Siller said. Those who wish to contribute \$11 a month will help 200 catastrophically injured service members or first-responder families who've lost a loved one obtain mortgage-free homes and other living assistance.

Frank and his foundation aim to give back to those like his brother who devote their lives to helping others.

"Stephen died the way he lived—for others," Frank said.

Stephen always wanted to help out, his brother added. His was a personality like many first responders; he always wanted to be there to help somebody. "Of course, he did it to the ultimate de-



COURTESY OF TUNNEL TO TOWERS FOUNDATION

Tunnel to Towers Chairman and CEO Frank Siller (in blue) is met by supporters on the Never Forget Walk.

gree by giving his life," Frank added. "But it didn't surprise us as a family that he did that, and it didn't surprise us that he found a way to get there, and it didn't surprise us

that he ended up going through that tunnel. "He inspired us, but he didn't surprise us, all those things, that he did, that's just the type of person he was."

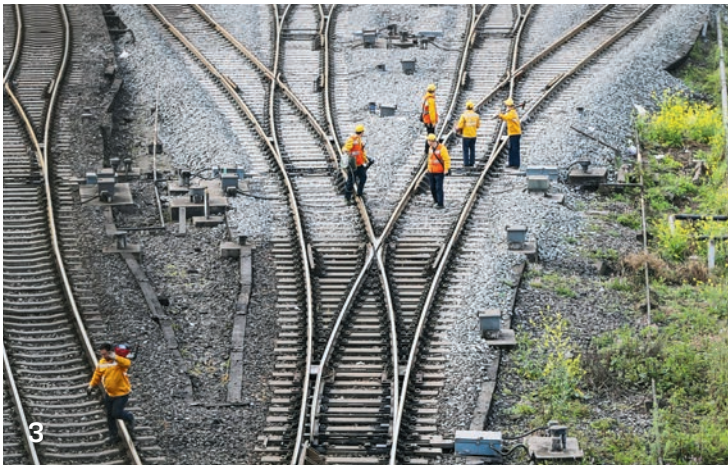


DIA DIPASULI/GETTY IMAGES

U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY LT. LAUREN SPAZIANO/RELEASED



STR/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



REUTERS

1. The fast combat support ship USNS Supply (T-AOE 6) and the Royal Navy Duke-class frigate HMS Kent (F78) conduct a replenishment-at-sea in the Barents Sea while training in the Arctic Circle on May 3, 2020.
2. A medical staff member disinfects at a quarantine zone converted from a hotel in Wuhan, China.
3. Workers inspect railway tracks, which serve as a part of the Belt and Road Initiative freight rail route linking Chongqing to Duisburg, at the Dazhou railway station in Sichuan Province, China, on March 14, 2019.

BOOKS

Brad Thor Confronts Chinese Communist Threat in Latest Bestseller

ZACHARY D. WARNER

What distinguishes a good thriller novel from the best? Brad Thor.

He's been hailed as the "undisputed king of the genre" by a critic. A reviewer once commented, "No one writes a better thriller than Brad Thor." He is the author of the wildly popular, bestselling Scot Harvath series, including his recently released thriller "Black Ice."

What separates this author's work from the rest of the genre? It's uncanny how a Brad Thor novel comes across as not merely an entertaining work of fiction, but often also a prediction of tomorrow's news.

He always writes an engaging narrative, and his dedication to grounding his novels with

real-world events backed by meticulous research with a keen eye for detail is unmatched. He even went so far as to get himself embedded as an observer with a U.S. black-ops mission in Afghanistan to make his novels as realistic as possible.

His dedication to realism has led the author to become an authority figure on national security issues, and news outlets have sought out his opinion about the threats facing America.

With "Black Ice," Thor shifts his focus to the threat posed by the tremen-

dous increase in China's power and its pursuit to become the dominant global superpower.

In this 21st novel in his Scot Harvath thriller series, Thor takes the reader to a part of the world few would imagine as a location for espionage intrigue entangling the world's three major powers—the frozen depths of the remote Arctic Circle region.

Why are China and Russia suddenly closely allied in targeting the Arctic? What could possibly be buried deep under the snow and ice that now garners so much attention from them? Will America's North Atlantic defense system be put at risk? It's a thrilling adventure when it falls to Harvath to find out and thwart any threat to America.

Scot Harvath is no ordinary espionage operative. He's the U.S. president's secret weapon, the counter-intelligence operative to turn to when extraordinary, possibly unsanctioned, measures may be called for in battling bad actors. He works for a super secretive private operation that parallels the CIA, working with, but not officially for it (and the president), to ensure deniability. A publication that specializes in reporting on thriller novels and their authors, "The Real Book Spy," dubbed Thor's character Scot Harvath "America's favorite hero."

I interviewed Thor by phone from his home in Nashville, Tennessee, about



MANITAC/SHUTTERSTOCK

You're not getting the full picture if you get all your news from Facebook groups, Thor says.

Zachary Warner: "Black Ice" will be viewed by many as a warning about global Chinese ambitions. Can we expect this to be a recurring theme for your upcoming novels?

Brad Thor: I go where the most pressing threats take me. My goal, first and foremost, is to give people a great, edge-of-their-seat, white-knuckle thrill ride. If I have done that, I have done my job as an entertainer. If they close the book a little bit smarter, a little bit more knowledgeable, then I have done my job as an American. Each book is different, so I cannot tell you how China will play in the novels going forward.

Mr. Warner: What are the appropriate steps the United States and the international community can follow in holding the Chinese Communist Party responsible for the spread of the COVID-19?

Mr. Thor: To hold the CCP responsible, the U.S. and the international community must have hard evidence. Just before we spoke, it was learned that the intelligence community was able to secure an enormous catalog of information, including genetic blueprints of virus samples, from the lab in Wuhan—likely from hacking the cloud-based servers the lab is assumed to have used. Analyzing it will prove a nightmare, however, as it will require massive computing power and scientists with the proper security clearances who can also speak Mandarin. If it can be proven that the COVID-19 virus escaped the Wuhan lab, then the world can begin discussing the next steps.

Mr. Warner: What are some of the international security lessons learned from COVID-19?

Mr. Thor: Number one is that our supply chains are much too fragile and we are far too dependent on just-in-time manufacturing from China. It is a major threat to America's national security. From pharmaceuticals to semiconductors, we need a Manhattan project aimed at reshoring and "disruption-proofing" the manufacture of our most critical products.

Mr. Warner: In "Black Ice," the reader is witness to an uneasy alliance between China and Russia. Except, for opposition to the United States, what does each of them benefit from greater collaboration with the other? Is a Russian-Chinese alliance a permanent fixture on the international stage?

Mr. Thor: Beijing is, in fact, growing closer to Moscow. It is an uneasy marriage of convenience. Each has things the

other needs. But, as history has shown, alliances have ways of fraying and breaking apart.

Mr. Warner: Our international focus seems to be shifting to China and the Pacific. What new challenges does the Chinese Communist Party pose to America?

Mr. Thor: China is a country in which the CCP does not recognize the rights of the individual. When individual liberty is not fostered and protected it is impossible for creativity to flourish. And when creativity is unable to flourish, a nation is incapable of innovation. And when a nation is incapable of innovation it stagnates—particularly in science and technology. This leaves said nation with only one avenue—steal. Unable to scientifically and technologically advance, China must steal from freer, more prosperous, more advanced nations like the United States.

Therefore, Chinese espionage remains a serious threat to the United States. China's construction of faux islands/atolls in the South China Sea, its position vis-à-vis Taiwan, and the immediate risk it poses to the other first island chain nations, are all ongoing threats that need to be closely watched.

Mr. Warner: The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative [BRI] has been the subject of important strategic conversations: some experts believe it will have drastic implications on the United States' foreign policy and role in the world; however, the focus is usually on developing nations. What is the future international role of Western, developed countries, such as Norway, who might share more cultural similarities with the United States but might benefit from Chinese economic investment?

Mr. Thor: When it comes to China, there is no "free" lunch. The BRI is how the polar bear gets his nose inside your tent. It allows China to lock up the resources it needs for its continued growth. The flip side of the BRI coin is that it provides the CCP with a powerful seat at the table and influence over the nations that take their money—both in terms of domestic and foreign policy.

Countries like Canada and Norway have seen China's moves in the Arctic for what they are and have flatly shut the Chinese down. They have wisely said no to China trying to purchase a seat at their tables.

As per Western nations culturally aligned with the United States and whether or not they should accept Chinese investment—one needs to always remember that there are always strings attached, even if said strings are not immediately visible. Bottom line—is the juice worth the squeeze?

Mr. Warner: What is the greatest obstacle

the average citizen faces when understanding foreign policy?

Mr. Thor: The greatest obstacle is how Americans silo themselves. If you get all of your news from Facebook groups, you're not getting the entire picture—and you are likely a ripe target for disinformation.

As human beings, we're hardwired to want to function in small bands, or tribes. We seek out like-minded people online. But the price of staying in a digital tribe is often complete and full agreement with a particular viewpoint. If everyone thinks the same—that's a problem. Not only that, malign foreign actors find such digital tribes ripe for disinformation campaigns.

I eat vegetables not because I like them, but because I know I need to. The same can be said for media consumption—you can have favorites, but you should consume a wide and varied diet. As a responsible steward of the Republic, it is your duty to be civic-minded and as well informed as possible. That means picking your head up, breaking the Facebook barrier, and consuming multiple types of news and information.

“Unable to scientifically advance, China must steal from freer, more prosperous, more advanced nations like the United States.”

Brad Thor

Mr. Warner: What is your opinion on the current administration's approach to national security affairs?

Mr. Thor: As with every administration, it's a mixed bag. The Afghanistan pullout is a continuation of the Trump policy. I think it will be an absolute disaster for the Afghans, but we've been there for 20 years. We can make a United States Marine in 13 weeks, but after two decades, the Afghan Army cannot stand on its own two feet? That's a problem—a big one.

Kabul could fall by the end of this September (if not sooner). [Editor's note: This interview was conducted prior to the fall of Kabul.] That will be game over—and like I said, it will be terrible. But it wasn't that we did too little, it was that the Afghans didn't do enough. You cannot hand a nation freedom and democracy on a silver platter. They have to want it more than anything else. They have to be willing to fight, bleed, and die for it. I think they are too tribal, too fractured, for a shared na-

tional identity to be at the forefront of how they see themselves.

Culturally, the hierarchical "family, village, tribe" ethos is too hard to break. We could have remained another 20 years, possibly even 100, and still not have been able to impact that identity. It is a shame because there are many really good people in Afghanistan. I feel especially heartbroken for the lives the women and girls will be forced back into. The one hope I have is that having had a taste of freedom, perhaps the seeds of liberty have been sown. Perhaps they will organize and push back against the Taliban. Time will tell.

Mr. Warner: What is America's role in the world?

Mr. Thor: I believe America's role is to be that shining city on a hill—a beacon for all to see; an example of what can be done when the individual is free, protected in the eyes of the law, and pursues his or her life via ordered liberty and a sense of civic virtue.

Mr. Warner: What will the international world lose from an isolationist United States of America?

Mr. Thor: When we are strong and united at home, we can be strong and united (with our allies) abroad. A robust, confident American presence on the global stage helps secure peace and prosperity internationally. When we are fractured at home and retreat within our borders, other actors (most certainly malign) will step in to fill that void. Nature (and global leadership) abhors a vacuum.

Mr. Warner: How do you maintain a balance between writing a story that is engaging to the reader, yet also grounded to realism?

Mr. Thor: I call what I do "faction," where you don't know where the facts end and the fiction begins. One of the greatest compliments I get paid is that many readers love to read my thrillers with their laptops nearby so they can look things up.

When I plot my novels, I want a big, real-life scenario to act as my backdrop. I award bonus points to the scenario if it's something that isn't getting enough media attention. In the case of "Black Ice," it was China's push into the Arctic and their enlistment of Russia to help get them a toehold.

Mr. Warner: How do you explain your ability to write stories that almost seem to be taken from tomorrow's news?

Mr. Thor: I am a voracious consumer of news. I am always looking at stories and examining them from different angles. I like to ask myself, "What if it happened this way?" Or, "What if this happened instead?"

As a thriller writer, my job is to beat the headlines, so I am constantly trying to peer over the horizon.

Mr. Warner: What piece of advice helped you the most as a writer?

Mr. Thor: "You can't wait for inspiration. You have to go after it with a club!" [from] Jack London.

Mr. Warner: What advice would you give a new writer seeking to improve their writing skill?

Mr. Thor: Read. Read. Read. You cannot be even a halfway decent writer without being a passionate reader.

Mr. Warner: Do you believe there is any Brad Thor in Scot Harvath?

Mr. Thor: Absolutely. In fact, I tell people he is my alter ego, much in the same way I'm sure James Bond was for Ian Fleming and Jack Ryan was for Tom Clancy.

Mr. Warner: Every entry in the Scot Harvath series has been a huge bestseller, how are you able to consistently able to imagine new plot points and flesh them out into a bestseller?

Mr. Thor: The key is in finding something happening in the real world that I am surprised to learn about. That becomes the rocket fuel that propels my writing. Again, I'm all about giving you the best white-knuckle thrill ride I am capable of. If you close one of my thrillers having had a fantastic adventure, I've done my job as an author. If you close it a little bit smarter about any number of fascinating things going on in the world, then I've done my job as an American.

Mr. Warner: A major theme of "Black Ice" was Scot Harvath's possible life as a retired operative. What does this signal to readers who might take this as a sign that Harvath's journey is coming to an end soon?

Mr. Thor: He can never give it up—that's a big part of his struggle. He loves his career. It's a calling and he deeply believes in it. There can be no American dream without those willing to protect it. It does get harder as he gets older, but that's something we can all relate to.

Mr. Warner: What's next for you?

Mr. Thor: Currently, I am writing next summer's thriller. It will take readers to a part of the world I have never written about before. There is something fascinating, simmering just beneath the surface, on the other side of the globe. It was too good not to base a thriller on. I only hope I can get the book complete before the real-world events break wide open.

Zachary D. Warner is a writer specializing in political commentary and book reviews.

HISTORY

Didius Julianus: The Roman Emperor Who Bought the Imperial Throne—and Paid With His Life

The notorious 'Auction of the Empire' reveals what eventually happens when a civilization succumbs to concentrated power and corruption

LAWRENCE W. REED

Does money buy high public office? It's a contentious political question. The best answer, it seems to me, is this: Sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't. Just ask presidential hopefuls Jeb Bush and Michael Bloomberg.

One occasion when money bought the highest office in the land—in plain public view—occurred in 193 A.D. in ancient Rome. The position of emperor of the Roman Empire was auctioned off, and the winning bid belonged to a man named Didius Julianus. Here's the remarkable story.

After nearly 500 years, the ancient Roman Republic succumbed to the hazards of the welfare/warfare state a few decades before the birth of Christ. Replacing it was the Roman Empire, an imperial autocracy that lasted another 500 years. Don't confuse the two periods; the Empire, where the liberties of earlier days succumbed to concentrated power, was very different from its predecessor.

During its first two centuries, however, the Empire coasted on past achievements. Though some of its early emperors were ghastly—murderous tyrants (such as Nero and Caligula)—the Empire under Marcus Aurelius was larger in area and influence than it had been in the days of the first emperor, Augustus.

The death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 and the subsequent 12-year rule of his violent and erratic son Commodus ended the era of Pax Romana (the "Peace of Rome"). With the assassination of Commodus on New Year's Eve 192, many Romans no doubt hoped 193 would bring a restoration of peace and stability. That was not to be so. Indeed, the new year was so tumultuous that it would become known in Roman history as the Year of the Five Emperors.

The elite unit of imperial bodyguards known as the Praetorian Guard arranged

for an army officer named Pertinax to succeed Commodus as emperor. We know that money played a role; Pertinax offered a tidy sum of 12,000 sesterii each to the guardsmen, but it was done in the more typical way (quietly and behind the scenes). After 87 days in which Pertinax attempted to clean house of Praetorian corruption, the dissatisfied Guard stabbed and beheaded the would-be reformer. That set the stage for an act so brazen in its scope that the next emperor would be remembered primarily for that, and for not much more.

Knowing the Praetorian Guard could be bought, two men appeared at its headquarters and presented themselves as rival claimants for the Roman throne. One was Titus Flavius Sulpicianus, who was the father-in-law of the deceased Pertinax. The other was 60-year-old Didius Julianus, who had distinguished himself in both politics and the military. In his "Chronicle of the Roman Emperors," historian Chris Scarre notes:

"No attempt was made to hide the nature of the negotiations: the praetorians stationed heralds on the walls to announce that the position of emperor was up for sale ... The bidding went on for some time, but eventually the soldiers' choice fell on Didius



JOSÉ LUIZ BERNARDES RIBEIRO/CC BY-SA 4.0
A bust of Didius Julianus at the Residenzmuseum, Munich.

Julianus. He not only bid the higher price, but also warned them that if they elected Sulpicianus they might expect revenge at his hands for the murder of Pertinax."

This notorious "Auction of the Empire," as Edward Gibbon would call it centuries later, was described by another historian who was alive and writing as it happened, Cassius Dio (155–235 A.D.). In his 80-volume history of Rome, he described the scandalous episode this way:

"So when he [Didius Julianus] heard of the death of Pertinax, he hastily made his way to the imperial throne. Then ensued a most disgraceful business and one un-

worthy of Rome. For, just as if it had been in some market or auction-room, both the city and its entire empire were auctioned off. The sellers were the ones who had slain their previous emperor, and the would-be buyers were Sulpicianus and Didius Julianus, who vied to outbid each other ... They gradually raised their bids up to 20,000 sesterii for each soldier. Some of the soldiers would carry word to Julianus, 'Sulpicianus offers so much; how much more do you make it?' And to Sulpicianus in turn, 'Julianus promises so much; how much more do you raise him?'

Sulpicianus would have won the day, being prefect of the city and also the first to name the figure 20,000, had not Julianus raised his bid by a whole 5,000 at one time, shouting the sum out in a loud voice and indicating the amount with his fingers."

Sold! One gigantic empire and the top position in it—for a mere 25,000 sesterii per guardsman, or approximately the value at the time of 10 horses.

Upon assuming the mantle of emperor, Didius Julianus devalued the currency by reducing the precious metal content of Roman coinage. But not even that measure made the price he offered affordable to him. He never fully coughed up what he promised. After 66 days in power, he met the same fate as his predecessor—assassination at the

hands of disgruntled praetorians.

"But what evil have I done?" he is said to have cried with his last words. "Whom have I killed?"

Before the year was over, three other men would attempt to claim the title of Emperor until one man emerged as the unquestioned ruler—Severus.

The Year of the Five Emperors was drenched in power lust, scandal, and blood. For the Empire, it was mostly downhill from there. When it fell to foreign invasion in 476, many Romans welcomed the invaders because they figured they couldn't be worse than their own rulers.

And, sadly, they were probably right.

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For Additional Information, See:

- "The Roman Emperors: A Biographical Guide to the Rulers of Imperial Rome, 31 B.C. – A.D. 476" by Michael Grant
- "The Architects of Rome's Demise" by Jack Emerson Brown
- "Chronicle of the Roman Emperors: The Reign-by-Reign Record of the Rulers of Imperial Rome" by Chris Scarre
- "The Lust for Power Led to Rome's Decline and Fall" by Lawrence W. Reed
- "The Fall of the Republic" by Lawrence W. Reed
- "How to Lose a Constitution: Lessons from Roman History" by Lawrence W. Reed
- A Selection of Articles from FEE on the Lessons of Ancient Rome (FEE.org/rome)

Wielding Deadly Weapons of One Kind or Another

Safety rules and precautions are called for

JOHN FALCE

Commentary

This summer, I've accomplished a variety of things. I've been swimming, running, tree-climbing, board-game-playing, and too many other happily carefree activities to list. Apart from all of those activities, however, shooting holds a special place in my heart.

Hardly a day goes by that I'm not occupied in the backyard, honing my marksmanship with a BB gun. I'm here to tell you firsthand, no other pursuit could be dearer to any little boy's heart.

Nevertheless, as any little boy's mother will tell you, guns are dangerous. You could shoot your eye out. My father was the one who first introduced the four weapon safety rules. Three out of four of my siblings are boys, and four out of four of us can recite the rules by heart. Even my youngest brother, "Baby Cowboy," knows his target and what's beyond it when he wields his orange-capped toy pistol. While most of the safety rules may be intuitive, they're a constant reminder to keep your guard up while handling a firearm.

Weapons safety doesn't just apply to guns, either. Knife throwing, blow darts (my grandfather's proficiency in this field remains, so far, unsurpassed), and other tools that can be utilized as a means of defense or offense require vigilance. The consistent application of precautions can make the difference between life and death.

In today's day and age, guns are taboo in certain circles. But, in the right context, they're also recreational and useful. With the proper caution and respect for the power weapons command, shooting can be a valuable hobby. But before you fire a shot or hurl a tomahawk into a target, here are the four weapon safety rules:

Know your target and what's beyond it. Always maintain proper muzzle control. Keep your finger off the trigger until you're on target and ready to shoot.

Treat all weapons as if they're loaded. Before you go throwing hot lead down-range, keep those rules foremost in your mind, just as my dad taught me. Those rules, combined with a healthy respect for what you're holding, make or break your conduct with a firearm.

Last spring wasn't the paradise of the present. Stuck inside with the internet, there was a dearth of time and space for shooting or any other of those formerly

stated outdoor activities dear to a child's joy. I'm not usually prone to screens. I don't play video games, and in my house, TV airs exclusively on a Friday night. As for social media, I'm a total stranger.

House rules for the internet were conservative as well. It had to be used in clear visibility, on an approved website, with no straying allowed. I would never have been alone, in my room, with the internet, if classes hadn't moved online. But, amid loud little brothers, suddenly out of school, it was deemed necessary for peace, quiet, and studiousness that I excuse myself to a private location to attend online classes. Online classes, however, can be dull, to put it mildly. And an idle mind on the internet is a recipe for disaster.

Superficially, it wasn't the gravest of errors—I strayed off task, and out of class, onto a random internet link. It was only a simple advertisement for a math website, leading to cheesy math-related games—but it was against house rules. And I respected those rules. Yet, I was surprised to find how susceptible I could be when a flashy gimmick was presented.

We all know that cyber warfare exists. Nations have weaponized the internet before. And on a microcosmic level, dangers are all the more present. Cyberbullying, child predators, and general brain rot swarm the internet like mosquitoes, transmitting irritation, sickness, and even death where they touch.

Logically, I knew that temptation was there, but I hadn't fully appreciated that I was susceptible. Now, don't get me wrong, it isn't that I don't see the numerous positive uses of the internet, too. Like any new weapons technology, it has remarkable aspects. One day, I was shown by a friend the miraculous consumption of three Cokes in one moment. How but through the internet could I have otherwise witnessed such an impressive feat? But through this new technology, I've also realized, one faces a greater threat than through most traditional weapons, because the chance of harm is more than physical.

Well, after I cut class, my straying from cyber school was discovered. Mom and dad were swift to act. This time, it was my mother who presented us with a new set of safety rules—recycled and adapted to fit the modern dangers of the cyber world. Her repurposed rules "Internet Safety Rules" are as follows:

Know your target and don't go beyond it. Always practice proper screen control. Keep your eyes off screens until you have a safe, acceptable, and approved plan. Treat all websites as if they're loaded. Since the dawning of the new rules, I handle a screen with as much care as a



Navigating the internet and social media demands a great deal of care and caution.

The consistent application of precautions can make the difference between life and death.

John Falce is 13 years old. He 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.

loaded rifle, applying the four internet and screen safety rules with a consciousness of real and present danger, the same as for any other deadly weapon.

I hear classmates and friends talk of their hours lavished on social media, and I wish that I could caution them as I've been cautioned, to keep them from harm. When unmitigated screen usage is so much a part of our day-to-day lives, how long can it be until one is hit by a poison dart?

Without serious self-discipline, unregulated screen exposure poses serious danger.

We use the internet every day. Most of us probably never consider the full extent of the menace that lurks underneath its harmless or even beneficial façade. An ad can appear completely unremarkable at first glance. Once given attention, however, it may lead to a trap.

Would you rest your finger on the trigger of a loaded pistol, off its aim? Eventually, that pistol is going to go off. And, equally inevitably, one of those countless everyday links will trigger a landmine.

The internet has been weaponized. Good luck denying that. The likelihood of danger grows nearly omnipresent, the more carelessly we handle it. Like a gun, the internet can be utilized for good or for evil. And still, for of all its flaws, it has its purpose.

In the end, no mom or dad will be able to keep you safe from yourself. It's up to you how to use it: Will you employ safety measures and the right judgment in your online conduct? Or will you wind up toying with a threat beyond your control?



8-Year-Old's Lemonade Stand Raises Over \$30,000 for Children's Hospital

EPOCH INSPIRED STAFF

An 8-year-old boy with a heart of gold and a wish to quench the thirst of hundreds of bikers passing through the Black Hills in western South Dakota during the annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally set up a lemonade stand that became immensely popular and raised more than \$30,000 for a children's hospital.

"It's just been crazy," Wyatt Dennis, a motorcycle fan from Piedmont, South Dakota, told The Epoch Times.

His mother, Robin, couldn't agree more: "We've been overwhelmed with the generosity of people in this, we never expected a small little kid's lemonade stand to turn into what it has."

Wyatt's idea to begin a free lemonade stand emerged when he and his mom saw motorcycles passing by from the deck of the house they were about to own.

Wyatt, who is now going into third grade, didn't forget about it, and when the family bought the house the following year, he told his parents that he was ready to put out his lemonade stand.

As it was his initiative, his parents made it clear that he would have to help with mixing and serving the lemonade, and they would just be there to support him. Last year, they served about 20 gallons of lemonade to the entire rally.

"We decided to do it for free because we wanted to teach him that when you work



South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem paid a visit.

We never expected a small little kid's lemonade stand to turn into what it has.

Robin Dennis

hard, you can get whatever your goal is," Robin said. In this case, it was a Lego set.

According to Fox News, not only did Wyatt make enough money to buy what he wanted, but he also donated about \$200 to St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital.

Wyatt said he chose that specific hospital because he "wants to help some kids out. I want to help a charity with kids."

Following last year's success, Wyatt and his parents decided to set up a lemonade stand for the bikers this year, too, expecting the same crowd. On the first day, Wyatt sold 20 gallons of lemonade within an hour; he estimates he made about \$700 that day.

On the same day, a biker named Tracy who stayed at the campground next to the stand stopped for a lemonade. During the next few days, she came by again.

Impressed by him, she posted about his cute lemonade stand on one of the rally's websites. From there, word got out, and Robin's husband began to get text messages from people about Wyatt's lemonade stand. "We had no idea what [was] happening. We kind of had a breakout moment because we definitely did not have enough lemonade," Robin said.

Over the next few days, thousands of people visited. Robin said that within five minutes of setting up the table, about 40 people would come over.

"It's just fun to see your kid interacting with people," Robin said. Seeing people who didn't know each other come together

at the stand, talk, and get to know each other was really heartwarming, she said.

"It's just really neat to see the biker community come together and see how generous they are," Robin said.

Wyatt, who waved at all the bikers passing by, also has a book with the records of all those who visited his lemonade stand, which includes bikers from different states in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and England.

On one of the days, Gov. Kristi Noem also stopped by Wyatt's lemonade stand.

This year, Wyatt's donations from the lemonade stand were divided into three categories: 50 percent for college, 35 percent for St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital, and 15 percent for a dirt bike.

According to a Facebook post, Wyatt donated \$31,394 to the hospital.

Robin said she and her husband are very proud of Wyatt, who she describes as an outgoing and personable kid who doesn't hesitate to talk to people, shake someone's hand, or show gratitude to a veteran for his service.

With the lemonade stand, Robin said she and her husband weren't trying to do anything extraordinary or outstanding but just teach their son about saving, spending, and giving.

"That's kind of how we structure our life and what we've been taught," Robin said. "I hope that he carries that with him for the rest of his life."

Comfort for a Grieving Mother

Ann Brigham Chrudinsky urges people to heed the 'little signs' around them

DAKSHA DEVNANI

A day after her son's death, a grieving mother spotted a monarch butterfly just 10 yards away from her. Recalling that someone said a monarch could mean a sign of a loved one trying to connect, she requested it to land on her hand, and it did.

"I was completely stunned," Ann Brigham Chrudinsky told The Epoch Times via email. "I absolutely felt it was a sign from God."

Chrudinsky, from the rural northern Wisconsin city of Tomahawk, lost her 23-year-old son Ben to suicide on July 3, 2019, after he'd had a hard battle with alcohol addiction and depression.

A day after his death, the mother of two couldn't hold back her tears and was walking her dog in the evening when she saw a monarch butterfly floating away as the sun was casting a glow on everything.

As news of her son's passing got around, a friend on Facebook had posted that seeing a monarch meant that a loved one was nearby. At the time Chrudinsky chose to ignore the sentiment and thought the person was just offering comforting words.

Choosing not to walk toward it, she instead said aloud: "If you're with Ben, land on my hand," and she raised her hand to above waist height, with a bent elbow, slightly away from her body.

"It flew directly over to my hand and landed," Chrudinsky said.

Knowing that people might not believe her, Chrudinsky asked the butterfly to stay on her hand. After snapping two photos, she thanked the butterfly and it flew away.

Touched by what she witnessed, a tearful Chrudinsky shared the heartwarming episode with Ben's former fiancée.

"I believe God allows those signs to help us through grieving," Chrudinsky said. "Thank God for the beautiful signs and reminders he gives you."

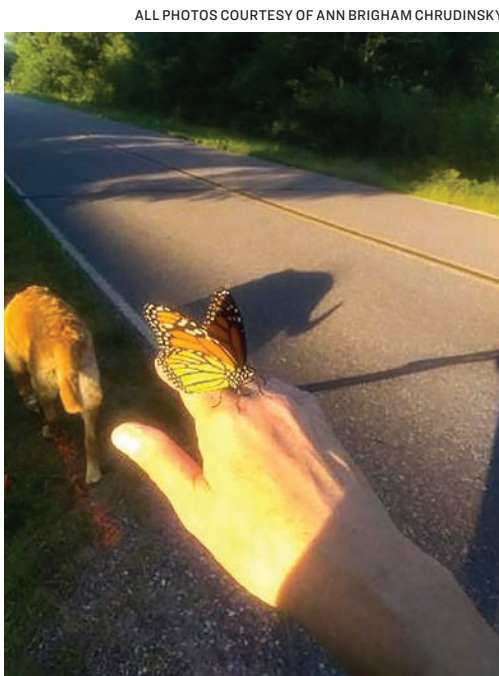
After this, she said, she never again had a similar experience with a butterfly. Chrudinsky, who calls herself "a writer by design," was raised in New London, Wisconsin. After a traumatic end to her marriage in 1998, she moved with her two sons to Northwoods to start anew. Over the years, she has worked as a journalist for a regional daily newspaper, a managing editor of a weekly hometown newspaper, a general manager and advertising director of a newspaper, and a grant writer.

Chrudinsky shared a great bond with Ben. The two would go to the movies together, go on walks, enjoy drawing and writing, and leave each other handwritten notes.

Ben, as Chrudinsky described, was extremely intelligent, a gifted artist, a self-advocate, a devoted son with a great sense of humor, and someone who loved his friends deeply.

However, by the time Chrudinsky learned about the depths of his addiction, "it was full-blown and destructive to his life," she said.

"He entered some serious counseling and sought addiction treatment. His sobriety lasted two weeks, unfortunately, as he tried to 'white knuckle it' because, like any 23-year-old, he just wanted to be with his friends and lead a 'normal' life."



Although he paid heed to his mother's advice and even began to make progress in keeping away from drinking alcohol, as well as getting to bed on time and getting up before sunrise to work at a job he liked, he couldn't keep at it for long and eventually spiraled out of control.

"I didn't know he had started drinking heavily again until it was too late," Chrudinsky said.

Since losing her son to suicide, Chrudinsky says it's her "heart's desire to keep families from having to endure the loss of a loved one to suicide because they feel there is no other escape."

After her experience with the monarch butterfly, she urged people to pay attention to the little things that she refers to as "little signs" around them.

"The wind in the trees when there aren't any other trees swaying, for example, or the dragonfly that seems to just hang around you for a long time before flying away ... these things may be coincidence, but it's comforting," Chrudinsky said. "Take it, and don't let anyone else tell you you're just grasping at anything to hang onto a loved one."

(Left) A monarch butterfly landed on the grieving mom Ann Brigham Chrudinsky's hand after her son passed away.

(Far left) Ben with his mother Ann Brigham Chrudinsky at his high school graduation.

By the time Chrudinsky learned about the depths of his addiction, 'it was full-blown and destructive to his life,' she said.



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EDUCATION

Go for the Gold: Some Advice for Students

JEFF MINICK

Heads up, gang! Are you ready for books, tests, teachers, and study?

It doesn't matter what sort of school you attend. It doesn't matter whether you're in fourth grade or a college freshman. It doesn't matter whether you spent last year in a classroom or distance-learning in your kitchen. Here are some tips that will help you meet your full potential as a student this year.

Be Present

Come to the classroom ready to learn. Before the class begins, have the requisite books, notebooks, and homework out on the table. If the classroom has open seating, sit near the front, where there are fewer distractions. Once the class begins, pay attention. Take notes. Listen and learn.

A special addendum for college students: Show up. Don't cut classes except in the case of a true emergency. You're paying money—in some cases, big bucks—to listen to a professor. Don't throw the money or your education away.

Be Prepared

So you were supposed to read Ray Bradbury's short story "The Veldt" for your seventh-grade English class or Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" for your college lit course. Maybe you forgot about it or maybe you put it off and ran out of time, but either way, it's not good.

When you come unprepared for class, you can't really follow a teacher's lecture or participate in discussions. Even worse, at least from the standpoint of humiliation, you'll be bumbling around if the teacher singles you out and asks a question.

Be prepared. It's not just a lesson to learn in school. It's a lesson to learn for life.

Be Organized

In her book "That Crumpled Paper Was Due Last Week: Helping Disorganized and Distracted Boys Succeed in School and Life," Ana Homayoun stresses the importance of organization and the visualization of goals for young men. (The book would also work for girls.) An esteemed academic counselor and speaker, Homayoun also teaches her readers how to resist peer pressure and to avoid the anxiety sometimes caused by school.

During my years as a teacher, I found that lack of organization was a fundamental reason for a student's poor performance. An example: When I would



▲ Being prepared is a good lesson to learn not only for school but also for life.

Let me say it again: **organize, organize, organize. You'll be astounded by how much easier your academic life will become.**

call for the class to turn in a paper assigned for homework, one or two of the students would spend the next couple of minutes digging through a backpack. If they actually found the assignment, the paper often looked as if the student had wrestled with it while writing it.

Whether you're this student or a home-schooler who spends 15 minutes a day tracking down your Saxon math book, let me say it again: organize, organize, organize. You'll be astounded by how much easier your academic life will become.

Be Proactive

You're new to college, and the European history professor has assigned a 1,000-word paper on the Crusades. You complete the paper, but because you wrote so few essays in high school, you wonder if it's any good. Here's the next step: Hie yourself off to the school's writing center and have one of the tutors read the paper and help you make it stronger. That's why the college has hired these advanced students. One young man I know, now a successful attorney, often deliberately took his papers to the toughest tutor in the writing center, knowing that her critique would improve both his writing and his grade.

Or maybe you're sitting in your 11th-grade chemistry class and the teacher is talking about the "mole." When he finishes, he asks if there are any questions, but you don't raise your hand and remain silent.

Big mistake. I know because I was that student. Mr. Parker, my chemistry teacher, would bring up the mole from time to time, and though I could recite the definition of the word, I really had no

idea what it meant. Yet I was too shy to ask for further explanation.

Don't be passive. Take charge of your learning.

Look Sharp

As a teacher, I sometimes wished I could take photos of my classes and then show them to the students. Some of them looked as if they had just rolled out of bed. Some had dressed as if they had chosen their clothes in total darkness. Some sat slumped at their desks, heads down to avoid eye contact. Some looked bored, and we hadn't even begun class yet.

In contrast were those students who sat erect, books, notebooks, and pens at hand. Their bright faces and neat attire testified they were eager to begin work. They had clearly selected their clothing to show they were all business in the classroom.

Once I conducted an experiment with my classes. I asked the students to dress up on a test day, suggesting the boys wear ties and the girls slacks or dresses rather than jeans. The object of this experiment, I explained to them, was to discover whether they did better on that day's test by dressing for success. Although most reported their clothing had made little difference in how they had tested, three boys wore ties to class for the rest of the year.

Looking sharp can enhance being sharp.

Dare to Be Great

Whatever happens with our schools this year—lockdowns, masks, distance learning, and anything else—brush those cobweb obstacles aside. Never give up and never despair. You have one goal: to learn. For most of you, this is your chief task for this time in your life. So banish boredom, take personal responsibility for your education, stuff that fine mind of yours with as much knowledge as possible, and aim for excellence.

Do these things, and you've just taken a giant step forward into adulthood.

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.

HOMESCHOOL

Homeschooling Just Crossed the Tipping Point

ANNIE HOLMQUIST

Commentary

In the months before COVID hit, a number of my friends began a new phase of motherhood by starting careers as homeschool teachers. They expressed normal trepidation, concerned they would fail, and by extension, their children would.

Then the pandemic hit, homeschooling became the new way of life, and my friends were suddenly homeschool veterans, all settled in and progressing with their curriculum while everyone else scrambled to get their act together. I now hear a sigh of relief and an eager "Yes!" when I ask them if they're glad they're homeschooling.

They're not the only ones. Recent data show that as much as 11 percent of the population is homeschooling since COVID-19 hit. Bad news abounds these days, but the soaring success of homeschooling is a silver lining in the clouds of COVID and chaos, suggesting we may have reached a new tipping point.

Unfortunately, many try to tell us otherwise, as is the case in a recent National Review article by Sean-Michael Pigeon entitled "Homeschooling Can't Be for Everyone." Yet the idea that homeschooling

can't be a prominent part of the answer to America's educational crisis is misguided. Pigeon argues that homeschooling on a larger scale is unworkable because of the costs and sacrifices required. "More affluent families," he says, "may not want to dramatically decrease their standard of living by cutting off an income stream" while others "simply won't want to take on the task of personally educating their children." With the increased ability of parents to work from home and the proliferation of pandemic pods, the barrier to entry for homeschooling has fallen significantly. Besides, just because a family doesn't want to live on a reduced income or doesn't want to spend time educating their children doesn't mean that it can't be done. It all depends on where you decide to put your time, talent, and treasure.

The most interesting critique Pigeon offers of homeschooling concerns how bad ideologies will continue to proliferate in schools if parents don't push back, and how a mass exodus of students from conservative families from the public school system will accelerate our cultural decline.

It's here that it's helpful to consider the concept of tipping points. "Scientists have found that when just 10 percent of the pop-

ulation holds an unshakable belief, their belief will always be adopted by the majority of the society," researchers at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute reported in a 2011 study. Author Malcolm Gladwell has also explored this phenomenon in his book published in 2000, "The Tipping Point."

A few years ago, homeschool students made up roughly 3 percent of the student population, making the tipping point a distant prospect. But as of fall 2020, 11.1 percent of school-age households nationwide reported homeschooling their children, according to a recent U.S. Census Bureau report. The homeschooling rate doubled in many states and tripled or quadrupled in others. Alaska continues to lead the pack, with 27.5 percent of school-age households homeschooling. One in five school-age families in Oklahoma now homeschool their children, while 18 percent of families in Florida do the same.

But it's not just red states that are jumping into the homeschooling game. Predictably blue Vermont saw its homeschooling rate rise from 4.1 percent to almost 17 percent. New York's rate rose from 1.2 percent to 10.1 percent, while Massachusetts grew from 1.5 percent to 12.1 percent.

If we've achieved the tipping point so quickly, who's to say the homeschooling rate can't grow further in the next few years? And if it does grow more, who is to place limits on it in terms of its ability to change students' ways of thinking, or the education system as a whole?

Some may say such change is a pipe dream. But those who say this are forgetting that homeschooling does a great deal to develop strong families, fostered

through increased togetherness. It's this strengthening of the family that will be the commonality around which the tipping point is created; the family, one of Edmund Burke's "little platoons," can achieve great things in changing the course of a country.

"To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society," Burke said, "is the first principle (the germ at its core) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind."

Recent data show that as much as 11 percent of the population is homeschooling since COVID-19 hit.

If you're discouraged about the course of the country, perhaps this silver lining in the growth of homeschooling will give you cause to take heart. It's always darkest before the dawn. We're about to see the light arise as thousands of American families abandon the public education system and rediscover learning and family at the same time.

Annie Holmquist is the editor of Intellectual Takeout and the online editor of Chronicles Magazine, both projects of the Charlemagne Institute. This article was originally published on Intellectual Takeout.



THE LAND OF Story-Books

by Robert Louis Stevenson

At evening when the lamp is lit,
Around the fire my parents sit,
They sit at home, and talk and sing,
And do not play at anything.

Now, with my little gun, I crawl
All in the dark along the wall,
And follow round the forest track
Away behind the sofa back.

There in the night, where none can spy,
All in my hunter's camp I lie,
And play at books that I have read,
Till it is time to go to bed.

These are the hills, these are the woods,
These are my starry solitudes,
And there the river by whose brink
The roaring lions come to drink.

I see the others far away,
As if in firelit camp they lay,
And I, like to an Indian scout,
Around their party prowled about.

So, when my nurse comes in for me,
Home I return across the sea,
And go to bed with backward looks
At my dear Land of Story-books.

VITALII BASHKATOV/SHUTTERSTOCK

FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES

DID YOU READ THE BOOK ABOUT ANTIGRAVITY?

IMPOSSIBLE TO PUT DOWN

YUGANOV KONSTANTIN/SHUTTERSTOCK

“The reading of all good books is like conversation with the finest (people) of the past centuries.”

RENE DESCARTES, FRENCH PHILOSOPHER (1596–1650)

ALL IMAGES BY SHUTTERSTOCK



AMERICAN STRIKES OIL

On August 28, 1859, American businessman Edwin Laurentine Drake (aka Colonel Drake) became the first person to successfully drill for oil in the United States.

Drake was hired by the Seneca Oil Co. to seek oil in Titusville, Pennsylvania. After his men had spent some time drilling at a total depth of 69.5 feet, they hit an obstruction and left for the day. The men packed up for the day. On the morning of Aug. 28, they were surprised to find crude oil rising up at their digging site. Drake was summoned and the oil was deposited into a tub.

His discovery and method for drilling had a significant impact on the establishment of the petroleum industry.



1. Edwin Laurentine Drake.
2. Drake's oil well, in this file photo.

By Aidan Danza, age 15

THE VARIED COUNTRY OF TEXAS

Texas has a great amount of variety.

First of all, it's a simply enormous state, and in that way, encompasses almost a "natural crossroads." From lush bayous and mangroves in the far east, to arid desert in the west, and everything in between, Texas is unique in every way.

A small part of east Texas is called the "Piney Woods" by locals. Its trees include the longleaf pine, the shortleaf pine, and the loblolly pine, along with various broadleaf trees. The piney woods stretch from east Texas into Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. It encompasses the area east of Dallas and north of Houston.

While dominated by woods, it's also quite swampy. They contain bayous and sloughs, essentially forests with water for a forest floor. These sloughs are prime real estate for wood ducks. Wood ducks nest in old woodpecker holes. At two or three days old, the ducklings will daringly jump from their hole into the underlying water or leaf litter, at their mother's call. The woods also contain familiar animals such as possums, deer, and raccoons.

Farther west are various types of prairie, which is the landscape that dominates Texas. In these prairies, there are very few trees, replaced by various grasses and wildflowers. The

animals change in the prairie. The deer disappear and squirrels give way to prairie dogs. The prairie dogs are of particular interest. These are actually ground squirrels but are called dogs because of their doglike bark. They live underground in vast colonies called prairie dog towns. Many of the eastern birds, which prefer forests and suburbs, are replaced by ground birds such as the meadowlark, the dickcissel, and the bobolink, as well as many other sparrows that enjoy the seeds that are found in the prairie.

In the western tip of Texas, prairie turns to desert; specifically, the Chihuahuan Desert. The grasses give way to sagebrush and cacti, and the animals again change. Here, there are burrowing owls, rattlesnakes, and roadrunners. Instead of trees, woodpeckers make their holes in the towering cacti. Here in the desert, only 9.6 inches of rain falls per year, compared to 46.6 inches per year in New York City.

A male wood duck.

A baby wood duck.

A female wood duck.

A prairie dog.

AMAZING ESCAPES!

START

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

Easy puzzle 1

3	8		
2	7		
+	-	x	÷

Solution For Easy 1

L + 2 x (8 - 8)

Medium puzzle 1

14	16		
3	15		
+	-	x	÷

Solution for Medium 1

8 - 91 + 91 + 91
8 x 91 = (91 - 91)

Hard puzzle 1

21	27		
3	22		
+	-	x	÷

Solution for Hard 1

L2 - 12 + 8 x 22

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

Across

7 Agatha Christie genre (7)

8 Book's introduction (7)

10 Inscription in a book (10)

13 Album (9)

16 Inexpensive book (9)

17 Place to check out books (7)



THE
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