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LIFE &

TRADITION

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CULTURE

Retired State Senator in New Battle Against Domestic Communism

Richard Hayden Black says communism is spreading at 'breakneck pace,' seizing power by creating divisions



Richard Hayden Black at his residence in Virginia.

MAUREEN NEWMAN

A Vietnam War veteran and former Virginia state senator is at the center of a new battle: pushing back on domestic communism in the United States.

After 16 years in the Virginia House of Delegates and Virginia Senate, Sen. Richard Hayden Black withdrew from the office in 2020, but not the community. On June 22, he spoke at a school board meeting in his county of residence, Loudoun County.

The county is west of Washington, D.C., where liberal-leaning northern Virginia and the more conservative parts of the state meet. It has become ground zero for the fight against critical race theory (CRT), a variation of Marxism that interprets society through the lens of racial class struggle and

sees inherent racism in the foundations of Western societies.

Black's self-introduction caused a stir in the crowd. A sense of respect and anticipation arose in the air. People knew him and burst into louder and louder cheers as he criticized school board members for suppressing freedom of speech by encouraging an enemies list to punish CRT opponents.

He moved on to condemn the proposed transgender policies, which allow boys who self-identify as girls to use girls' bathrooms and locker rooms. The crowd cheered more, and many stood up to express their agreement.

Immediately, the school board members voted to end the public comment period and retreated from the dais, making Black the approximately 50th and effectively the last speaker out of 289 total registered. As he was walking toward the exit of the board-

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Richard Hayden Black

room, many approached him to thank him and shake hands with him.

Defending freedom isn't new for Black. He spent 32 years altogether in the U.S. Marine Corps (rising to the rank of colonel) and the U.S. Army JAG Corps, the legal arm of the U.S. Army. He holds three Legions of Merit, the Purple Heart Medal, the Navy Commendation Medal with "V" for Valor, the Combat Action Ribbon, and two Presidential Unit Citations.

Face-to-Face With Communism

The last time he was face-to-face with communism was in Vietnam. "Lord, if this is it, I'm ready. But if not, I won't forget," Black said his shortest prayer ever in a rice paddy near Hoi An, Vietnam, in 1967.

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Wisdom and Wonder: The Magic of Fairy Tales

JEFF MINICK

In my 1967 edition of "The World's Best Fairy Tales: A Reader's Digest Anthology," which sits at my elbow as I write these words, former children's librarian Marie Cimino introduces this 800-page collection in this way: "In this world, virtue is always rewarded, evil is punished, the weak are helped and the youngest can be the winner. The fairy tale offers reassurance, at the same time that it appeals to the taste for the marvelous."

At the end of this brief essay, Cimino adds this note about fairy tales: "Listening to them or reading them, children will experience some of the enduring wisdom of other times, when the sense of wonder was very much alive."

Many adults love fairy tales as well. Visit your local library or bookstore, and you'll find dozens of fantasy novels aimed at older readers, classics ranging from Tolkien's

"Lord of the Rings" to John Hood's 2021 "Mountain Folk," his tale of the American Revolution in which the likes of Daniel Boone and George Washington consort with dwarves and sprites.

Fairy tales also act as primers in virtue and morality.

Wisdom

My Reader's Digest Anthology includes, of course, the tale of Cinderella. Here are the two step-sisters who scorn and mock her, the fairy godmother, the glass slipper, the ball at which the beautiful Cinderella draws the rapt attention of the handsome prince, his search for her when she disappears, and his proposal of marriage when he finds her.

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"Cinderella at the Kitchen Fire," 1848, by Thomas Sully.

CULTURE

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Mortar shells whistled by, landing closer and closer to where he took cover in the mud. One more would have hit him.

He survived, and he didn't forget.

In 1966, on a flight to bring in supplies to a South Vietnamese encampment, Black flew over a village. All of the people in the village had been beheaded. "The mothers, the fathers, everybody, their heads were on poles. There was just enormous brutality and cruelty. It's not that the United States didn't make mistakes in Vietnam, but anyone who thought that we were on the wrong side does not understand the evil of the people who took over there."

Many years later, in 2012, Black met with generals and senior officials of the government of South Vietnam; all of them had been imprisoned in concentration camps after the communists took over. They spent a large part of their lives in those camps, anywhere from 13 to 26 years. They said about a third of all the people in the camps died there.

In some camps, the men would just be stripped naked and sent to the jungle to forage for grubs, insects, and earthworms. And if their wives knew they were in that camp, the wives would want to bring them food. The only way they were ever allowed to bring food was if they would submit to rape by the camp guards. "So, you can imagine what that put the wives through. The choice of watching their husband starve to death or submitting to rape is just so fundamentally evil," said Black.

One official from a Catholic village recalled that, after Saigon's fall, the communists tracked down the parish priest and took him to the center of the village. They forced all of the people from the village to come and watch. Then, they lit the priest on fire. They burned him to death as a way

“During the days of the Soviet Union, they always recognized that race was a dividing point.”

Richard Hayden Black

Black spoke to pilots and air crews just after the Syrian Army drove ISIS from Palmyra in 2018.



COURTESY OF RICHARD BLACK



Black points to a photo taken on May 8, 1967, when he and his radioman chose to go on a rescue mission; at the time they were awaiting the next flight home. Ten minutes after the photo was taken, everyone in the photo was wounded or killed.

of saying, if you're a Christian, this is what happens to you. You're next.

In Black's view, communism became a religion, and that's why it excluded all other faiths.

A Changed America

Black returned to the United States in 1967 and saw America going through "disturbing" changes. He had worked in the reptile industry in Florida before leaving for Vietnam. While enjoying the solitude of the swamps as he used to do, he saw teenage girls hitchhiking down the road after midnight.

"It symbolized the coming collapse of American culture," said Black, adding that although he saw it in Florida, it was happening across the nation. "It was sort of this free love, drugs, and sex era that came out of the Vietnam times. And so that was the first that I started seeing the unraveling of America, America's culture. It's not necessarily the only one. For me, I was 22 when I came back from Vietnam, and I found it troubling."

Black studied at the University of Florida-Gainesville, where he found that the Soviet Union had infiltrated the anti-war movement and was using it for its own ends. Eric Dittis, a fellow student and head of the Student Mobilization to End the War, mobilized thousands of people and sent them to Washington to protest.

Black said he and Dittis shared an odd friendship as they were both ideology-driven, albeit very different ideologies. He asked Dittis where he got the money to organize such big demonstrations. Dittis shared that his organization was almost entirely funded by the Soviet Union.

Black said Karl Marx, the original author of communism, anticipated uniting peasants against landowners and capitalists. However, when communism was implemented in

Russia, communists discovered that workers were easier to organize. Every culture has this friction over fault lines that communists seek to exploit, said Black. "During the days of the Soviet Union, they always recognized that race was a dividing point."

"The cultural changes, the moral changes, are sort of the underpinnings for everything. It's the foundation. But what I'm seeing is that we're taking away the foundations of a stable country and that I am watching communism spreading at a breakneck pace because communism always attempts to seize power by creating divisions."

The Battle Continues

"It has reached an incredibly dangerous point at this time, where we honestly risk the fragmentation and disintegration of our culture. I can't tell you that I'm sure that the United States will exist as a cohesive nation 20 years from now. I can't say that," said Black.

"We are in a situation today where the communists back when I was in college realized that the fissure in American society was a racial one. And they've worked very hard to exploit that. And at the same time, they recognize that to collapse society and bring about a communist revolution, they have to also take out all of the moral underpinnings of society. And this is what we see being done."

His speech at the June 22 Loudoun County School Board meeting was one of his efforts in pushing back domestic communism. In the age of 77, Black is still fighting. "If I doubt that America is going to hang together for 20 more years, and my grandchildren are going to be young men and women 20 years from now, they've got to live. I want something left of this country. That makes it worthwhile."

Wisdom and Wonder: The Magic of Fairy Tales

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And just before the story ends:

"Her two sisters threw themselves at her feet to beg pardon for all the ill-treatment they had made her undergo. Cinderella embraced them and cried that she forgave them with her whole heart and desired them always to love her."

And the last sentence:

"Cinderella, who was no less good than she was beautiful, gave her two sisters lodging in the palace and, that very same day, matched them with two great lords of the court."

The conventional rendition of "Cinderella" teaches lessons in modesty, hope, and generosity. As Marie Cimino suggests, other fairy tales—"Chicken Little," "The Emperor's New Clothes," "Hansel and Gretel," and so many more—also act as primers in virtue and morality.

A Sense of Wonder

Moreover, talking animals, elves, wicked witches, and stalwart heroes enliven and expand the imaginations of young children. Whether they're reading fairy tales or hearing them, the minds of the little ones catch fire with these stories. When I tell my preschool grandchildren "The Three Billy Goats Gruff," changing my voice for the troll and for each of the goats, they sit enraptured by the performance. Another grandson recently wanted me to read the story of "Jack and the Beanstalk" to him over and over again, seeing himself in his mind's eye, I am certain, as the intrepid Jack.

As we grow older, we may lose this wonderment regarding fairy tales, but not wonder itself. Like physical fitness or intelligence, wonder grows with exercise. The young woman fed a diet of nursery rhymes and fairy tales as a child finds majesty and beauty in a meadow or a human face that others may miss.

Evolution

Fairy tales mutate through time and from place to place. There are many versions of Cinderella, for example, from around the world and from antiquity until now. Some of these are quite strange—in one Italian rendition, Cinderella is born inside a gourd, abandoned by her mother, and is beaten and abused by a prince until she appears before him in disguise—and some are dark, gruesome tales.

In her online article "The Most Popular Fairy Tale Stories of All Time," Ariel Zeitlin tells us that Cinderella is first on this list by far and that "there may be as many as 1,500 traditional variants of the tale from around the world, including 'The Girl with the Rose Red Slippers' from ancient Egypt and a ninth-century A.D. Chinese version that just might explain the story's fascination with small feet."

A Step Too Far?

But is it possible to modernize and twist the messages and even the plots of fairy tales beyond recognition?

In her review of the latest version of Cinderella, "Why Camila Cabello's 'Cinderella' made these 7 changes to the fairytale," Ashley Lee tells us this "is not your mother's fairytale."

Here Cabello plays a Cinderella who goes to the basement not as a punishment but to work as a fashion designer. Her first paying customer is Prince Robert, a royal who is reluctant to be king. Cinderella's fairy "godmother" is the non-binary "Fab G," who wants to help her go to the royal ball to "meet a bunch of rich people who will change your life." While there, she turns down the prince's proposal. "I have dreams that I have to chase," she says. "So if it's a choice, I choose me."

Meanwhile, the pop musical features no wicked stepmother. In an interview, the film's writer-director, Kay Cannon, said, "I didn't want there to be any 'evil' in the movie at all." The stepmother instead begs Cinderella to marry the prince to solve their financial problems, which raises an obvious question: If a man who would be king is smitten with you, and you with him, why not marry, become queen, and design and sell your dresses?

"I choose me." Is that the lesson we want from fairy tales?

Paying Homage to Tradition

Writers and film directors likewise have the right to do as they please when retelling these treasured tales, but they also have a responsibility to honor the wisdom and morality of the original story. When they create a fairy godmother with a non-binary gender, they have effectively changed the definition of "godmother." When Cinderella becomes an egotist looking out for No. 1, the writer has eroded the meaning of the story.



"Hänsel und Gretel," unknown date, by Alexander Zick.



An illustration for "Jack and the Beanstalk," 1907, from "The Red Fairy Book" by Andrew Lang.

Whether they're reading fairy tales or hearing them, the minds of the little ones catch fire with these stories.

In her critique of Kay Cannon's "Cinderella," a friend asked me, "Are filmmakers really so out of touch with their audience?"

Her question later led me to wonder: What if modern audiences prefer a self-centered, career-minded Cinderella to the char-girl in the traditional tale? What would that say about us?

Connections and a Compass

In "What Your Kindergarten Needs to Know," a part of the Core Knowledge program aimed at students in grades K-6, editors E.D. Hirsch Jr. and John Holdren include poems, stories, and fairy tales that should be commonly known by children.

The idea behind this educational program is that all young people, who will one day become adults, share these poems and stories central to our culture, thereby building bridges between individuals and within communities. Familiarity with "Jack and Jill," "Little Boy Blue," "The Little Red Hen," and "The Ugly Duckling" creates an intersection of shared knowledge and experience among our citizens.

In his "Preface" to "The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know," Hirsch expands on this concept: "Community is built up of shared knowledge and values—the same shared knowledge that is taken for granted when we read a book or a newspaper, and that is also taken for granted as part of the fabric that connects us to one another."

Traditional fairy tales are included in that fabric. In addition, their values and their heroes can give a map and compass to our children for life. As G.K. Chesterton wrote:

"Fairy tales do not give the child his first idea of bogey. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon."

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.

5 Homeschooling Tips From a Successful Pioneer

ANNIE HOLMQUIST

Although we didn't know it then, my family was what is now referred to as a pioneer of the modern homeschool movement. I still remember being stopped at the grocery store—several years after we began our homeschool journey—being asked why I wasn't in school, inwardly wincing at the alarmed or confused look I was sure to get upon announcing my homeschool status, and then being shocked when my questioner had actually heard of such a thing.

Homeschooling is now mainstream, thanks especially to COVID-19. The 3 percent pre-COVID homeschool population exploded to 11 percent by fall 2020, the Census Bureau reports. That momentum promises to continue as parents tire of school mask mandates and curriculum focused on critical race theory.

The more I research, the more I believe that parents will set their children on the path to success if they simply teach them to love reading.

But just because homeschooling has gone mainstream doesn't mean the road will be easy for those sacrificing to give their children a solid education at home. There will be hard days where you just want to send your children back to sit in a classroom with a mask on. Don't give in to that temptation. Instead, think of homeschooling as a "TREAT," and be encouraged by

these five small things that I learned from homeschooling:

T-Time

When my family reflects on our homeschool memories, the many hours spent on math problems and (often failed) science experiments aren't what we remember. Instead, it's the time we occasionally took to do out-of-the-ordinary things, such as field trips to the potato chip factory and the old-fashioned radio museum, or the fancy dinner to practice the etiquette we learned. Taking a picnic lunch and a library book to the nearby hillside and reading there for the entire day, just because the book couldn't be renewed, is one of our simplest, most favorite memories of homeschooling.

R-Read

The more I research, the more I believe that parents will set their children on the path to success if they simply teach them to love reading. The reason is simple: Reading is the key to all education, and those who love reading often become lifelong learners whose education doesn't stop with high school or college. One of the easiest ways to build this love is to spend time reading out loud as a family.

E-Education Holes

In recent years, it seems to have become trendy for adults who were homeschooled to scorn their schooling, saying that it wasn't effective because they "have holes in their education." I have news for those people:

Everyone has holes in their education.

Your child—whether in public, private, or home school—will never know everything there is to know. But if you, as a homeschool parent, can teach him to love learning, then he will have tools to fill those holes as he heads into the world. That fact should free you as a parent from worrying over whether you are choosing the right curriculum or covering enough material—just do your best!

A-Advantage

Take advantage of the flexibility homeschooling offers. It won't kill you to readjust your schedule to do school in the evening now and then or for a week in the summertime in order to take time off in the fall. My family used our flexibility to help grandparents with yard work and do service projects at church. And while it took until the latter years of our homeschooling career to figure this out, the week after Labor Day is an excellent time to plan a family vacation, as the weather is still summerlike and tourist traps are empty because everyone else is back in school.

T-Teacher Care

I'd be lying if I told you that parents aren't adding to their load when they homeschool—teaching plus parenting is hard work! Which is why it's important to avoid burnout when you see signs cropping up. One of the simplest ways to do this is to get everyone out

of the house for a brisk walk whenever you feel stress rising.

Above all, don't be too hard on yourself. Chances are, you—with your love and concern for your children—are liable to do far better educating them than the public schools ever would. If you doubt this, just compare your children's annual test scores to those on the Nation's Report Card for a boost of confidence.

Let me point you to similar advice from John Taylor Gatto, a former New York teacher of the year. In his book "Dumbing Us Down," Gatto wrote:

"After an adult lifetime spent teaching school, I believe the method of mass schooling is its only real content. Don't be fooled into thinking that good curriculum or good equipment or good teachers are the critical determinants of your son's or daughter's education. All the pathologies we've considered come about in large measure because the lessons of school prevent children from keeping important appointments with themselves and with their families to learn lessons in self-motivation, perseverance, self-reliance, courage, dignity, and love—and lessons in service to others, too, which are among the key lessons of home and community life."

So here's to a great school year for you and yours! A few more of these, engineered by diligent parents and grandparents across the country, and we may begin to see our nation turn back to traditional values and clear thinking.

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

LOUISE BEVAN

A California 10th-grader with \$20 in his pocket, a handwritten sign, and a selfless ambition started selling handmade ice pops outside his high school to raise funds for rent, food, and a motorized wheelchair for his mother.

Thanks to an outpouring of community support, Kevin Giovanni Esparza has since raised more than \$5,000.

Kevin's mom, Maria Esparza, 48, can't work, owing to arthritis and diabetes; she also has a medical condition that inflicts pain in "multiple places at once," as Kevin describes it.

"What inspired me is my mom, because she always told me that she had a dream of me buying her a house and a car," Kevin, 14, told The Epoch Times. "I want to complete her dream."

Kevin's mom is especially dear to his heart. He was born prematurely at just five months gestation, and his father left the family. The teen boy has been helping his struggling mother change, bathe, and brush her hair, and helps with sweeping and mopping.

Maria, who speaks Spanish, spoke to The Epoch Times with Kevin acting as translator. She said she's proud of him, and that he is an "amazing son" and an "excellent student."

Kevin said: "My mom has been an excellent parent for me: mother and father. For that hard work of raising me, I thank her very much. It's thanks to her that I'm here. Now it's my turn to take care of her."

Kevin and his family have lived in their Bakersfield home for a year. With his first \$20, Kevin bought the ingredients he needed to make pineapple and cucumber ice pops, or "bolis," in July, selling them outside South High School in Bakersfield.

With his first profits, he branched out into an array of flavors, including strawberry, mango, Oreo cookie, pineapple, cucumber lime, cucumber jicama, and coconut almond.

When one of their supportive locals, Gregorio Arellano, caught wind of Kevin's venture, he decided to help the teen reach a wider audience. Arellano posted a photo of Kevin at his ice-pop stand on Facebook. He urged locals to stop and buy an ice pop if driving past.

"I have personally seen him pushing his mom around on the streets in a wheelchair," Arellano wrote. The post was shared thousands of times.

According to Arellano, scam fundraising accounts had been opened in the 10th-grader's name. So Kevin began accepting donations through Cash App and Venmo, and generosity wasn't in short supply. Candy shop owner Beatriz Magdaleno, of @juicypickatreats, even stepped up as Kevin's fundraising partner, reported Bakersfield Now.

"He doesn't even know it, but he's a good example for other kids," Magdaleno told the outlet.

Between candy sales and Kevin's bolis, the pair made close to \$5,000.

Kevin said he credits his community for their support from the outset. He said the customers' response was "amazing." The teen expressed his gratitude, saying the community's kindness has made him experience a heartfelt joy that he "couldn't contain."

"They have been amazing," he said. "They have been supporting us, and thanks to them that we made it this far."

Kevin hopes other teenagers follow his lead.

"What I would like them to do is support their parents, love them with all their hearts," he said. "There's a lot of teenagers that don't help out their parents anymore."

Kevin says his mom raised him with his grandparents' core values of honesty, humility, respect, and obedience.

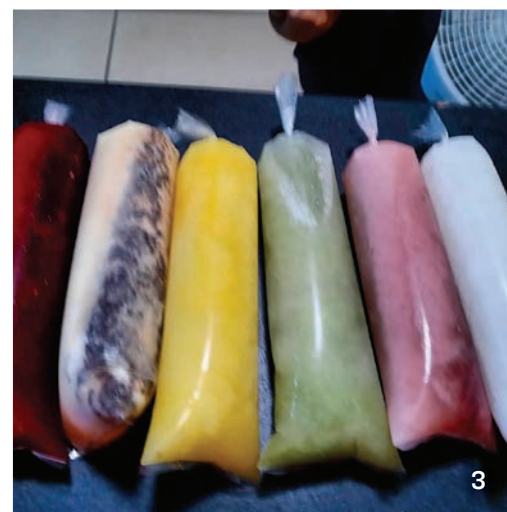
The young man now has a plan for the future. With all the help he's receiving from the community, he wants to grow his business "bigger and bigger," eventually opening an ice-pop company so that he can share his bolis with the world.

Teen Starts Ice Pop Business to Help Sick Mom Pay Rent

'It's my turn to take care of her,' says 10th-grader Kevin Esparza



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF KEVIN GIOVANNI ESPARZA



1. Kevin Giovanni Esparza with a sign advertising his ice pops. 2. Kevin with his mother Maria. 3. Kevin's handmade ice pops.

With his first \$20, Kevin bought the ingredients he needed to make pineapple and cucumber ice pops.

Family Love Is the Foundation of Civilization

The near universal preference for one's own children isn't a disorder

KIMBERLY ELLS

Commentary

Rebecca Roache, senior lecturer in philosophy at Royal Holloway, University of London writes, "The wish to be biologically related to one's children, like the wish to associate only within one's racial group, can have harmful effects."

Similarly, Dr. Ezio Di Nucci of the University of Copenhagen writes, "A preference towards children one is biologically related to is morally illegitimate" and that the tendency to prefer one's own children is a "moral vice." He says this is so because "in the context of parental love, biological considerations are normatively irrelevant."

Despite these declarations from academics in ivory towers, almost all parents from all across the globe display a "passionate determination ... to protect and prefer their own children." Does this mean that all families of the earth are infected with a kind of "systemic familial racism?" That seems to be the growing sentiment, though it's usually couched in less-alarming language.

But the almost universal preference for one's own children isn't a disease, a disorder, a symptom of inequality, or a sign of racism. Most people call it something else—love. And most people believe it's a good thing. In fact, the love of mothers and fathers has historically been the standard against which all other love is measured.

Is it surprising that when we go to a piano recital, we're most anxious to hear our own child play? Is it shocking that when we go to a high school football game, we hope the coach calls our kid off the bench to give it his best shot? No, these aren't signs of systemic racism or inequality. These are the very things that bind the world together. They are the things that provide almost every person on earth with their very own cheering section and support system.

Loving Everyone

But why should it matter? Should it matter which child or which parent belongs to whom? Aren't we supposed to love everyone? Aren't we supposed to love everyone as ourselves? Isn't that the grand goal? Yes. But that's a tall order, and it takes a very long time to learn. Learning to love works better in small, cohesive sets of people who belong to each other. The small sets of people we get to practice loving are our families. In time, when we come to realize that everyone in the world is literally part of our vast, interconnected family, we love everyone better because we learned to love some people in our micro-families first.

When a child is orphaned or separated from her parents for some reason, a just society works to remedy that situation in a way that is in the best interest of the child. Adoption—while rarely seamless—often offers a child the wonderful



Family relationships are based on connection rather than competition.

opportunity of living in a family where she is claimed and loved, following the pattern established by biological belonging and stewardship.

Defeating Kinship

Since the days of Plato, philosophers of many stripes have argued that parents are nothing special and that non-parents could raise children better than their own flesh and blood. In the 1970s, author Shulamith Firestone wrote, "A mother who undergoes a nine-month pregnancy is likely to feel that the product of all that pain and discomfort 'belongs' to her. ... But we want to destroy this possessiveness."

In 2017, anti-marriage advocate and radical feminist Merav Michaeli said that the stewardship of fathers over their children caused "ongoing hurt in children" and proposed that biological relationships not be recognized by the state but rather the state should endorse child custody agreements wherein "a child can have more than two parents; they don't necessarily have to be his biological parents or her biological parents."

Further, in 2019, feminist Sophie Lewis said we must "explode notions of hereditary parentage" and work for the widespread "defeat of kinship." She also declared that "infants don't belong to anyone, ever," which flatly denies the validity of family bonds.

Those who wish to abolish or de-

nounce the bonds of mothers and fathers because they foster possessiveness or racism of some variety are grossly misguided. They underestimate the power of familial belonging, the supremacy of sacrificial serving, and the anatomical design of humans which demands them both.

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The long, arduous dedication required in helping a small, incapable person become a big, capable person is a key component for growing love. And loving that which belongs to you isn't wicked. It's good.

A Place of Connection, not Competition

Conception and birth connect us to each other inescapably by forging what we have come to call family relationships. If this weren't the case, and life were set up more like the classic novel "Lord of the Flies," in which people are essentially airdropped into a community instead of being birthed into specific families in a

community, there would be no discernible connections between people. Socialist utopists call this "equality." What it brings is cutthroat chaos. It brings rivalries or alliances. Starting life from a place of neutrality or opposition rather than connection is more likely to result in enmity, animosity, hatred, and death.

Fortunately, either by a stroke of luck or by the design of God, family relationships launch people from a place of connection rather than competition.

The physical links between parents and children ensure that everyone starts from a place of connected belonging and specific placement, which secures for them the best possible potential for surviving and for experiencing love. Hatred or indifference is still possible, but inherent belonging accomplished by the formation of families tips the scales in favor of love.

So is loving your own child a racist, "moral vice?" Well, if a new mother cared no more for her newborn babe than for the baby in the next room, the world—and the babies in it—would be in a world of hurt. In fact, I submit that such a world couldn't last one generation. Family love isn't racism. It's the very foundation of civilization.

Kimberly Ells is the author of "The Inevitable Family: Why the Global Campaign to Crush Motherhood and Fatherhood Can't Win" and is a policy adviser for Family Watch International.

Your family is your very own cheering section and support system.

GUSTAVO FRINGI/PEKELS.COM

Why Follow Your Conscience?

GRATTAN BROWN

During World War II, a group of college students calling themselves "The White Rose" wrote leaflets against Nazism and were executed. Another person of conscience during the war, German industrialist Oskar Schindler changed the fate of 1,200 Jews, whose families now thrive, and they honor him today.

Sadly, communism survived World War II and continued to persecute and impoverish millions of people. At the same time, it moved people to adopt better ways of life in opposition. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's ability for self-criticism led him to trenchant criticism of the Soviet system in "The Gulag Archipelago." In China, Liu Xiaobo provided intellectual and political leadership to his fellow Chinese working for human rights, and Li Hongzhi offered a traditional spirituality of hope to millions in the Falun Gong movement.

Adherents of Falun Gong are known for their courage, and behind their courage is their conscience. They've chosen the hard right rather than the easy wrong when people's lives depended on them. But mostly they've carried out the ordinary activities of daily life like everyone else.

Following your conscience in everyday life is good practice for those moments when a few courageous, well-chosen actions make a great difference. Most people aspire to do the right thing under pressure, but not to live under pressure. Fortunately, we're not constantly tested. But the downside is that we don't always become stronger, more prepared to stand up for the right thing.

Following your conscience turns out to be one of the most important spiritual moves for living at peace in a conflicted world. You're more likely to live your best self every day, be more successful and peaceful, and affect more people than you realize.

What Is Conscience?

Conscience is not consciousness. Waking up makes you conscious but doesn't arouse your conscience.

There are lots of definitions, but your conscience is essentially your best judgment about how to put your best self into action. It's one of the most powerful movements in your heart and soul. People often associate conscience with guilt, but following it can bring great peace, spiritual strength, motivation, and success.

Your conscience is a judgment about your actions: whether they're right or wrong, and, if they're right, whether they are good, better, or the best you can perform. If you're like most people, you're probably doing all right but could do better. That's your conscience telling you to take your game to the next level.

"Conscience" comes from ancient Greek courtroom language: *syn* + *eidesis*, which the Romans translated *con* + *scientia* = with + knowledge.

Looking at Your Conscience ... **Looking Back at You** But let's be honest, sometimes your judgment is off. Your conscience is wrong. That's not a deal-breaker, especially if you tried ... and keep trying. The good news is that you learn.

People learn best by studying a little every day. One of the best ways to know and love yourself is to spend 5 to 10 minutes at the end of each day asking yourself what you did well, what you did poorly, and why. Perhaps describe what you did in a journal and reread it. For the good and the bad, ask, "Why did I do it?" Did it go toward mak-



German students Hans Scholl (1918–1943, L) and his sister Sophie (1921–1943), circa 1940. Both were members of the non-violent White Rose resistance group against the Nazis. After their arrest for distributing anti-war leaflets at the University of Munich, they were convicted of high treason and executed by guillotine.

the spiritual strength to do the right thing under pressure and turn bad situations into good ones. Conscience can be a kind but firm challenger when you know deep down you're going astray. It can also be a passionate advocate when you're doing well and teach you how to live and love better. But you have to pay attention.

Conscience is connected to powerful emotions such as guilt, shame, and poor self-esteem. Emotions are sometimes reliable, sometimes not. Shame is a great example. We can feel ashamed when we've done nothing wrong or when we have. We can feel unashamed when we really have done something wrong and have become hardened and blind to it. Negative emotions can be an early warning system that something is wrong, but we have to think about them to recognize it.

No one forces you to follow your conscience. You've probably already figured out that if someone tries forcing you to do something that makes you uncomfortable, it's a good time to engage your conscience and figure out why.

You have to choose to follow your conscience. Your conscience will speak up to let you know things. But sometimes other voices speak more loudly. Like a wise counselor, your conscience is often quieter but more patient and insistent. When you choose against your conscience, you disappoint yourself. That's one of the worst feelings of all.

Following your conscience means avoiding what you know is wrong, doing what you know is right, and striving for the greatest goals in the best way. It doesn't mean you have to change the world or be amazing, but if that's your calling, go for it. Using your talents and skills to serve others in professional life, to help friends and others in need, to get and stay married, to raise a family, and make a positive impact on your community are the great goals of ordinary life.

Looking at Your Conscience ...

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ing you the kind of person you hope to be? What should you change and what should you keep the same for tomorrow?

Be honest with yourself, and pay close attention if you did something your conscience was telling you not to do. That might be a weakness and a sign of danger: the relationship that shouldn't continue, the crutch of lying to gain unfair advantage, cutting corners on work projects, taking friends and family for granted, failing to stand for justice for a neighbor, or neglecting physical fitness and mental health.

Expect to wrestle with your conscience. Sometimes you'll want to choose against your best judgment. Some questions are hard, and in some situations you'll be confused about what's wrong, right, good, better, and best. But if you take a few minutes every evening to look back at your day and listen to your conscience, you'll become a stronger person and better friend to more people.

If you regularly explain to yourself why you think you did well or poorly, you become more conscious of your moral standards. You might not think of your moral standards very often, and that's not necessarily bad. But everyone has them and acts on them, and no one needs to tell you that they become very important in difficult or controversial situations.

Some of these moral controversies go on inside us. They arise for different reasons and can be complicated or simple or somewhere in between. But turning your attention to the standards you've lived by so far can confirm them, engage them, lead you to better, more humane standards, or even cause a wholesale conversion in your life.

Sometimes we're our own worst critics. We can denigrate our true accomplishments and at the same time rationalize and overlook our darker motivations. You need a wise outside voice to silence the devilish ones within and recognize the true voice of your own conscience. Good mentors help you look smartly at situations, spot the wrong, and aim for the good, the better, and the best. In the end, you judge, you own it, and you act.

Why Follow Your Conscience?

Your actions have consequences. Sometimes you have to make up to others for what you did. If so, do it as soon as possible and with a good heart. That helps you deal with those other consequences: the ones inside you. Your actions have consequences inside you as well as out. When you make things truly right with others, you change yourself inside.

Your conscience has important things to tell you, and if you don't pay attention, it will be quiet for a while. That's how people fall into bad, sometimes tragic or fatal habits. But every once in a while, conscience will speak up again, often triggered when situations make you recognize the bad habit. Listen. It's worth it.

Following your conscience makes you a good judge of character, beginning with your own. If you know what to look for in yourself, you know what to look for in others. Being a good judge of your own character builds self-confidence. Being a good judge of others' character builds strong professional relationships and, most importantly, strong friendships, marriages, and families.

At the end of your day, ... week, year, and life, you'll live at peace in a conflicted world, have had a positive impact on many lives, and leave your community better than you found it.

Tying the Knots

Man proposes adoption to stepdaughters on wedding day



Donte Williams with Abigail and Natalie.

LOUISE BEVAN

On his wedding day, a groom from Detroit, Michigan, delivered vows to not one but three special ladies in his life. Moments before tying the knot, he turned to his bride's two young daughters, whom he has known for years, and surprised them with a life-changing question: "Can I adopt you?"

Donte Williams, 33, married 26-year-old Myshella Burton on Aug. 13. The newlywed told The Epoch Times that his wife's girls—Abigail, 9, and Natalie, 8—knew he was "the one" for their mom even before she did, upon meeting him seven years ago.

His plan to propose adoption was only finalized the day before the wedding. "We did rehearsal the day before," Donte said. "I pulled our officiant to the side and I told her, 'Hey, I want to write some

vows for my daughters. And she said, 'Does anybody know about this?'"

It's a surprise, Donte replied. Having written vows for his Detroit-native wife in advance, Donte, who was originally from Cleveland wrote his proposal to the girls on the morning of the wedding day. At the altar, Abigail and Natalie were stunned when their stepdad flipped the script.

"They were looking like, 'We didn't rehearse this, what's going on?'" Donte recalled. "My wife, she didn't know what was going on. ... Everybody was emotional, crying, and it was a lot of love in the room."

In footage of the moving moment shared on Instagram, Abigail and Natalie look visibly emotional as Donte works through tears to make his speech. "Although they are not biologically mine, blood could not make us

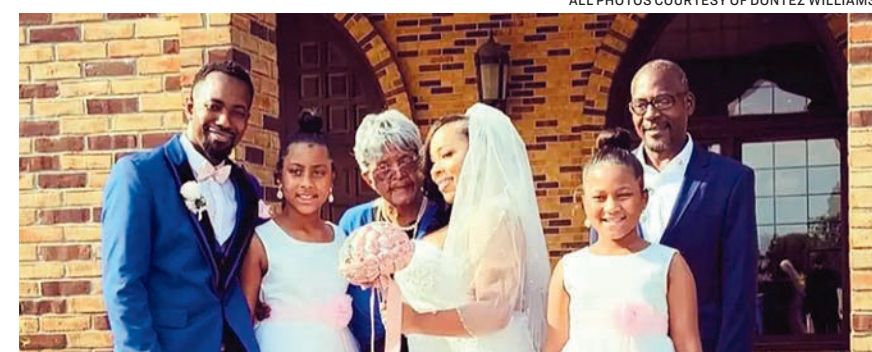
any closer," he captioned the touching post.

In an excerpt from Donte's adoption proposal, he addresses the girls:

"When I first came into your lives the very first day, you both enjoyed my company so much that you told me you loved me. From that moment, I felt I was destined to be there for you both. ... You both help me become a better version of me. I know you both look at me as a father figure, and you both call me Dad, but I want to make it official and ask: Can I adopt you?"

The girls' emotional response, said Donte, brought the trio closer. The soon-to-be legal father is grateful that his videos have touched people's hearts and received such positivity.

A mental health case manager at Starfish Family Services for kids aged 6 to 18, Donte met Myshella, who works in obstetrics at a birthing center, on the dating website Plenty



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF DONTEZ WILLIAMS

of Fish and went on their first date in 2015. They got engaged in 2018 when Donte set up his "perfect" proposal with the help of friends at Detroit's Metro Beach, with rose petals, candles, and a romantic dinner.

However, before asking Myshella to marry him, Donte asked the girls' permission. "They were happy; they said yes," he told The Epoch Times.

Donte also said that the kids were really excited about the wedding and began counting days to it.

He said he was raised by his mother, though his father was also present in his life. With 13

brothers and sisters on his father's side, Donte also grew up with an uncle and cousins around the same age and thinks of himself as always having been family-oriented.

Although they are not biologically mine, blood could not make us any closer.

Donte Williams

As for the girls, Donte said Abigail was smitten with him from the get-go, her eyes "lighting up" at their second meeting on her second birthday. Meanwhile, Natalie was more standoffish. "But once Natalie did get close to me, she became more of a Daddy's girl," Donte reflected. "She became the one that wrapped me around her finger."

Over the years, Donte has built a strong

DEAR NEXT GENERATION

Lessons From Dad: A Simple List of 10

→ Advice from our readers to our young people

Dad says to:

Be proud of who you are. You're unique. Be careful with your words. They can easily hurt. Love with all your might. It's all worth the risk. Laugh a lot. It's good for your emotional and physical being. Cry when you need to. It's God's way of cleansing. Dream. Never stop dreaming. Never quit. Never. Ever. Strive to achieve, but know when to ease up. Stuff, although fun to collect, is still just stuff. Review decisions on a scale of 1 to 100, then make your choice.

—George Dunn

The advice I received from my father has served me for all my 57 years. It follows: "Do what is right, not what is most expedient!" It covers everything from carrying out the trash to speaking or practicing kindness to strangers or your family. YeeHah!

—Kendall Tomlinson, Texas

My twin brother Keith and I are partners in an artist supply store. I live nearby and usually walk to work. Occasionally, I need a car to run errands or make deliveries, so I hop in Keith's car and go. But every time I use his car it's almost out of gas.

How exasperating! I have to admit that I harbor a bit of resentment for someone who would so casually let things slip. Who would live so close to the edge, risking his safety and mine? Yet there it is—the little needle on the dash taunting me, "Do you feel lucky, punk?" I'll put in 10 bucks, which bumps up the gauge enough to do the delivery and return.

Don't get me wrong—Keith is a great guy. He's otherwise a kind, smart, really decent human being in great shape for a guy even 20 years younger. He volunteers at church, fixes every kids' broken bicycle, looks after his family and friends, and will say yes to every call for help.

But this little habit of his—this nonchalant, inconsiderate, childish, reckless habit—has threatened our lifetime bond. Except, being a timid kind of guy and not wanting to appear unthankful, I don't vent to him directly. Let's just say I may make a comment or two to anybody and everybody.

And I'm an open-minded kind of guy. I've walked in everybody's shoes. I understand how the world turns. Live and let live is my motto. But really—running on empty?

Then one day, I needed help with a delivery and I asked Keith's son, Nathan, to



"Laugh a lot. It's good for your emotional and physical being," writes George Dunn.

come with me. When I started the car, wouldn't you know, it was out of gas, as usual! Aaaagggghhhh. I pointed at the gauge and couldn't stop myself. I broke out into a rant about gasoline, our busy morning, death on the highways, irresponsible people, the fall of the Roman empire, and liberals and conservatives.

To his credit, Nathan just sat and let my voice flail around. I finally tired of listening to my echo.

Nathan said only, "That's the temperature gauge."

For the first time in my life, I was speechless. And I was wrong. Not just wrong. I was stupid wrong. I was "what a jerk" wrong.

All those hateful things and feelings I had spawned over the years were so bad. The invincibility that had grown around me over the past 60 years started to crack. If I could misjudge my twin brother—my womb mate—I could misjudge anyone and anything. Could an aging small city mom and pop retailer be wrong about other topics? My Lord knows I've spent more than 60 years instructing everyone within shouting distance about politics,

religion, Fords, and football games.

Maybe I should learn a new skill—listening.

I can only learn if I'm listening. But I want to listen to those who really know. I want to soak in the experience of the wisest voices in history. Less me—more Nathans.

Maybe I should learn a new skill—listening.

So I'm lying in bed with my legs arguing over who will be the first to move. I am thinking about tomorrow. Way tomorrow—like when I'm lying on my deathbed. Like the song says, "Is that all there is?" Do the memories of family, work, and home fill the Book of Everything? Have I lived a closed-minded life?

I imagine living in an old attic with no windows, secure but dull. Then I open one small window called "Family," and a tiny ray of light enters my attic life and I seek

interaction with my family.

Then I open the second little window, "Work," and I begin to really listen and care about our staff and customers.

With the third window, "Sports," I see a different direction and more light enters my life. I go to a couple of football games with family and begin a weekly frisbee golf routine.

The fourth window is called "Music," and my small attic is now less secure, but much less dull. I change talk radio stations to music stations.

The fifth window is large and much harder to open. It will completely illuminate my attic life. Maybe my neighbors will think less of me because I open my mind and my life to all directions. I want brilliant light to rule every move I make. I may worry about what others think, but I worry more about darkness. This window I call "Spiritual." I attend church every week and listen to what's said. I feel that I'm part of a bigger, caring family. This becomes my couple of hours a week where I escape from the crazy world and soak in peace, friendship, and acceptance.

Now I try not to judge others, because people in glass houses shouldn't throw stones, and I'm never alone.

The bottom line? I've spent 70 years wallowing in every dark temptation the world can showcase. My next century will be spent with all windows open. The last window helps me feel Love and Acceptance. I can see clearly now.

Life is brilliant and focused with many open windows. I learn about the greatest teacher, Jesus Christ, in the world's best-selling book—the Holy Bible. And I listen to the Nathans sharing my church every week.

Open your windows. The world is greater than it looks!

—Ken Harcus

When you're struggling to make a decision, just ask yourself, "What is the right thing to do?" Suddenly your decision will be very clear.

—Mel Gajewski

What advice would you like to give to the younger generations?

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 our 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, 5 Penn Plaza, 8th Fl., New York, NY, 10001

posted the scene on Facebook. But no one had. So she posted her own photo, sharing how the farmer's patriotic act inspired her.

She captioned: "This gentleman was busy mowing the large hayfield, but took the time to stop and stand for our national anthem. True respect.... hard working role model. He was even awarded a round of applause from the crowd following praise from the game announcer. Greatest thing I've seen in a long while."

The post went viral, garnering thousands of shares; while her notifications and comments exploded with "praise for the gentleman."

Through the comments, she soon learned the young man's name: Alex Couch.

"His younger sister had commented how she was so proud of her brother," Osborne said. "I have previously transported Alex's younger siblings on my school bus."

She said that Alex is a "wonderful role model."

"Our entire community is proud of Alex," she said. "We even received praise from the opposing football team fans from the game, which are from North Greene High School in Greenville."

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

heart," Osborne said.

As the band started playing, his show of respect captivated the crowd—to the point that the announcer called for a round of applause.

Then he waved his hat, climbed back in his tractor, and continued working—but not before Osborne snapped the perfect picture. It even had the American flag in it.

On returning home, the mom assumed that somebody else would have already



COURTESY OF MONICA OSBORNE

“The sight of this young man was almost magical, like something you'd only see in a movie or commercial on TV.”

Monica Osborne

The image captured by Monica Osborne in Virginia.

A Norman Rockwell Moment

A football game crowd cheers for a farmer in a neighboring field

MICHAEL WING

It was a picture-perfect moment—as golden as a Norman Rockwell painting.

Before a high school football game in Virginia, the national anthem was about to play. In a neighboring field, a lone farmer stood patriotically, respectfully, hand over heart.

Local mom Monica Osborne captured the magical scene on camera late August, as her son readied for his debut performance in the school band. The sight gave her chills.

"As I turned to face the flag, hand over heart, the sight of this young man was almost magical, like something you'd only see in a movie or commercial on TV," Osborne told *The Epoch Times*.

"I got very emotional to the point of feeling a lump in my throat and tears filling my eyes," she added. "I knew it was a special moment immediately."

The farmer had been mowing his hayfield for nearly an hour but shut off the tractor and mower a few minutes before the anthem. "He was already prepared, standing on the tire, hat in hand over his



Early years in school were spent in sparse wooden desks. Note the small hole to hold your ink bottle and grooved space for pencil or pen.

Once Upon a Time in a Classic Classroom

Memories from my childhood

ANITA L. SHERMAN

My 6-year-old granddaughter Maria is a first-grader this year. At this writing, and I pray it continues, her classes are in-person. Her kindergarten days were primarily spent in front of a computer due to the COVID-19 lockdowns.

She and I recently spent a delightful time shopping. It was a "grandmother date," and together we chose a few outfits for school and, of course, a pair of black patent leather Mary Janes. Some items are just classic and have remained. She told me that her mother, my daughter-in-law Rose, had purchased her school supplies ... crayons, pencils, highlighters.

Our excursion brought back many early, actually vintage childhood memories, or maybe you'd call it retro remembering.

My children are grown, so shopping (or ordering online) for packs of colored pencils isn't on my agenda, but I found myself reflecting on my back-to-school days growing up in Portland, Oregon.

Things Were Simpler

Yes, I know it's a cliché, but things were simpler then. I attended St. Rose, a Catholic elementary school. And for me, the ritual of heading back to those small wooden desks with a hole in the upper right corner to hold a bottle of blue Sheaffer's ink was sweet.

By third or fourth grade, we were expected to master the use of a fountain pen. I don't even think ballpoints had been invented. If they had, we didn't use them. For us, it was pencils, always to be kept razor sharp, and fountain pens.

Ink cartridges arrived on the scene later. We had to fine-tune the art of filling a fountain pen by gently mastering that tiny, slim silver lever on the side. A little and not enough ink always went in. Too much, and your fingers bore the permanent mark of your mistake.

And then, of course, there was Stephen. I'll never forget the image of him occasionally drinking the ink because it gave him a blue smile. Stephen was quirky.

Rulers were your basic plastic variety with the tiny white numbers that eventually wore off, and crayons were gradually getting packaged in bigger and bigger sets—but for most of us stopped at 24.

Scissors were small, rounded, and metal, and didn't cut very well.

Marbled composition books were very much in vogue as they are today, but mine were all black. There were no colors to choose from.

All my folders looked the same. I knew them only as PG folders and they were cream-colored, illustrated with sports figures in a cinnamon-colored ink. Lisa Frank (the designer of those cool psychedelic folders) hadn't even been born yet, and Tweety Bird and company were just making their appearances on cereal boxes.



(Far left) Writer Anita Sherman with her granddaughter, Maria Sherman, sharing some school shopping time. Six-year-old Maria recently started first grade. (Left) Writer Anita Sherman (then Anita Marquez) in first grade at St. Rose School in Portland, Oregon.

Zipped pouches for holding all the precious pencils and pens were around, but many of my classmates used old cigar boxes. These actually worked better because there was no zipper to break or plastic to get smeared with broken lead.

Backpacks were around, but they were used for hiking and canoeing trips. We had book bags, and if they had a strap, they were slung on one shoulder. They had lots of buckles and pockets, but the best part was the large plastic handle centered on top. Strutting down the street (most of us walked to school then), your bookbag would gaily swing from side to side suspended by that handle that rarely, if ever, broke.

Taking your lunch to school was always risky in those days. Brown paper bags were acceptable, but having a metal lunch box was much better. However, the tricky part was the thermos. Rarely did liquids make it through the morning without leaking onto the rest of your lunch.

My mother preferred the red plaid variety, but I was insistent one year and arrived on the scene with a brand-new metal lunch box in brilliant color featuring Superman. For weeks, this served as lunchtime entertainment as everyone took turns reading the cartoon bubbles and turning the box to see newspaperman Clark Kent throw off his glasses and fly into the air in resplendent caped attire.

As far as clothes, again, it was simple. We wore uniforms. They started as burgundy jumpers with beige blouses but quickly changed to green plaid jumpers with white blouses bearing Peter Pan collars. You could jazz them up with a green cardigan sweater and/or a beanie. Oh, for lack of a propeller on top! Beanies were usually only seen on the younger students. The boys wore salt and pepper cords, crisply ironed shirts, and ties. I always pitied the boy who forgot his necktie.

As today, books had to be covered, but book socks were unheard of.

My father was a designing engineer and he always offered, and I always expected, that he would be the designated book coverer. I would leave my books on the dining room table with the plain brown or sometimes clear paper. In the morning when I got up, the books would be neatly covered and piled, ready for me to take to school. He did a beautiful job, measuring and folding each corner just so.

While my father handled anything "technical," under which school supplies and covering books fell, my mother took

care of the purchase of new shoes.

Back to School With Buster Brown

My mother and I would walk down Wisteria Avenue and into the Hollywood District, where the movie theater and several department stores were located.

My mother's favorite was Miller's. I remember his creaky wooden floors and fussy sales clerks, but in one corner of the store was the shoe department, and it was there that we would look at Buster Brown shoes.

For my mother, these were the shoes that she knew and trusted. They were made of leather, and you could polish them over and over and always get a shine. The suited shoe man would have me stand on this thing that resembled a scale, but I think it was an X-ray machine, as he would always say, "They fit perfectly, and she has room to grow."

Year after year, I would start the new school year with black-and-white saddle shoes or cream-and-brown saddle shoes or burgundy loafers. One year, it was black Mary Janes. But they were always Buster Browns.

Inside the shoe where your heel goes was a round decal bearing the image of the little Dutch boy with his dog.

I looked forward to our trips together to shop for school, the smell of her cologne, the brush of her coat against my cheek, and walking out of Miller's with a brand-new pair of Buster Browns.

My pencils sharpened, my books meticulously covered, and my fountain pen not leaking, I was ready to walk down the hallways and find a new classroom each year.

My memories of those early school days are cherished. I'd like to believe that they provided me a springboard to a life of learning well beyond the classroom.

So far, first grade is going well for my granddaughter Maria. She's putting her crayons, pencils, and markers to good use. She relishes bringing home new library books (in her backpack) each week, and I've seen her wearing her Mary Janes. She smiles when she talks of school.

Her memories are in the making.

Anita L. Sherman is an award-winning journalist who has more than 20 years of experience as a writer and editor for local papers and regional publications in Virginia. She now works as a freelance writer and is working on her first novel. She is the mother of three grown children and grandmother to four, and she resides in Warrenton, Va. Anita can be reached at anitajusturite@gmail.com

Letting Go of Perfectionism

BARBARA DANZA

I've recently begun to recognize how self-sabotaging and hindering perfectionism can be. Perfectionism almost sounds virtuous. After all, what harm could there be in striving to reach perfection?

That's not how perfectionism plays out, however. With perfectionism, the standard of perfection can never be realized. So rather than attempting to get as close as possible, one protects oneself from the shame and disappointment of falling short by avoiding the work, the endeavor, or the dream altogether. Avoidance tends to manifest itself as procrastination, distraction, laziness, foggy-headedness, or even a state of being busy with other, less meaningful work.

The tragedy of perfectionism is that one's innate gifts, inherent talents, and greatest potential are never brought to light, but squandered in favor of self-preservation. There's nothing perfect about that.

So, what's a perfectionist to do?

Look Within

Letting go of perfectionism must start with a search for truth within oneself. The fears of not living up to one's own standards, of being judged by others, and of facing the limits of life in this world need to be recognized. Looking within oneself in search of the notions and ideas that are stifling progress as well as the ways in which, consciously or unconsciously, avoidance plays out can be very enlightening.

Define Perfection

There's a vast difference between perfection and perfectionism. While perfectionism is hindering, perfection is an ideal of infinite potential. What ideals one aims at determines the trajectory of one's life.

Whether the ideals are those of moral character, creative endeavor, or service to others, it's useful, inspiring, and motivating to have a vision of one's ideal.

After all, what harm could there be in striving to reach perfection?

Focus on Progress

Where perfectionists get hung up is after envisioning their ideal, they freeze. They've experienced disappointment before of not being able to manifest the perfect vision in their mind, so they seem to get stuck in inertia, scrolling Instagram, or reorganizing their sock drawer instead.

The antidote to avoidance is to lay all of one's focus upon making progress, not reaching perfection. A perfectionist may even tell himself that the most perfect way to get started is to simply make a very tiny amount of progress and celebrate doing so each and every time.

Life is long and imperfect, but aiming for the highest ideal one can conceive of is worthwhile. The way to bring that to bear is to make consistent progress over time. You've heard it before: focus on progress, not perfection. One can aim for one's current conception of perfection without ever requiring or achieving perfection. The way to do that is to focus on progress.

Stay Flexible

As one aims for one's ideal, one might hopefully learn along the way, gaining wisdom and perspective. One's understanding of perfection will very likely change, an idea that may bring comfort to a recovering perfectionist.

As one takes consistent action, celebrating incremental improvements along the way, remaining open to new ideas and possibilities and maintaining flexibility can also combat the tendency toward hard-nosed perfectionism.

Treasure the Journey

Finally, the humble recognition that we humans can't possibly conceive of true perfection with our human limitations can be a great comfort to a perfectionist. Rather than lament our mortal limitations, we can treasure the journey toward the highest ideal we can conceive and the growth and enlightenment that may transpire as a result.

A perfectionist is stuck, frozen in time, and unwilling to try in order to avoid suffering. If he or she recognizes that you can aim for perfection, never reach it, and still uncover immense fulfillment as a result, the perfectionism can be tossed aside.

PARENTING MATTERS

How to Become a Dynamic Parent

PARNELL DONAHUE

In his book, "The Four Signs of a Dynamic Catholic," Matthew Kelly describes four characteristics that separate dynamic Catholics from "other" Catholics. While reading his small book, I kept thinking these same characteristics define dynamic parents as different from "ordinary" parents. I have adapted these principles as they apply to parents below.

Dynamic Parents Read and Study

All parents need knowledge to determine truth, because it's truth in parenting, as well as in all of life, that sets us free. None of us come into this world schooled in child care; we aren't born with a parenting degree.

Before good parenting habits can be developed, parents need to educate themselves. Thousands of parenting books are waiting to be read. Not all are good, some are, some aren't.

Dynamic moms and dads dig through the myriad of parenting books, podcasts, CDs, and radio and TV shows, and find parenting styles that fit their needs. They learn, too, that parenting isn't "one size fits all." Informed parents treat these sources much like they treat a beautiful smorgasbord; they take what they need and what works for them.

Dynamic parents are on constant watch to avoid relativism. A thing or statement can't be true for me and not for you. There is no relative truth!

They also keep in mind that truth is good, right, and beautiful.



BAZA PRODUCTION/SHUTTERSTOCK

Children benefit from volunteer work; when they are older and get a first job, they can choose a charity to support.

Dynamic Parents Are Generous

They are generous with their time and talents as well as their money. Generosity requires patience, and it results from being compassionate and kind.

I interviewed a young man for my radio show, "Parenting Matters," who had been instrumental in founding a local branch of a "father/son" religious group dedicated to helping fathers raise their sons to be men of virtue. He said the first thing he learned was that if he was going to teach others to be virtuous, he had to become virtuous himself.

"These eight years have helped me as much as they helped my son," he said. Most charitable things we do have that effect; they benefit us as much as those we help.

Dynamic parents take time to help neighbors and strangers and allow their kids at an early age to participate in these acts of love. All three of my sons and their children (age 10 to 20) volunteered to help clean up Nashville after the 2010 flood. It was eye-opening for all of them. Because much of the flooded area was in the "poor" part of town, one boy said he didn't know people could live in those little, old houses.

es. All of the kids were changed for the better because of the work they did with their dads.

Dynamic parents contribute to charitable causes and share the causes they assist with their kids. When their teens get their first income, dynamic parents help them choose a charity to support.

Dynamic moms and dads dig through the myriad of parenting books, podcasts, CDs, and radio and TV shows, and find parenting styles that fit their needs.

Dynamic Parents Evangelize

Evangelize originally meant "spread the Gospel" but in recent times, it has a broader meaning. If we love dining at Shirley's restaurant we become one of Shirley's best advertisers. We tell our

friends about Shirley's and invite them to meet us there for dinner. In short, we evangelize for Shirley's.

Dynamic parents love being parents and share with others how much they enjoy their family. They may be a bit boastful, but they want others to experience the joy that comes from having a dynamic, loving relationship with their kids at all ages, especially teenagers. Learn from them. They also share the books they've read, the podcasts they listen to, and invite their friends to attend the next parenting conference with them.

Be attentive to these parents and you'll soon enjoy parenting as much as they do. You'll know this happens when you start evangelizing the things they talked about.

Dynamic Parents Pray Regularly

Dynamic parents praise and thank the Lord, seek his help through daily prayer, and, like Solomon, pray for wisdom. Dynamic parents also show gratitude through prayer; they thank God for their parents, their spouse, their children, and for the many gifts he has provided.

They pray for peace in their home, their country, and the world; they love and pray for their neighbors, their kids' teachers and coaches, their boss, co-workers, and even those whom they don't like. They teach their kids to pray!

If you follow these principles, you will become a great, dynamic parent, and you and your children will be more virtuous. Best of all, they will grow up to be men and women of character. Think about that, wouldn't you rather work with a virtuous person than one you couldn't trust? Which would you prefer to have for a spouse, a liar or a person of virtue? Wouldn't it be a great world if we were all more virtuous?

Enjoy the children in your life, and may God continue to bless you and your family!

Dr. Parnell Donahue is a pediatrician, military veteran, author of four books, and the blog ParentingWithDrPar.com, and host of WBOU's "Parenting Matters" show. He and his wife, Mary, have four adult children; all hold doctorates, two also are MDs. Contact him at Parenting-Matters.com

Never Too Early: Holiday Prep

BARBARA DANZA

Holidays? Already? Hear me out.

You know that dream you have of the holiday season when your days are spent baking cookies, sipping cocoa by the fire, enjoying all of the local holiday events in your community with your family, and perhaps looking forward to a family getaway right after the holidays? The beauty of that dream is that in it, your stress level is super low because you've got a stack of stamped cards, a pile of wrapped presents, and a list of completed holiday tasks

all checked off. You're free to soak up the magic of the season.

The only way that dream becomes a reality is to prepare early.

Here are a few simple things you can do now to make the holidays easier this year.

Make Lists

You likely make the same lists each year: the gift list, the card list, the home decor list, the holiday meal list, and the fun-to-have list. If you take a vacation this time of year, that's another list.

Start brainstorming and putting pen to paper while the pressure is off and creativity can flow. Starting a list nice and early can give you time to tackle some items, but also tweak as you go along and discover better ideas or ways of doing things.

Start Shopping

As you go about your errands in everyday life or place your regular online orders to be delivered to your home, add in some holiday shopping. Designate a portion of your closet or a box in your home to hold the presents you collect.

Further, consider ingredients that you may want to have on hand this season in your kitchen, decor items you want to have ready, the cards you'll send out this year, and anything you need for your holiday vacation.

Aim to make regular progress on these tasks and keep track of what you've got and what you still need.

Book Fun

If there are travel reservations, dinner reservations, or tickets that need to be purchased, take care of those details and rest assured that you're not going to fall prey to the results of procrastination this year. Manage your calendar, creating a series of events your family is sure to enjoy and that aligns with your priorities.

Beginning the process of holiday planning early gives you time to think through what's most important and meaningful to you and your family.

Print Cards

If you send out cards to friends and family each year, buy them or have them created, and begin to make progress in addressing them and readying them to be mailed just after Thanksgiving, which isn't far off.



ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

By finishing some tasks early, you will be free to enjoy the holiday season when it rolls around.

Focus on What's Most Meaningful Beginning the process of holiday planning early gives you time to think through what's most important and meaningful to you and your family this time of year. Declutter your plans, your decor, your lists, and your obligations.

Think about why you celebrate this time of year, what values and traditions you wish to pass on to your children, and how best to spend your holiday time.



FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES

Week 38, 2021

The Things Divine
by Jean Brooks Burt

These are the things I hold divine:
A trusting child's hand laid in mine,
Rich brown earth and wind-tossed trees,
The taste of grapes and the drone of bees,
A rhythmic gallop, long June days,
A rose-hedged lane and lovers' lays,
The welcome smile on neighbors' faces,
Cool, wide hills and open places,
Breeze-blown fields of silver rye,
The wild, sweet note of the plover's cry,
Fresh spring showers and scent of box,
The soft, pale tint of the garden phlox,
Lilacs blooming, a drowsy noon,
A flight of geese and an autumn moon,
Rolling meadows and storm-washed heights,
A fountain murmur on summer nights,
A dappled fawn in the forest hush,
Simple words and the song of a thrush,
Rose-red dawns and a mate to share
With comrade soul my gypsy fare,
A waiting fire when the twilight ends,
A gallant heart and the voice of friends.

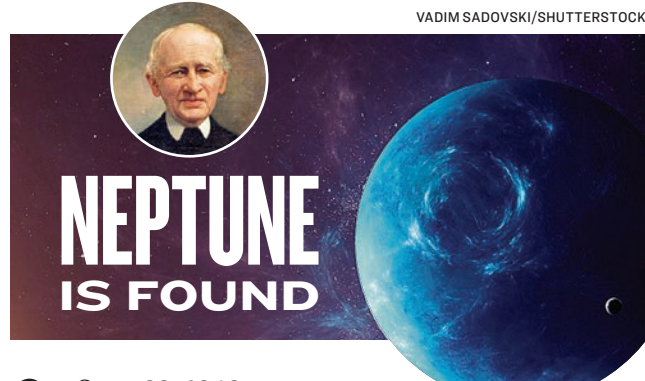
WHAT IS BLACK, WHITE, AND ORANGE AND WADDLES?

A PENGUIN CARRYING A PUMPKIN.

In seed time learn, in harvest teach, in winter enjoy.

WILLIAM BLAKE (1757-1827), ENGLISH POET

This Week in History



NEPTUNE IS FOUND

On Sept. 23, 1846, astronomer Johann Gottfried Galle of the Berlin Observatory became the first person to observe the planet Neptune.

Neptune wasn't entirely unknown at that time. In 1612, Galileo recorded a star with his telescope that later turned out to be Neptune.

Further, French mathematician Urbain Joseph Le Verrier theorized the existence of the planet Neptune using math. He posited that an unknown planet was causing the changes scientists observed in the orbit of Uranus. It was Johann Gottfried Galle who confirmed this to be true.

VADIM SADOVSKI/SHUTTERSTOCK

An oil painting of the Berlin Observatory. "Die Neue Sternwarte in Berlin," 1838, by Carl Daniel Freydanc.



INFOCOTIER

By Aidan Danza, age 15

THE PINE BARRENS

The Pine Barrens are a landscape that is iconic for the southern half of New Jersey. However, there are other Pine Barren forests along the East Coast that occur in Southeast Long Island, and in a large area of eastern Massachusetts.

So, what makes these particular forests "Pine Barrens?" It all begins with the soil. Pine barren soil is sandy and acidic, and also very nutrient-poor. The first settlers of New Jersey called the area "barren" because none of the usual crops would grow there.

Additionally, the Barrens are quite dry, apart from the famous cranberry bogs and cedar swamps, making it easy for fires to sweep through. As for the "pine" in Pine Barrens, it's included in the name because of the prevalence of the Pitch Pine, a tree that is specialized for life in the Barrens. First of all, its bark is very thick, but it has gaps through which needles can grow. The thickness enables the pine to survive a fire, while the tree can recover quickly by growing needles and branches through bark, a characteristic that is very unusual for a tree. The pine tree actually needs frequent fire to reproduce, because the pine cones containing the seeds open only after being heated by fire. In contrast, the

next-most prevalent tree in the Barrens, the various types of oaks, are usually killed by fire.

In areas of very frequent fire, the forests can never get above chest height, and they are called dwarf pine forests.

Pines and oaks aren't the only things that grow here, though. Blueberries are very common among the pines, and in bogs, cranberries are prevalent. These were and are still grown in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey and Massachusetts, where it's designated the state berry. In swamps, the trees change to towering cedars, which grow in wet, organic soils topped with sphagnum moss and often harboring frogs and turtles where the water gets to be a few inches deep.

Animals are certainly difficult to find in the barrens, but they are there. Lizards, snakes, songbirds, waterfowl, owls, muskrats, raccoons, deer, and black bears are all present in varying numbers. In water, frogs and turtles are easy to spot.



A yellow-rumped warbler.



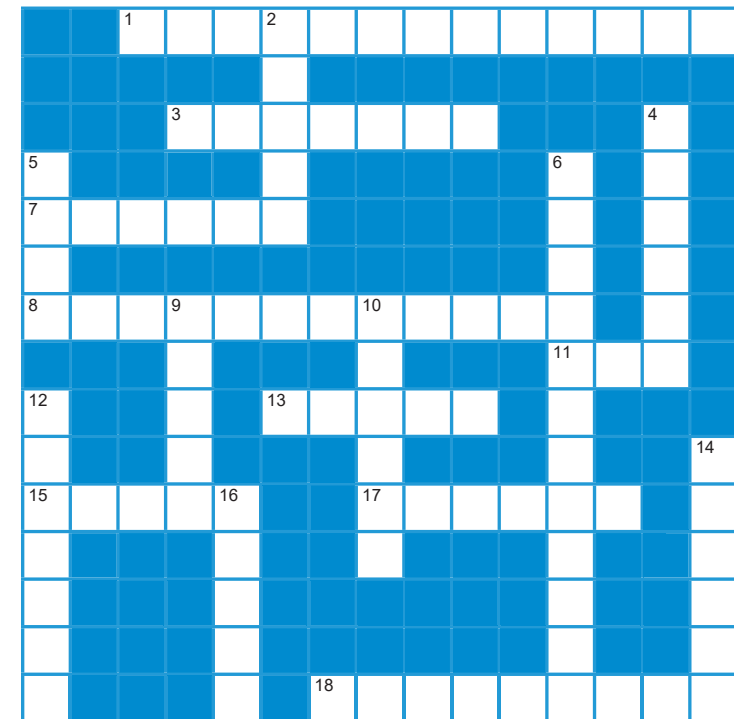
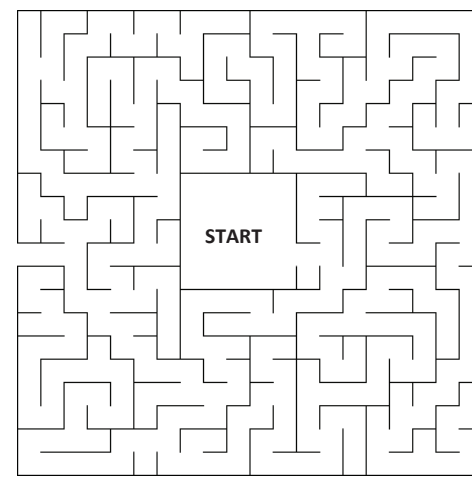
A white-tailed deer.



A raccoon.

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AMAZING ESCAPES!



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

Easy puzzle 1

9	10
4	10

59

+ - x ÷

Solution For Easy 1
6 + 01 + 9 x 01

Medium puzzle 1

11	15
5	13

25

+ - x ÷

Solution for Medium 1
9 - 91 + (11 - 61)
91 + 9 x (11 - 61)

Hard puzzle 1

11	29
2	17

33

+ - x ÷

Solution for Hard 1
2 - 11 - 11 + 62

Across

- Fall treat (7,6)
- Halloween Eve job (7)
- Pumpkin color (6)
- Coffee flavor (7,5)
- Pumpkin dessert (3)

- Down**
- Pumpkin mush (5)
 - Jack O' Lantern light source (6)
 - Pumpkin dish (served in a bowl) (4)
 - Where the Headless Horseman lives (6,6)
 - Where pumpkin grow (5)
 - A pumpkin is a _____? (6)
 - Should Halloween be a _____? (7)
 - Season to watch "The Great Pumpkin" (6)
 - Pumpkin bread (5)
 - Pumpkin shape (5)
 - Goes in a Jack O' Lantern (5)
 - Pumpkin season (6)
 - Best night for Jack O' Lanterns (9)

**THE
EPOCH
TIMES**

Epoch Times reporter Charlotte Cuthbertson interviews Yuma County Sheriff Leon Wilmot in the desert by the U.S.-Mexico border.



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- Cover an assigned beat, including a variety of U.S. national topics and world news
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- To apply, send your résumé, cover letter, and three or more samples of your work to careers@epochtimes.com

New York Reporter
Full-Time

- Cover news on one of a number of assigned beats, including City Hall, police, schools and transportation
- Requirements: a bachelor's degree in journalism or a related field and two years of experience as a professional reporter
- To apply, send your résumé, cover letter, and three or more samples of your work to careers@epochtimes.com

Economics and Business Reporter

- Cover economics, business and finance news
- Bachelor's degree and two or more years of journalism experience, preferably with a focus on business/economics
- To apply, send your résumé, a cover letter, two or more samples of your work, and three references to business@epochtimes.com

Breaking News Reporter

- Cover breaking news in the United States and around the world
- At least 2 years of experience in news reporting
- Send your résumé, a cover letter, two or more samples of your work, and three references to newsroom@epochtimes.com

China Columnist
Freelance

- Contribute sharp-eyed commentaries and analysis on the latest hot-button issues related to China
- We are especially interested in work that can provide insight into the Chinese regime's global ambitions, the latest issues affecting Chinese society and economy, and China-U.S. competition
- Requirement: Expertise in a

field related to China, including experience in conducting independent research or research for a think tank or nonprofit, or having a professional background related to China, such as military experience or analyst experience

- To apply, send your author bio, two or more samples of your work, and pitch an idea for an article to djyeditor@epochtimes.com

China Reporter
Freelance

- Cover topics related to China
- Requirement: at least two years of professional journalism experience
- To apply, send your résumé, cover letter, two or more samples of your news writing, and pitch a story idea to djyeditor@epochtimes.com

Australia Reporter

- Cover local, national and Pacific news in Australia
- A bachelor's degree and one year of professional news writing required
- To apply, send your résumé, two references, a cover letter, and samples of your work to hr@epochtimes.com.au

Wire Editor, US or Australia

- Edit and publish wire content as well as content from partner providers
- To apply, send your résumé, a cover letter, two or more samples of your work, and three references to newsroom@epochtimes.com

Travel Editor

- Shape and execute travel content strategy, manage day-to-day operations, work with staff and freelancers, and offer our audience travel stories that inspire and inform
- A minimum of five years experience in journalism, with at least two years' experience editing travel
- To apply, send your résumé, a cover letter, two or more samples of your work, and three references to philipp@epochtimes.com

Magazine Layout Designer

- Design and layout magazines and other print and digital products
- Requirements: bachelor's degree in graphic design or marketing and two or more years of related experience; advanced knowledge of Adobe Indesign, Illustrator, and Photoshop
- To apply, send your résumé, a cover letter, portfolio, and three references to careers@epochtimes.com

Assistant Food Editor

- Help shape and execute food content strategy, build and work with a team of writers, and manage day-to-day operations, including editing and occasionally writing a wide range of food and cooking articles for web and print
- Requirement: four or more years of journalism experience, with at least two years of experience in editing food content, including developing and editing recipes
- Professional cooking experience preferred, including culinary school, restaurant or catering jobs, and test kitchen work
- To apply, send your résumé, a cover letter, three to five samples of your work to food@epochtimes.com

Food Reporter

- Write feature articles about time-honored culinary traditions and recipes, from across the U.S. and around the world
- Requirement: two years of professional journalism experience, preferably with a focus on food. Professional cooking and/or recipe development experience is a plus.
- To apply, send your author bio or résumé, three to five samples of previously published work, and 1 to 3 story pitches to food@epochtimes.com



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