

THE EPOCH TIMES

LIFE &

TRADITION

ALL PHOTOS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

EKATERINA SHAKHAROVA/UNSPLASH



“George Washington Before the Battle of Trenton,” (circa 1792–94) by John Trumbull.

Battling Hard Times: Some Help From the Founders

JEFF MINICK

These words have recently popped up in some online articles:

Hard times make strong men.

Strong men make good times.

Good times make weak men.

Weak men make hard times.

Let’s assume for argument’s sake we’re in hard times right now. Making a case for that assertion is relatively easy. We’re still dealing with a pandemic after almost

two years of lockdowns, masks, and diminished liberties, we’re facing rocketing costs at the supermarkets and gas pumps, our federal government is spending money like some crazy uncle who just won the lottery, and our traditional culture appears besieged everywhere. Every day seems to bring more bad news, and the swirl of headlines leaves most of us breathless and dizzy, like some kid who has just spent a few too many moments spinning around the backyard.

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(L) George Washington taking command of the Continental Army in Cambridge in 1775; (R) Artillery being hauled for the siege of Boston in 1775.



Designate special days when you can spend one-on-one time with each of your grandchildren.

Ways to Deepen Connections With Your Grandchildren

BARBARA DANZA

Few relationships are as special as those between grandparents and their grandchildren. If you’re blessed with grandchildren, if your grandchildren are blessed to have you as their grandparent, make the most of this gift by adding some intentionality to your relationship.

Here are a few simple ways to deepen your bonds with your grandchildren.

Share Your Stories

Take out that old box from the attic, the slide projector from the garage, the photo album from the shelf, or the home videos from long ago and share them with your grandchildren. Toss aside any worry that you’ll bore them. They’ll delight in seeing their grandmother or grandfather as a young woman or man. They’ll see themselves in your experiences and the lessons you learned.

Whether your story is about a cake you once made that went awry or your military service—the big and small stories alike are all big to your loved ones. Sharing stories strengthens the fabric of the family. So, tell your stories, share your memorabilia, entertain every question that springs up, and do so often.

Ask for Help

You could probably use some help around the house, in the garden, or out running an errand. Involve your grandchildren. Show the little ones what you’re up to and allow them to help in whatever way they can. A toddler can hold a flashlight while something is fixed or mix the ingredients after they’re added to a bowl.

As your grandchildren get older, know that asking for their help is good for them and allows them to show their respect as well as to contribute to the overall well-being of the family. You can take joy in thanking them with a plate of freshly baked cookies or a simple hug.

Helping one another is what family members do. Don’t hesitate to kindly enlist the help of your grandchildren, for you and for them.

Single Each One Out

Designate special days for each of your grandchildren to visit or go somewhere with you. Spending one-on-one time with your grandchild will allow both you and your grandchild to get to know one another as individuals. Ask them about their interests, allow them to choose some of the activities you do, teach them something new, and answer all of their questions.

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DEAR JUNE

On Family and Relationships



A Paradigm for Holiday Joy

JUNE KELLUM

This year, the thought of holiday decorating didn't come with a feeling of enthusiasm for me, but rather niggling anxiety, the first signs of what could become full-blown holiday stress. Last year, it was different; I was excited to make wreaths, garlands, and kissing balls from evergreen boughs my children and I had gathered from a friend's forest.

But this year is different. I have different priorities, one of which is caring for and enjoying my smiley, bouncy 9-month-old. Still, because I so love the smell of fresh evergreen during the holidays, I was going to make those decorations—no matter how I felt.

Then, I happened upon a passage in the book "All Year Round," which is about celebrating festivals throughout the year. One of the authors, Christine Fynes-Clinton, gave this advice:

"One thing I must say is—and I can't emphasize this too strongly—don't overdo it! Resist the temptation to go overboard on celebrating festivals, especially if you have small children. The priority here should be to preserve your strength and calmness."

"Preserve your strength and calmness." These words resonated, and I felt instant relief from a burden I didn't fully realize I was carrying. They gave me the reason I needed to let go of decorating and to shift my thoughts to more important things.

This year has not been an easy one for the world and many people are heading into this holiday in need of real respite and healing. Many are facing grief from the loss of loved ones, financial hardship due to job loss, unpaid leave, or medical bills, health issues, stress and anxiety, and family strain due to differing beliefs.

So if you are finding yourself burdened instead of joyful by holiday merrymaking, I invite you to join me in letting go so you can find your calm and strength.

And replace the holiday "musts" and "shoulds" with intention and joy. Fynes-Clinton has this to say about keeping festivals simple and meaningful:

"I can acknowledge a festival day with a different color cloth or candle on the table, or a change of picture on the wall. Perhaps I should make the point again that the festivals are to be celebrated only if we want to. ... [The] festivals come alive only through our willing participation. There's no point in doing something because we feel we ought to, or because 'everyone else does it,' is there? If we are personally convinced of the value of living with the festivals, we will want to observe them, and after a time we may notice that the festival happens in us, even if we are in bed with flu at the time."

When she talks about festivals "coming alive" happening "in" us, I understand this to mean that, when celebrated in the right way, holidays awaken something of our soul nature—they give us a structure that allows us to experience more refined feelings than



When and if you feel burdened by holiday "shoulds," keep it simple and meaningful.

those we would ordinarily.

So this year, I will decorate very simply with candles in glass holders that I love and which came from the home of a dear family friend. Then I will make time to call this friend so she can enjoy some baby smiles.

Wishing you peace and joy this holiday season,

Sincerely,
June

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

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



When you see yourself in your children, it can be delightful or alarming. But above all, it can offer insight into yourself.



XOJOURNALING/ISTOCKPHOTO

Ways to Deepen Connections With Your Grandchildren

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A special day with your grandparent all to yourself is the stuff lifelong memories are made of.

Babysit

Your children could use help, no matter the ages of your grandchildren. The simplest way to ensure you're spending time with your grandchildren is to offer to babysit. Allowing their parents to do their Christmas shopping, sending them out to dinner, or simply giving them a day or two to catch up on life will be appreciated more than you may realize and will be a joy for you and your grandchildren.

Travel Together

Few experiences allow for undivided attention among participants like a travel adventure. Plan a vacation with your children and grandchildren so that you can all experience something new together—away from the distractions of everyday life. This is also a nice idea for grandparents who live far away from their grandchildren. Meet up in a central location and take in the sights together as a family.

Be a Pen Pal

Speaking of grandchildren who live far away, in addition to video chats and the times you do get together with your grandchildren throughout the year, establish a pen pal relationship with your grandchildren. You may not realize what a delight it is for the modern child to receive physical mail at home. They're used to all digital communication, so sending on a simple note or a box filled with treats—and requesting a response in kind—can become a delightful family tradition to uphold throughout the years.

Battling Hard Times: Some Help From the Founders

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Next, let's suppose, again for the sake of argument, that we live in hard times because many of our leaders—and even many of their followers—are weak men and women. If the above adage is true, then that should take us back to the first line of the equation: "Hard times make strong men." The sentiment behind that line is good, but where are we to find examples of such strong people? Perhaps our tough circumstances will produce such leaders, but would it not help if all of us possessed some examples of strength to guide us?

The Romans looked to their ancestors for such guidance. The knights of the Middle Ages relied on ballads and tales of such heroes as Arthur and Roland to stiffen their hearts and will. Where do we find exemplars who have the power to fire up our willpower and our resolve? We might take some lessons from the heroes of our American Revolution.

Principles

The birth and establishment of our Republic may seem inevitable to us today, but that was hardly the case at the time. The men and women who fought by sword or by pen for freedom were, as they well knew, subject to imprisonment, poverty, and even execution should they lose their struggle for liberty.

The men who had signed the Declaration of Independence, for example, patriots such as Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and John Hancock, understood they were signing their death warrants should the forces of the British Empire defeat them. Not only might the victors hang them as traitors, but the livelihoods and well-being of their families would also be jeopardized. Seeking their rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" came with the possibility of utter ruin.

And one man who had the most to lose, at least financially, was George Washington.

Appearance Counts

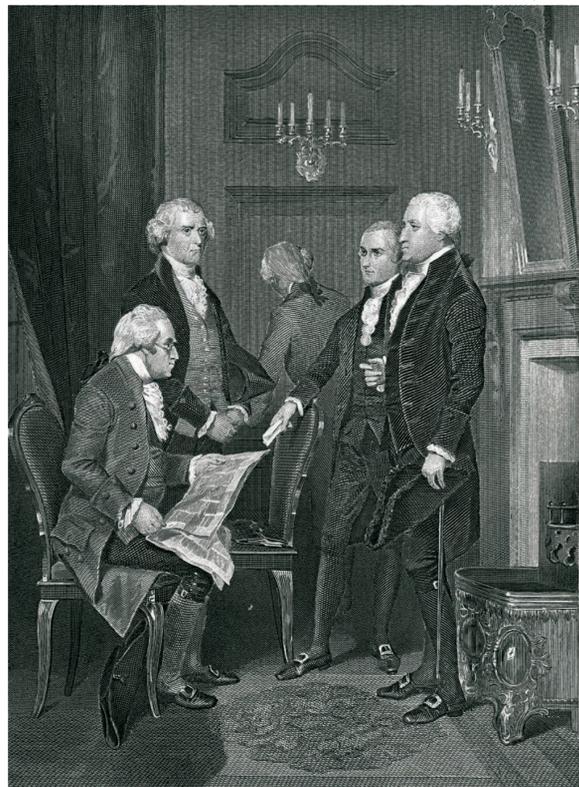
Gravitas.

It means "dignity, seriousness, or solemnity in manner."

And George Washington had gravitas in spades.

Washington wasn't the most intellectual of the American Founders. Unlike Jefferson or Madison, he never attended college. He never became proficient in Latin or Greek and mourned his "defective education" for his entire life. He was an autodidact who turned to surveying and military service after his adolescence. Later, he became one of the wealthiest men of his time.

Despite his lack of higher education, Washington understood the vital importance of decorum and appearance in the public square. Early in life, he composed his "Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior,"



An engraving from 1881 commemorating the first presidential cabinet: (L-R) Henry Knox, Thomas Jefferson, Edmund Randolph, Alexander Hamilton, with President George Washington.

which was essentially an outline of manners and correct behavior. A tall man, he took pride in his dress and carried himself always with dignity, impressing his contemporaries by his propriety and reserve. Though lacking the educational advantages of his older half-brothers, he taught himself the value of dignitas, the old Roman virtue of dignity and pride. Seeking their rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" came with the possibility of utter ruin.

To conduct oneself with such dignity is a mark of strength.

Intelligence and Willpower

Like Washington, Henry Knox of Boston was more than six feet tall, an impressive height in his era, and weighed a hefty 250 pounds. At age 9, he left school to work in a bookshop, where the proprietor treated him like a son and allowed him to borrow books for reading and study. Knox eventually opened his own shop, which was popular with the British officers and officials in the city, and from his conversations with them, from his reading, and from his participation in an artillery militia, he became well-versed in the arts of war.

As soon as the Revolution began, Knox and his wife, Lucy, fled the city, leaving his shop to be sacked by Loyalists. Impressed by Knox's artillery fortifications above Boston, Washington approved the young man's plan for bringing the cannon and mortars captured from the British

at Fort Ticonderoga in New York to Boston. In the dead of winter, Knox directed wagons, oxen, and hundreds of men 300 miles through the frozen countryside, and eventually returned to Boston with 56 artillery pieces, which were then used to drive the British troops and ships from the city. It was one of the greatest feats of the American Revolution.

Lessons learned from Henry Knox: Vision and determination are keys for interior strength.

Compared to the trials of our spiritual ancestors, our own troubles seem mild.

Heroes

Dr. Joseph Warren, the general who died as a foot soldier at Bunker Hill; Nathan Hale, who bravely faced his execution as a spy; the wily Swamp Fox Francis Marion; "Mad Anthony" Wayne; these and so many others were strong men in hard times. They bled and died and fought, and won their freedom.

Here we take as one exemplar neither a warrior nor a politician, but a mother and wife: Abigail Adams.

Wife of John Adams, a Founding Father who later became the second president of the United States, Abigail was an early ad-



Henry Knox (1750–1806) was remarkable for his vision and intelligence. He first joined the Continental Army in 1775 and eventually became Secretary of War.

vocate of education and rights for women and an abolitionist. With her husband away for months at a time handling various duties, Abigail raised her children, saw to their education, and managed the family farm. She wasn't afraid to express her opinion, writing to John when he was attending the First Continental Congress to "remember the ladies" and corresponding with Thomas Jefferson. To the end of John's life, she remained his closest adviser.

Abigail Adams is emblematic of all the women forced to manage farms, businesses, and families while their husbands and fathers were away fighting the war.

Grit and self-sufficiency are what we can learn from these women.

Never Say Die

Compared to the trials of our spiritual ancestors, our own troubles seem mild. So far, we're not called to choose between Patrick Henry's "liberty or death." The 21st century has brought an erosion of our liberties, but even today, some health professionals have risked their positions and professional condemnation for speaking up for personal freedom and choice during the pandemic. Parents appear before school boards seeking answers as to what their children are being taught or why they must wear masks in the classroom, and are attacked by authorities. Some business owners have bucked up against government mandates and regulations, and have suffered the consequences.

No—those old words "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" still abide in many American hearts. And if at times we feel in need of inspiration or the temptation to give way to despair, we can revisit those who preceded us in the great experiment that is our Republic and take strength from their deeds and wisdom.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin in seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. 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.

BARBARA DANZA

To become more self-aware, you may think that taking a good look in the mirror would be helpful, or perhaps asking for insights from family and friends might offer insight. If you're a parent, you may find the answers you're looking for in your children.

Seeing yourself in your children can be amusing, endearing, infuriating.

Every parent has experienced that delightful—or alarming—moment when their child reflects back to them their own behavior or quirks. Children seem to have a magical ability to act as mirrors. They can reflect their parents' deepest insecurities, habits, notions, and personality traits.

Seeing yourself in your children can be amusing, endearing, infuriating, or embarrassing. Most of all, it can be informative.

One way to improve the harmony in your home along with your level of self-awareness is to recognize this

phenomenon that your children will mirror back to you the very characteristics you might need to see in yourself. When they do, you may find you have more compassion and appreciation for them and gain insight into yourself.

It's easy to notice the positive ways that your children are just like you. Perhaps your daughter has your uncanny wit, or your son has your innate ability to make everyone feel welcome. The negative traits your children have inherited from you, however, can be the most helpful to witness.

Outbursts

The next time you're dealing with an outburst from your child, try to calmly observe and understand what's causing the distress. Ask yourself if what's bothering your child bothers you sometimes, or if the way that your child is struggling seems familiar to you as well. You may be surprised at the level of understanding you can experience when pausing to reflect on this, and as you guide your child you can also aim to improve yourself.

Bad Habits

As your children grow, they'll develop habits—good ones and bad ones. When you notice especially the bad ones, take a look at yourself and see

if you harbor that habit as well. Perhaps they're procrastinating on their homework, they don't clean up after themselves, or their manners could use some polishing. You may even find it helpful to share with your child that you, too, struggle with this habit and how you're trying to improve.

Emotional Distress

When your children are in emotional distress, they are in need of support and understanding, as well as guidance to work their way through and regain control. Looking within yourself when your child is emotional in one way or another can help to foster empathy as well as provide insight into your own emotional issues.

Unacceptable Behavior

As your children make their way in the world, they'll surely make mistakes, act out, and behave in all sorts of ways that you deem unacceptable. Here, too, you may see glimpses of yourself. Perhaps some ways that your children mirror you might not be pleasant, but being able to recognize the negative as well as the positive will lead to more self-awareness for you as a parent and a better understanding about how to guide your children.

Audiences Love SHEN YUN

New York-based Shen Yun Performing Arts is the world's premier classical Chinese dance and music company, established in 2006. Aiming for an artistic revival and celebration of China's rich cultural heritage, the company performs classical Chinese dance, ethnic and folk dance, and story-based dance, accompanied by orchestral and solo performers. The Epoch Times is a proud sponsor of Shen Yun Performing Arts. For more information please visit ShenYunPerformingArts.org



"It makes me feel hope that there are good people in every culture across the world, who are in tune with that divine spirit, who are seeking for freedom and liberty."

MATTHEW LOHMEIER,
an author, retired Lt. Col. for the U.S. Space Force, from Boise, Idaho



"I would bring my whole school if I could!"

JOE O'NEILL,
owner of a private school, from Portland, Oregon



"Peace, serenity. It was truly inspirational."

JACQUES VACHON,
logistics specialist for NASA, from Portland, Oregon



"I'm a lover of culture and I think that just to keep it alive, especially now in these times, I think it couldn't have been at a better time."

PAUL MATAMOROS,
CEO of Metro Properties Holding Co. LLC, from New Mexico



"Something I feel that it is really important that more Americans realize is that it's really easy to decide you want to be a communist when you live in a free country, but it's impossible to decide that you want to be free when you live in a communist country."

JESSICA CASTLEBERRY,
state senator, from Rapid City, South Dakota

Shen Yun's Upcoming Performances

San Jose	California	Dec. 22–27, 2021
Hartford	Connecticut	Dec. 26, 2021
San Diego	California	Dec. 28–29, 2021
Fort Lauderdale	Florida	Dec. 28–30, 2021
Berkeley	California	Dec. 29–30, 2021

For additional performance dates, please visit ShenYun.com/tickets

HOMESCHOOLING

Homeschool Humor

A conversation with Jennifer Cabrera of the Hifalutin Homeschooler

BARBARA DANZA

Homeschooling isn't for the faint of heart, but it sure helps if you can find the humor in it.

That's just what Jennifer Cabrera, a Texas homeschooling mom of three, a podcaster, and author of "Socialize Like a Homeschooler: A Humorous Homeschool Handbook," is doing, and she's sharing her humor with other parents in the same boat. If you're homeschooling (or thinking about it), find her on social media as the Hifalutin Homeschooler and let a new sense of ease and some unfiltered truth inspire you along your journey.

I recently asked Cabrera about her homeschooling experience and her advice for other homeschooling parents. Here's what she said.

The Epoch Times: What made you decide to homeschool your three sons?**Jennifer Cabrera:** Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans. Homeschooling is everything I never knew I always wanted to do. It only took me three years of sending my kids to public school to become Hifalutin enough to decide, "Anything school can do I can do better."

My husband and I are both physician assistants, each with a master's in public health. We planned to have one child. I would go back to my career after maternity leave. We'd hire a nanny but be devoted and loving in the evenings and on weekends. Have it all, do it all.

And then we had twin boys to start. I imagine God chuckled. Four years later, he gave us our third son. Already, I couldn't bear the thought of going back to work while they were so little. Yet, my husband and I both attended public school. My mother and aunts were public school teachers. Naturally, my boys would attend public school.

However, by second grade, the carpool line was sucking the life out of my toddler harnessed in the back seat and covered in bananas as we ventured through twice a day for his brothers.

I missed them so much and felt the school was an annoying middleman choking our family relationship.

Every evening, I dragged two grouchy, snot-covered kids home and used the last bits of daylight and our time together on excessive busy work. But they were receiving gold stars and stamped certificates, so we stayed despite the growing unease I felt.

My boys were some of the smartest in their class. We read books way above grade level to be rebellious at bedtime. We discussed science, music, and history because they were curious and mostly bored out of their minds at school. They usually finished their work quickly and became restless. They wandered the classroom, built things out of paper. And one of their teachers began hinting about testing them for ADHD.

That same year they were locked out of sections of the library deemed too difficult

for mainstream second-graders. No matter that they tested well above grade level in reading; they were also asked not to bring the books they read at home to class, so as not to make the other kids feel bad.

Tears flowed every morning before school. My boys were losing their love of learning. Realizing I was doing most of the teaching during homework time every evening anyway, I started snooping into the lives of weird, unsocialized, homeschool families.

Every reason I could find to homeschool was staring me in the face, but I couldn't get past my own public schooled mentality that I should leave it to those who knew best. But did they?

They were my boys. I had taught them to walk, talk, tie their shoes, write their names. I had even taught them to read before kindergarten.

Still, the world said they'd be weird and unsocialized, and I'd have to wear a denim jumper, sell strange oils, and raise goats!

Deep down, I knew I could homeschool. I wanted to be with my kids. I wanted to teach them to question everything, to read for curiosity and pleasure (not grade points), and instill our beliefs and values. I wanted to see and be in the world with them, rather than have them tucked away waiting to live like my husband and I were for 12-plus years.

So, I asked God to slap me upside the head with a homeschool catalog or something, if this is what I was supposed to do. I hoped he'd be really obvious about it, like a note home from the school expelling my boys for loitering on the wrong side of the library.

One morning before school, one of my boys began to cry: "I hate school! Why do you take me up there and leave me where nobody loves me or cares about me? You're supposed to teach me!"

Message received.

And so, we leaped off the cliff into homeschooling. After nine years, I still say it was the best decision we ever made for our family. Our reasons for homeschooling began academically, but as the boys have grown and the world has changed, family, faith, and freedom have become what keeps us going.

The Epoch Times: What have you found to be the most challenging aspect of homeschooling?

Ms. Cabrera: Most parents I talk to, myself included, have a hard time letting go of the constant worries of inadequacy and failure. Are we doing enough? Are we doing too much?

Do we need a set of encyclopedias and some chickens?

What if I forget to teach them something essential and they get to college not knowing how to use a combination lock? Should I go buy three combination locks? Will anyone believe my kid got an A on Mom's homemade transcript?

It is very challenging for parents to let themselves off the hook for every little unforeseen and unseen hole in their homeschool.



“**Mostly I wanted to show other apprehensive parents what ‘real’ homeschooling looks like in the trenches. You don’t have to be perfect to be awesome.**”

Jennifer Cabrera

Once, I lost two hours of my life searching the web to determine if test anxiety was something I needed to try to induce sporadically, so that my boys wouldn't be blind-sided with the need to breathe into a paper bag or call for medical aid when they go to take the SAT.

A certain amount of worrying is probably good for parents, especially homeschooling parents. It's what keeps us from letting our kids freely roam the internet, reminds us to teach them to count, and puts up red flags before we let YouTube cover all the basics of science.

Most of our worries stem from society's expectations that we don't want to meet anyway.

Homeschooling is an enormous, life-altering task. We are not adequate alone. There will be holes left to be filled. We will mess up and fall short.

But with God, parents are equipped and capable of homeschooling with amazing success.

The Epoch Times: What was one of the funniest things that you experienced along your homeschooling journey?

Ms. Cabrera: There was this time we burned down the kitchen for a science fair. OK, so it was mostly me, though I'd like to blame the children. Three boys, three separate projects, and just one me. Staying organized is key, but cutting corners is easier. So, when it rains, and you have a schedule to adhere to, you go ahead and launch a rocket in the kitchen for video evidence of success.

Now you're thinking, no wonder you started a fire. But this is not where things went south to Hades. We launched with the utmost care and precaution by aiming our trajectory at the kitchen sink and managing to hit the cooktop backslash instead, which is basically a fireproof enough wall. Plus, we have a vegetable sprayer on the sink, which is like a firemen's mini hose. We were basically OSHA-compliant.

Of course, we had to get rid of the pyrotechnic evidence before the principal got

home. I grabbed my cute mini-iron skillet with the yummy wax squares and set it to simmer on the gas burner and hide the hint of rocket fuel that lingered.

But my multitasking mom brain then glitched and moved on to getting the troops ready for swim practice. And the kids were pumping creative neurons upstairs, oblivious to the underworld bubbling up below them.

OK, OK ... they were playing Minecraft. The point is, no one was paying attention.

The fire alarms went off like a domino rally across the house. I was using the bathroom in peace and thinking how odd it was that the smoke from the rockets was just making it to the detectors. Weird.

And as I was yanking my yogas back up, I remembered the mini wax skillet! And the distance from my bathroom to the kitchen telescoped exponentially.

I rounded the cabinets to find the stove a fiery inferno of lemon-scented hell! My mind quickly wrote the entire press release for the local news in one twenty-fifth of a second: "Recent homeschooling newcomers to the area burned down their house today in a science fair experiment gone wrong. The mother claims it was simply a forgotten air freshener, but the smell of rocket fuel, and assorted questionable materials scattered around the home, leave room for suspicion. The children have been removed and placed in protective services after admitting their mother was teaching them to build and set off explosive devices."

We recently moved here, and I didn't want to get to know the rest of the town by asking for their donated socks and underwear. So, I acted, grabbing the oven mitt, and then the flaming skillet, and tossing it into the water and dirty dish-filled sink.

BWOOSH!! The boys rounded the corner in time to see a blazing mushroom cloud explode from the sink over four feet into the air. If their individual reactions were any indication of what kind of men they will be, I should make notes to warn their future wives. One child literally stopped, dropped,

and rolled out the back door. Another froze in place, screamed, and plugged his ears. And the third's eyes lit up excitedly as he exclaimed, "Awesome!"

"That was just a fire drill, guys. Congrats, you all passed! You just never know when accidents will happen. Yup, we have to be prepared," I panted.

They weren't buying it. I was shrill and shaking like I'd just witnessed Satan waltz in the kitchen and pour himself a cup of tea and sit at the bar. "Cause he did. Except it wasn't tea, it was hot boiling wax."

And that, folks, is how my children made me almost burn down the kitchen. And how I pulled off the most awesomely realistic epic fire drill ever.

Disclaimer: If you work for, or are planning to contact child protective services, I totally made all of this up. Especially the part about getting it on video.

The Epoch Times: Your ability to see the humor in homeschooling has inspired your growing audience. What prompted you to begin making humorous homeschool content?

Ms. Cabrera: It's like I always say: "If you're going to ruin a kid, might as well keep them home and do it yourself."

We started homeschooling in 2013, when homeschooling was growing but long before the homeschool-stampede-inducing pandemic. While searching for info, curriculum, and reading homeschool blogs, the overall impression of homeschooling was very ... picturesque and intimidating.

After getting started with three boys, I quickly learned it was anything but picturesque. Rather it was messy, loud, and things hardly ever went exactly as planned. I was totally exhausted, pulling my hair out, and yet having a blast and wishing I had started sooner.

Because it was working beyond my most optimistic expectations. My boys were thriving, confident, and loving to learn again. We were growing closer as a family. And yet we lost friends still in public school

Texas homeschooling mom Jennifer Cabrera and her family.

and had to deal with nosy skeptics.

In 2016, my alter ego was born: the "Hifalutin Homeschooler." I began my blog from a need to vent about homeschool skeptics and hit back on the homeschool stereotypes with good old-fashioned sarcasm.

"Some of y'all mouthing about socialization never met a real homeschooler, and it shows."

Mostly I wanted to show other apprehensive parents what "real" homeschooling looks like in the trenches. You don't have to be perfect to be awesome.

Homeschooling is less overwhelming when you realize you can learn right along with your kids. And even on the hard days, often the best learning happens in finding and fixing what went wrong.

I also hoped to reach experienced homeschoolers and say, "If you don't have anything nice to say about homeschooling, come sit by me." In fact, one of my most popular articles early on was "10 Things I Hate About Homeschooling."

My mission was to get the homeschool community to lighten up a little, even poke fun at life as a homeschooler and those who know nothing of it. By breaking down the stereotypes and intimidating barriers, we might lead hesitant parents to see that most homeschoolers are just strong families taking action against real-world concerns.

The Epoch Times: What advice would you give to a parent who is brand new to homeschooling?

Ms. Cabrera: There is a "Quick Start Homeschooling" tutorial on my blog that, in short, goes something like this: First, breathe.

Once upon a time, everyone homeschooled. For thousands of years, the world operated on the natural assumption that parents were expected to raise and educate their own children. Mass education is the newer experiment—and it's failing many.

You know and love your kids better than anyone and are going to be able to invest more one-on-one attention and personalization than any school.

Next, run. Run to educational and family freedom. It's homeschooling, not school at home.

You don't have to call roll or announce the pimento loaf for lunch each day. Fight the urge to create structured learning to fill time slots and check boxes. Cut the umbilical cord to the system and everything you've been programmed to believe is necessary for kids to learn.

The educational system unnecessarily, yet intentionally, complicates learning to justify its bloated budget and power, leaving parents feeling inadequate. Don't be intimidated. More is not always better, sometimes it's just more—more time wasted and more busy work.

Homeschooling can do in a few hours what takes the system months or longer. Learning really is straightforward. Your natural ability to instruct your kids along with your will to succeed, and the simplicity to do so, cannot be reproduced in mass—and that is intimidating to the system.

Next, find out your state's homeschool laws and requirements at HSLDA.org

Always lean on the homeschool community for support. Don't turn to the system you are fleeing for advice or handouts that may have strings attached that will erode our homeschool freedoms. Ask seasoned homeschoolers all the questions you can think of no matter how ridiculous they may sound. Nine years ago, I didn't know a thing about homeschooling, except that only weird people did it and I'd need a laminator. Turns out that was only half true. You don't need a laminator after all.

Then go shopping! Browse all the available curriculum,

books, tools, games, online resources, and area homeschool groups. I don't know what I expected to find when I first started shopping homeschool stuff. What I found was my confidence.

Just make sure you are shopping for your children and not the ones in the brochure. Discovering your child's learning style may take some time and trial and error. Likely, you already know your kid better than the school did or cared to accommodate. You can choose curriculum and scheduling based on what works best for each of your kids.

Know that socialization is probably one of the greatest reasons to homeschool today. Socialization is code for conformity and is a fear tactic used to browbeat homeschoolers. Don't fall for it.

If you subscribe to the traditional school definition of socialization in an artificial setting of same-aged peers forced together day after day, then homeschooling will always be wrong about socialization. We like being wrong.

Lastly, the untethered freedom to homeschool won't always seem as scary as it does when you're starting out. Sure, you will make mistakes but, like we teach our kids, that's where the learning happens. When we make mistakes, we can change things up and find a better way immediately. Schools make mistakes all the time, and many go uncorrected at the expense of students. Even if spite or fear drove you to homeschool, I pray the freedom it brings will be what ultimately keeps you going.

The Epoch Times: What most drives you to continue to homeschool your children and encourage others to do so as well?

Ms. Cabrera: We wagered a second income on the notion that we could educate our children more effectively than the public school system. We wagered the need to fit into the world's expectations on the belief that our children should look to us for social and moral guidance.

We wagered the ease and comfort of kid-free time on the belief that kids need family more than peers, love more than affirmation, and encouragement more than conformity.

If I could take back those three years I put my oldest two in public school, I would. But God blessed the broken road that led us straight to homeschooling. My faith and trust in God have grown, and I know that my children will be my life's greatest work for him.

More and more, I realize we homeschool our kids not to shield our kids from the world, but to prepare them for the harsh reality of it, armed with truth and reason.

I thank God for making me uncomfortable enough to act and decide to homeschool every time I see my boys stand their ground for truth as they venture into the world. Parents, talk to your kids about everything. A blank slate is easy prey for a corrupt word to write upon.

Homeschooling has opened up more opportunities for our kids than we could have ever dreamed. They are now 17 and in an honors dual-credit college program. One is training for his pilot's license and is cadet commander of his CAP [Civil Air Patrol] squad, the other is a CAP officer, math whiz, and tutor. My youngest is also a new cadet, a pianist, and starting his own farmers market business out of his love of gardening.

My time homeschooling them is so precious and will come to an end sooner than I am ready to let go.

I may say the time with my kids went by too fast, but I won't ask where the time went. I know exactly where it went. Because of homeschooling, I was right there with them every step of the way.

Siblings Tear Up as Stepdad Asks to Adopt Them

LOUISE BEVAN

Three siblings were moved to tears by an unexpected gesture from their stepfather—whom they've known for more than 18 years—when he asked to adopt them by presenting gifts at the youngest sibling's 22nd birthday party.

A video of the tear-jerking moment quickly went viral, tugging at netizens' heartstrings.

"Although it was my sister's birthday, my stepdad had a gift for each of us," the eldest of the siblings, Isabel Arias, 27, told The Epoch Times. "He wanted us to open the gifts together."

After the family sang the birthday song together and cut the cake, Isabel's mother, Angela Marroquin, 43, gathered all the siblings around the table and gave a box to each one of them.

"My dad was to the side of the table, then



(L-R) The three siblings, Isabel Arias, Arturo Olmedo, and Anahy Olmedo.



The three siblings embrace their stepdad.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF ISABEL ARIAS

they said, "OK, open your gift!" Isabel recalled.

Isabel, Arturo Olmedo, 25, and birthday girl Anahy Olmedo, 22, ripped open their boxes, joking about the tissue paper and candy inside. Then they saw the paperwork.

"We all cried at once," said Isabel. "Underneath the candy was the adoption paperwork and a pink sticky note, saying, 'Will you be my [son or] daughter?'"

As Anahy read the heartwarming note, she gushed: "You want to adopt us?"

Meanwhile, Arturo was the first to run over and hug his stepdad, Juan Marroquin, 52. The sisters then followed as party attendees clapped and cheered at the heart-felt gift. Later, Isabel posted footage on Instagram, captioned, "Our family is defined by love, not blood."

The post has almost 98,000 reactions to date, which none of the siblings anticipated. "Honestly, we were so shocked!" said

Isabel. "However, it makes me happy ... people have told us how heartfelt it is, and how they usually see the child asking the parent to adopt them, not the parent asking the child."

Additionally, Isabel also received messages from people expressing how happy they were for the siblings.

"My family and I are happy that our moment made people's day and gave them a smile and shed a few tears," she said.

The three siblings, who grew up in Clearlake, California, with their mother, Angela, first met Juan in 2003 when he was the DJ at a quinceañera—a girl's 15th birthday that is celebrated in a big way in Latino cultures. Isabel was 9 at the time and Angela had just filed for divorce.

"[Juan] took a moment to ask my mom to dance," Isabel said. "I didn't like that a man was asking my mom to dance ... I laugh at it now, because I was a bit of a brat about it, but my siblings liked him."

While the sibling trio thought Juan, a now-senior car detailer, was "super serious" at first, they soon discovered his caring, sup-

“**When our biological father stopped coming around for me and my siblings, Juan was there for us like a father should be.**”

Isabel Arias

portive side and warmed up to him. Juan then introduced his son, Edwin, to the trio.

"He quickly became a father figure to us," said Isabel. "When our biological father stopped coming around for me and my siblings, Juan was there for us like a father should be."

"He offered advice, gave lessons, and made memories with us," she said. "He was there for me and my sister for the father-daughter dance for our quinceañera; he was there for my brother and his soccer journey, coaching him and training him."

As Juan is a goalkeeper, too, a family tradition known as "Soccer Sunday" soon took root, involving home and away games, barbecues, and occasional picnics on the beach in Fort Bragg. Juan's excitement during a first planned trip to Disneyland as a family also remains at the top of the siblings' list of happy memories.

"These memories are so precious to us, because there was so much laughter, inside jokes, and good times," said Isabel.

These days, Isabel, who works in network marketing for beauty products, lives in Tex-



The entire family with their kids.

as, while Arturo, a cook, lives in Arizona. Their parents and sister, a middle school attendance secretary, remain in California, and the family stays in touch via FaceTime.

"When my brother and I visit, our new tradition is taking the boat out on beautiful Clear Lake, or playing some board games together," Isabel said.

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

DEAR NEXT GENERATION:

Lessons Learned as a Wrestling Coach

→ Advice from our readers to our young people

What I would like to share with you comes from what I learned as a volunteer wrestling coach for 20 years and 16 years for a local high school. I learned more over the years than my student-athletes did. I would like to share two lessons.

Firstly, I learned over the years that sports did more for the undertalented athlete than the one with gifts and talent. Instead of making champions out of boys, we were making men. The champions were always going to get the medals. They didn't need to be encouraged as much as the kid who lost to the champions.

One of my favorite stories sums this up well. A young Blasian (of black-Asian heritage) man by the name of Warren Johnson came to join the team. Why? I had no idea at the time. Warren was short, overweight, shy, and lacked self-confidence. His weight put Warren in the heavyweight class. A class of giants. He didn't stand a chance. Defeat after defeat, he suffered.

You see, this is the thing about wrestling, there is nobody to blame but yourself. After a match is concluded, you have to respectfully stand and shake hands with the victor and his coach. In front of God and everybody. Keeping your head up and accepting your outcome with class and character. This is no small thing to do, week in and week out. So this sets the stage.

Warren draws a champion for his first match. A giant amongst men. A 6-foot, 260-pound walking door of an African American. Huge hair, enormous muscles. Undefeated. This man smashed his opponents. I found Warren pacing with his hands clenched and tears in his eyes. I asked him, "What's up?"

His reply: "Coach, I am scared to death!" My answer? What could I say? "You're going to win"? That would be a lie and he would know it. So I told him the truth.

I said, "Warren, you are the most dangerous man on the mat."

"What?" he says. "How can you say that? Look at him."

"That's just it," I said. "He thinks he has already won. You, on the other hand, have nothing to lose."

Warren looks at me in disbelief.

"That makes you very dangerous. Throw caution to the wind and go all out, he won't see it coming."

So Warren walked out on the mat and looked up at this giant, who, in turn, flexed his muscles to intimidate. Warren didn't flinch. Per the referee's instructions, Warren reaches out and, looking him in the eyes, shakes his hand. They set for battle. An unknown coach grabs me by the arm and says: "How can you



Many lessons are learned on the high school wrestling mat—for the athletes as well as the coaches.

let this happen? Stop the match. The young man does not stand a chance and is going to get killed."

I brushed him off. The whistle blows. You have to understand, this man towers over Warren by two feet. Warren doesn't hold anything back. He springs into the air, grabbing his opponent with a throw we call a "head and arm." This giant flies through the air and lands flat on his back. A count of three and the referee slaps the mat signaling the pin and win for Warren. The auditorium erupts with pandemonium.

From that day forward, Warren became a man. Confident, assured, athletic. Over the years, Warren worked hard, lost the excess weight, and built a body the Greek gods would be envious of. He's a heavy equipment operator, husband, and father. A real man. He knows he is very dangerous, but he keeps the wolf within. The second is a parable.

The 3 Evil Brothers Now Are 4.

Many wrestlers lose because they lack confidence. In other words, they fear. Fear of success, fear of making a mistake, fear of embarrassing themselves. Their fear causes them to do what they don't want. My goal was to teach them to overcome their fears. To do that, you must understand that fear is evil and

part of a process. I used to teach that fear was one of three brothers, Fear, Anger, and Stupid. I now teach four brothers, Safe, Fear, Anger, and Stupid.

“An unknown coach grabs me by the arm and says, ‘How can you let this happen? Stop the match. The young man does not stand a chance and is going to get killed.’”

—Kevin M. Bigham Sr.

Let me explain. Safe is the high ground. Who wouldn't want to be safe? If you're not safe, you're dangerous. This is what we have experienced these past two years with the China flu. Safety is No. 1 in all workplace environments. To the point that it has created an unsafe work environment. People are so scared to make a mistake that they do nothing. They let others decide what is safe. Life is dangerous. There is no way to avoid it.

other for my parents' floor lobby. After driving all over town, we found two beautiful ceramic sets and headed back to the senior apartments.

Mike pulled the car up to the front entrance and I unpacked the figures as little white Styrofoam pieces scattered everywhere. I took off my coat, laid it flat on my lap, and placed two Marys, two Josephs, and the rest gently inside. I wrapped up my coat and ran into the building.

After leaving the building, I jumped in the car to go home pleased as punch that our secret caper had gone off without a hitch—or so I thought.

In the main lobby, I respectfully moved a few reindeer and placed one nativity set adjacent to a menorah. I scooped up my coat, took the elevator up to my parents' floor, repositioned a few elves, and set up the second nativity across from a blue Star of David.

After leaving the building, I jumped in the car to go home, pleased as punch that our secret caper had gone off without a hitch—or so I thought.

Be aware and self-responsible or it will progress to its brother, Fear. Fear leads to Anger. Anger leads to Stupid.

Think of how you react to somebody jumping out at you when you don't see it coming. First, you are startled. This is un-Safe! Then embarrassed. Then Anger takes hold. Now, you have a choice. Master your Anger or it will become your master. Your pulse is racing, you're pumped full of adrenaline. Fight or flight. Anger steps in and says, "I've got this, step aside."

Once Anger has you, you are no longer in control but Anger controls you. Typically we then do something Stupid that we later regret. If we (the grappler-wrestler) can break the chain of the evil brothers and take just one of the brothers captive then we stand a better chance of victory, just like the previous story of Warren Johnson. He broke the chain of Safe, replaced Fear with resolve, defeated Anger with courage, and put Stupid behind him. Even a fool can be thought wise. David defeated Goliath.

—Kevin M. Bigham Sr., California

I lost my father at age 14 and as sad as that may be, a friend's father, who was friends with my dad from coaching baseball in the same little league, took me under his wing afterward, as my supervisor at the start of my career in mechanical design. He was a great Christian man and a very approachable mentor to many young men in the community. His name was Jack Dobson. He was a second father to me and sadly, he recently passed a few years ago. Some of the best advice he ever gave were these little trinkets of wisdom:

1. "What's it gonna matter 100 years from now?"
2. "God has a way of working things out."
3. "Keep doing the next 'right' thing!"

The latter is my personal favorite and I gladly share these with our next generation because they sure did help this lost little 14-year-old kid in his life and still do, as I'm about to turn 58 this January. (So here's to men like Jack!)

—Randy Hudgins, Virginia

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 your wisdom and hard-earned experience. We feel that the passing down of this wisdom has diminished over time, and that only with a strong moral foundation can future generations thrive.

Send your advice, along with your full name, state, and contact information to NextGeneration@epochtimes.com or mail it to: Next Generation, The Epoch Times, 229 W. 28th St., Floor 7, New York, NY 10001.

FILM REVIEW

An Excellent but Incomplete Biography

MICHAEL CLARK

In adapting Max McLean's stage play "C.S. Lewis Onstage: The Most Reluctant Convert," director Norman Stone resisted the temptation to add any filler and as a result, the running time is a scant 73 minutes, which might leave some viewers feeling a tad cheated.

What Stone's film might lack in quantity is more than made up for with the quality of the content. If anyone were to nitpick, it would be with the omission of Lewis's brief marriage to American author Joy Davidman and the lack of detail regarding his fictional and non-fictional written works.

While the film covers the bulk of Lewis's relatively short life, it concentrates mostly on his religious beliefs (or lack thereof) and it does so in ingenious ways.

Max McLean Reprises His Stage Performance

Reprising his stage role as the elder version of Lewis, McLean (dressed in mid-20th-century period garb) is first seen entering a sound stage that recreates his home yet is populated with present-day grips, and sound and lighting technicians. Upon taking a seat, Lewis breaks the fourth wall, looks into the camera, and speaks his first words: "When I was an atheist." Leaving home, Lewis goes to a pub and orders two pints of beer, one for himself and the other for the audience. If for no other reason, Stone's unorthodox beginning to the film immediately ropes in the viewer.

Growing up in a well-to-do Irish home with a non-religious family, Lewis (played as a pre-teen by Eddie Ray Martin) faced what was then the biggest hurdle of his life: the death of his mother from cancer. He had been told that prayer would save her and when it didn't, he became disillusioned and decided that there was no God.

It didn't help matters that the mood of his formerly congenial attorney father Albert (Richard Harrington) darkened after the death of his wife, and he channeled his anger toward Lewis and his older brother Warnie (Charlie Ray Reid). Lewis's opinion of the Almighty worsened when he (now played by Nicholas Ralph) was nearly killed in action while serving as a soldier



Max McLean reprises his role as C.S. Lewis in "The Most Reluctant Convert: The Untold Story of C.S. Lewis."

in France during World War I.

Prior to the war, Lewis and Warnie were privately tutored in England by William T. Kirkpatrick (David Gant), the former headmaster at Lurgan College, the private Christian middle school. This was when Lewis initially became interested in writing but also developed an obsession with the occult, which was fueled further by fantasy author George MacDonald's "Phantastes."

J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson

It's during Lewis's time in college at Oxford and his interaction with other future famous scribes J.R.R. Tolkien (Tom Glenister) and Hugo Dyson (David Shields) did things begin to change. Already devout Christians, Tolkien and Dyson didn't so much attempt to convert the non-believer Lewis as much as they presented him with philosophical arguments that appealed to his mind and heart as well as his soul.

Frequently framing the elder Lewis with the people he's talking about in flashback adds further texture to Stone's approach. The movie is a little bit of a docudrama, something of an anthology and part live-action but not enough of any of those to fit into any one genre. Some might also watch the film and label it as "Christian," but it isn't that either. This is a hybrid production that defies easy categorization.

Lewis's transition into Christianity wasn't an overnight occurrence. By his own admission in the film, he resisted conversion by "kicking, struggling, being resentful, and darting my eyes in every direction for a chance to escape." This wasn't going to be a "come to Jesus" moment but rather a long, contemplative slog. The overlong title is certainly on the mark.

There are essentially two groups of those familiar with Lewis: the ones in love with his books about faith and the millions who

Max McLean reprises his role as C.S. Lewis in "The Most Reluctant Convert: The Untold Story of C.S. Lewis."

are aware of him from "The Chronicles of Narnia" trilogy of movies from the 2000s. Whether intended or not, the "Narnia" filmmakers largely played down the religious subtext contained in the books that in all likelihood broadened their audience appeal.

As good as "Reluctant" is, it's far from a complete overview of Lewis's life, which isn't at all a bad thing. The movie accomplishes what it set out to do; it wasn't trying to be a full-blown biography. Much the same can be said about the 1993 "Shadowlands" starring Anthony Hopkins as Lewis and Debra Winger as Davidman that only concentrated on their romance.

A Cable Mini-Series Would Be Welcomed

What needs to happen at this point is for Netflix or Amazon to start the ball rolling on a limited six-hour series in either a live-action or documentary format that would delve into every aspect of this man's monumentally interesting life from cradle to grave.

That Lewis went on to become one of the most famous and influential Christian writers and defending "apologist" theists makes his conflicted spiritual journey all the more impressive and awe-inspiring. He didn't want to find God but God ended up finding him.

After a limited theatrical run in the United Kingdom in November, "The Most Reluctant Convert: The Untold Story of C.S. Lewis" is now available on-demand at CSLewisMovie.com through Jan. 9.

Michael Clark has written for over 30 local and national film industry media outlets and is ranked in the top 10 of the Atlanta media marketplace. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a regular contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com

Running Time 1 hour, 13 minutes

MPAA Rating: Not Rated

Release Date Nov. 3, 2021

★★★★★

BOOK REVIEW

The Texas Revolution Recreated With Historical Accuracy

Author James L. Haley's historical fiction series heads to the Republic of Texas

DUSTIN BASS

When Americans think of the American Revolution, they typically think of the ground troops led by men such as George Washington, Daniel Morgan, and Nathanael Greene. When it comes to fighting on the high seas, it's the French Navy that comes to mind. The Continental Navy, aside from possibly John Paul Jones, typically isn't given much thought. In fact, the Continental Navy was disbanded at the end of the war. It wasn't until 1794 that the Department of the Navy was created, but still it wasn't incredibly memorable.

Over the past five years, James L. Haley has been working to help mend that dismissive mentality. In 2016, his first work of the Putnam Series launched with "The Shores of Tripoli: Lieutenant Putnam and the Barbary Pirates," telling the fascinating story of the war against the Muslim pirates. The series follows its namesake, now-Captain Bliven Putnam, along the African coast, against British vessels in the War of 1812 ("A Darker Sea: Master Commandant Putnam and The War of 1812"), into Hawaii ("The Devil in Paradise: Captain Putnam in Hawaii"), and into Texas with his latest work "Captain Putnam for the Republic of Texas."

Writing Skill Meets Historical Knowledge

Haley, one of Texas's most prestigious historians, simultaneously puts his incredible writ-

ing skill and historical knowledge on display in the new book. The author provides a thorough historical analysis of what was taking place before, during, and after the Texas War of Independence, which began in Gonzales on Oct. 2, 1835. Haley takes the reader on a fun ride through the trials, defeats, and triumphs that culminated in the creation of the Republic of Texas.

This fourth installment of the Putnam Series brings back several familiar faces, such as Sam Bandy, Putnam's wife Clarity and, of course, Putnam himself. As Haley creates his fictional, yet historically accurate, portrayal of the 1830s, new faces emerge, such as Gen. Sam Houston, Gen. Santa Anna, and President Andrew Jackson.

Haley has created his own way of telling the early history of America's Navy through incredible tales of bravery and hardship on these large wooden vessels. Along with colorful characters, an exciting narrative, and a thorough and accurate historical education, Haley gives the reader a masterclass of how the ships and their crews worked. One could study his four books and at least obtain a good grasp of the inner workings and outer workings of a ship of the line.

An interesting aspect of Haley's recent book (which he accomplishes in each) is that he successfully places the reader on both sides of some of the most crucial debates of that time (arguments that are still discussed today), including slavery, the reason for the Texas Revolution, and the controversial presidency of Jackson.

It was a few years ago that I'd read Haley's debut Putnam novel, "The Shores of Tripoli: Lieutenant Putnam and the Barbary Pirates," and I was enraptured by the adventurous writing that was steeped in America's actual naval history. Haley



'Captain Putnam for the Republic of Texas'

Author James L. Haley

Publisher Publisher Penguin, March 2, 2021

Edition Hardcover, 368 pages

★★★★★

Haley has created a figure who exemplifies the most treasured American qualities and virtues.

provided insight into America's need for a strong navy, how the European powers had been dealing with pirates, and a view into portions of the early 19th-century Muslim world.

Haley's Lasting Accomplishment

What Haley has done is create a fictional naval series reminiscent of Britain's Horatio Hornblower or the Jack Aubrey series. The author leaves an opening for a possible fifth installment in the series, which I do hope he writes. The Texas Revolution is now over, but the Mexican-American War is only a decade away, and less than 15 years after that, America erupts into its Civil War. Haley still has plenty of history to work with, and his protagonist still has plenty of life left in him.

This is the type of historical fiction series that Americans need. As iterated earlier, these are enjoyable books with history added throughout. It helps place the reader in the midst of important conversations, and at the same time expresses the need for patience with those with whom we currently may not agree.

In Putnam, Haley has created a figure who exemplifies the most treasured American qualities and virtues: fortitude, courage, wisdom, and generosity. These books are perfect for a rather wide audience. I would recommend the books to early teens and up, and especially for anyone with an appreciation for naval history and stories. This is a great way to learn and remember our country's early days fighting on the high seas, and now the Gulf of Mexico.

Dustin Bass is the co-host of The Sons of History podcast and an author.

FAITH

An 'I Love Lucy' Christmas

A holiday caper has unexpected results



When holiday decorations seem to be lacking at her mother's building, the author jumps in.

BERNADETTE BONANNO

Growing up in the 1960s, my favorite show was "I Love Lucy." It made me laugh to see how Lucy was always getting herself and her husband, Ricky, into predicaments. Periodically and unfortunately, I can relate.

A while back, my parents left their home of 51 years to live in an independent senior apartment building. Outside each apartment is a small corner shelf for residents to personally decorate. With the holidays approaching, the small corner shelves, as well as the building lobby areas, were beautifully decorated with Christmas trees, wreaths, Santa and all his workshop helpers, Stars of David, and menorahs.

Walking throughout the hallways, my mom frequently whispered, "In all these decorations, there aren't any signs of the birth of Jesus." To avoid offending her new neighbors, she kept her comments quiet and put a candy dish on her corner shelf.

It was an icy, cold Sunday just before Christmas. After going to mass and out for breakfast, my husband Mike and I dropped my parents off at their apartment. By this time, Mike was familiar with Mom's "no signs of Jesus" whispers.

This is when my Lucy tendencies surfaced. Despite poor road conditions, we decided to go shopping for nativity sets—one for the main lobby and an-

PUBLIC DOMAIN



ART EXPLORATION FOR THE YOUNG AND YOUNG AT HEART

Mary and the Angelic Friar

ANDREA NUTT FALCE

Are you ready for Christmas? Christmas prepping is a practice many of us share. Whether you are writing a wish list or to-do list, dream sheet or balance sheet, cooking, cleaning, or polishing up behavior to eke onto the nice list, before celebrating Christmas, there is work to be done.

Perhaps you've already decorated your home with twinkling lights or picked out the fluffiest tree. Me? I've just started planning menus and hoping we're not too late to purchase a nine-foot Fraser fir. Last year, an especially scrawny six-footer was the best we could find. Yet this year, the trouble is still finding the time.

As we struggle to prepare for the joy to come, there's expert help to be found. Let us look to a lesson from the mother of all Christmas preppers—Mary.

Mary Reading Herself for Christ's Birth
Mary was the first to actively anticipate Christmas Day. Her gentle service is worth considering. The Bible never mentions Mary fussing over a subtly decorated nursery or a perfect home, except insofar as it pertained to her very person. God called, Mary answered. When she was praised, Mary gave all glory and thanks to God. She never declared it was time to secure her own comfort or pamper her psyche. In fact, right after Mary came to expect Jesus, she set out to care for her aging cousin Elizabeth, who was also with child. For Mary, taking care of herself meant loving and serving God.

As God would have it, when the time came for Christ to be born, Mary and Joseph were called away from their physical home in Nazareth to be counted in the census. In place of fine accommodations, Jesus was born in a stable in Bethlehem. Christ came into the world where it pleased God to bring



"Adoration of the Child" (1440) by Fra Angelico. Museo Nazionale di San Marco.

him forth. He humbled himself to be born of a woman and laid in a manger where animals fed. A king unlike any other, he came to serve rather than be served.

The heart, soul, and womb of Mary were arranged with such love that no matter the exterior circumstances, her interior made a radiant home for Jesus. Mary provides a great lesson in how to carry Christ. Though she often seemed surprised by God's plans, she was still prepared. Throughout art history, the figure of Mary has been honored and memorialized for this role.

The Sacred Art of Fra Angelico
Sacred art is a particular gift to the faithful. Historically, many followers of Christ could no more afford a copy of the Bible than they could read one. Since as early as the second century after Christ was born, Christian art has been an aid to prayer, faith, and understanding.

One of the greatest artists to invest his talents toward illuminating events in the lives of Jesus and his disciples was Fra Angelico. This artist was not only a prolific painter, but also a sincere believer. Guido di Pietro, as he was originally named, was so widely considered a man of faith that he became more recognizable by the title "Fra Angelico" which means "angelic friar."

Probably born around the year 1395, Fra Angelico was a consecrated brother in the Dominican order. An especially brilliant artist, it's said that he prayed constantly while creating his masterpieces.

Fra Angelico painted Mary and Jesus over and over again, meditating as he went on the way to love and serve God. His paintings of the Annunciation are famously beautiful. They are also highly theological. The Annunciation altarpiece was painted for the church of San Domenico in Cortona around 1430. At the heart of the work, the Angel Gabriel bows to Mary, honoring her with the greeting of God.

The Holy Spirit also hovers in gold above Mary, who crosses her arms in loving submission to the Lord. Mary is juxtaposed in a posture of humble reverence. Her humility can be compared to the humiliation of Adam and Eve, depicted in the upper lefthand corner of the work. Viewers are meant to recall the expulsion of the first man and woman from the Garden of Eden following their disobedience to God. In holy obedience, Mary is thus set as the new Eve. She submits to the will of God making way for Christ.

Beneath the image of this Annunciation, the altarpiece is adorned with numerous painted scenes familiar to the faithful. Of special note among the rich collection depicting the life of Mary is a picture of "The Visitation." The little painting portrays the Blessed Mother arriving in the hill country. Mary reaches out, bearing Christ to her cousin Elizabeth, who is pregnant with John the Baptist. Mary is dressed in red, a color that symbolizes humanity; she is also draped in blue, the color of heavenly grace. According to the Bible, the unborn child John leaped for joy at the sound of Mary's greeting, which also heralded the coming of Christ. Such scenes are meant to lead viewers to a deeper contemplation of salvation history.

Six hundred years after he lived, the exceptional Renaissance painter Fra Angelico still points to Christ through his work, and through the example of his life as a friar. He spent his life praying and meditating on the word of God while bringing it to light in paint. His efforts bore good fruit: On Oct. 3, 1982, Pope John Paul II beatified Fra Angelico. In 1984, he was declared the patron saint of artists. His work is moving to behold. He is especially noted for his paintings of Mary. For many who celebrate Christmas, the art remains a special gift, intended to aid viewers in contemplation and preparation.

Andrea Nutt Falce is a happy wife and mother of four. She is also a Florentine-trained classical realist artist and author of the children's book, "It's a Jungle Out There." Her work can be found at AndreaNutt.com

"The Annunciation" (between 1430 and 1432) by Fra Angelico. Museo del Prado.

"Visitation" (1430s) by Fra Angelico. Diocesan Museum in Cortona, Italy.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

Fra Angelico painted Mary and Jesus over and over again, meditating as he went on the way to love and serve God.



"Madonna of Humility" (circa 1430) by Fra Angelico. National Gallery of Art, Washington.

PUBLIC DOMAIN



FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES



GRAFISSIMO/GETTY IMAGES



(ILLUSTRATION) DUNCAN 1890/GETTY IMAGES; (DECOR) FLAFFY/SHUTTERSTOCK

The Wassail Song

Old Devonshire Carol

Here we come a-wassailing
Among the leaves so green,
Here we come a-wandering
So fair to be seen.

Love and joy come to you
And to your wassail too,
And God bless you, and send you
A happy New Year.

We are not daily beggars
That beg from door to door,
But we are neighbours' children
That you have seen before.

Good Master and good Mistress,
As you sit by the fire,
Pray think of us poor children
Who are wandering in the mire.

Bring us out a table
And spread it with a cloth;
Bring us out a mouldy cheese
And some of your Christmas loaf.

God bless the master of this house,
Likewise the mistress too;
And all the little children
That round the table go.

WHAT DO YOU GET IF YOU EAT YOUR CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS?

'SILLI-TISNIL



CELTSTUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK

Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love.

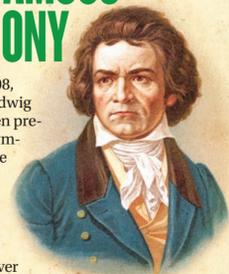
NORMAN VINCENT PEALE (1898-1993), AMERICAN MINISTER AND WRITER



SYDA PRODUCTIONS/SHUTTERSTOCK

BEETHOVEN INTRODUCES HIS MOST FAMOUS SYMPHONY

On Dec. 22, 1808, composer Ludwig van Beethoven premiered his Symphony No. 5 at the Theater an der Wein in Vienna, Austria. To this day, it's one of the most famous works of music ever written, featuring possibly the most recognizable four-note combination (G, G, G, E flat) at its introduction. The conditions in the theater the evening of the debut weren't ideal. There were issues with the temperature and the orchestra wasn't playing well that day. No matter, as Beethoven's 5th, along with many of his other works, has stood the test of time.



By Aidan Danza, age 15

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

THE SAHARA

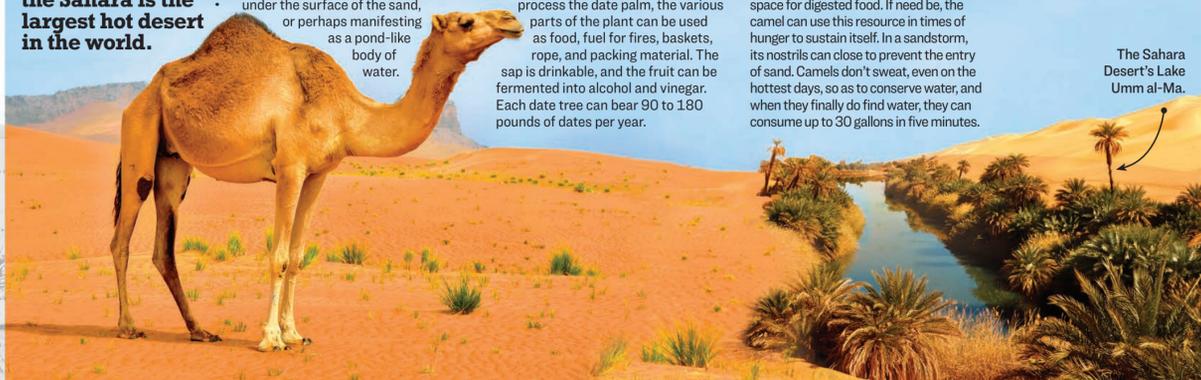
Covering more than a quarter of Africa, the Sahara is the largest hot desert in the world.

As a very arid desert, it receives very little rain. Average rainfall, across the entire desert, ranges from 4 to 10 inches per year. Four inches of rain can be dumped, in America, by a heavy rainstorm that lasts a few days, perhaps. In the desert, some water can be found in oases—these are deposits of groundwater, found just under the surface of the sand, or perhaps manifesting as a pond-like body of water.

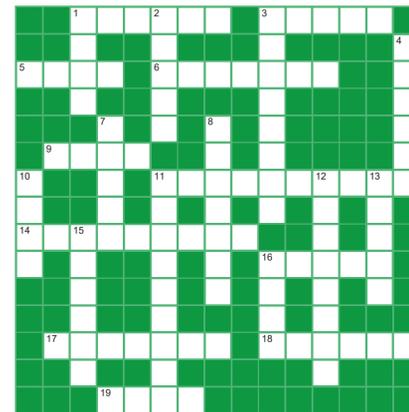
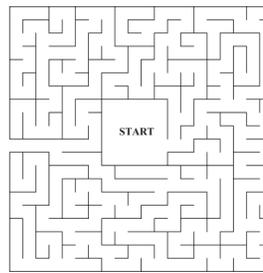
There would be no indication of an underground oasis if not for the plants that take advantage of it. One of these is the date palm, perhaps the most iconic plant of the Sahara. If a weary, thirsty traveler found just one date palm tree, he could be supplied with water and the sweet fruit of the tree. For someone who has the means to process the date palm, the various parts of the plant can be used as food, fuel for fires, baskets, rope, and packing material. The sap is drinkable, and the fruit can be fermented into alcohol and vinegar. Each date tree can bear 90 to 180 pounds of dates per year.

Of course, there are few animals in the Sahara. By far the most iconic, though, is the dromedary (one-humped) camel. This animal was domesticated by the Africans for long trips across the desert. It's made specifically to endure the desert. Its feet are large, so it can gain traction on the sand. Obviously, it has a hump, which is actually used as a storage space for digested food. If need be, the camel can use this resource in times of hunger to sustain itself. In a sandstorm, its nostrils can close to prevent the entry of sand. Camels don't sweat, even on the hottest days, so as to conserve water, and when they finally do find water, they can consume up to 30 gallons in five minutes.

The Sahara Desert's Lake Umm al-Ma.



AMAZING ESCAPES!



Down

- You don't want this in your stocking (4)
- We send these to friends for Christmas (5)
- Winter storm (8)
- Stable place (6)
- Wassail ingredient (5)
- Aid for shaking hands? (7)
- Downhill ride (4)
- Where Santa lives (5,4)
- "Deck the halls..." group (8)
- Little people (5)
- Christmas drink (6)
- Box under a tree (4)

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

Easy puzzle 1



Solution For Easy 1
8 + 8 + (1 - 8)
(8 - 8) + (1 + 8)

Medium puzzle 1

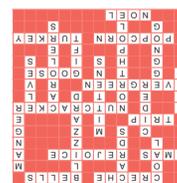


Solution for Medium 1
11 + 11 + (16 - 9)

Hard puzzle 1



Solution for Hard 1
62 - 9 + (6 - 9)



Across

- Nativity scene (6)
- "Jingle _____" (5)
- Present time (4)
- "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" verb (7)
- Santa makes one every year (4)
- "... Suite." (10)
- Christmas decoration site (9)
- "A Christmas Carol" dinner option (5)
- We may string this and hang it on our tree (7)
- What Scrooge bought for the Cratchit family (6)
- Christmas song (4)

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