

# THE EPOCH TIMES

# LIFE &

# TRADITION

MORSA IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

## The Magic Fix for Family Life Dinner Together



It's more than just a nice idea. University research shows that the family that eats together, stays together.

IDA GAZZOLA

Imagine if there was one, simple thing parents could do for their children that would lead to the following results: better mental and physical health, higher self-esteem, less risky behavior, better academic performance, better communication skills, and a better relationship between parent and child.

The family meal: 20 years of research has shown that this tool does, indeed, exist.

Anne Fishel, professor of psychology at Harvard University and co-founder of the Family Dinner Project, is an advocate for family meals.

"So many of the things that I try to do in family therapy actually get accomplished by regular dinners," Fishel said.

Leonard Sax, a psychologist with 30 years of experience and the author of some very

insightful parenting books, in his advice for parents says that the family meal should be a constant.

"Research shows having a family meal at home without distractions is important. Every day," Sax said. "Not doing that indicates that time spent at home with parents is the least-important priority. It doesn't matter. It can be overlooked and forgotten. By communicating that time at home as a family is our highest priority, you are sending the message that family matters."

### Communication

Communication is the antidote to so many issues that may afflict our children. Healthy communication is most effective in a relaxed, convivial setting.

*Continued on Page 2*

“

**So many of the things that I try to do in family therapy actually get accomplished by regular dinners.**

*Anne Fishel, co-founder,  
Family Dinner Project*

ANASTASIA SHURAEVA/PEXELS



## 5 Rules for Finding Purpose in Life

ANNIE HOLMQUIST

Today's world is so full of fools who have turned the world into a chaotic mess that the most basic, common-sense statements become nuggets of profound wisdom. I almost stood up and cheered when I came across one of these the other day.

The statement in question was made by Abigail Shrier, an Oxford and Yale-educated lawyer turned independent journalist. Shrier is perhaps best known for her 2020 book, "Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters," a topic that hasn't exactly won her many friends in the politically correct stratosphere.

Shrier kept her nonpolitically correct reputation intact during a recent speech to Princeton students in which she took polite swipes at our illogical society. Yet her speech didn't just snipe at what was wrong with the world, it also offered five ways to return to sanity. Shrier's advice pointed toward a life

lived with purpose, rather than as just another automaton marching in lockstep to the drumbeat of the political and cultural elites.

**Great purpose comes 'when you summon the courage to fashion a life, something that will remain after you are gone,' Shrier said.**

### Get Married

Official Centers for Disease Control and Prevention numbers show that the number of marriages per 1,000 people has declined from eight to six in the first two decades of the 21st century alone. This is down from more

than 16 marriages per 1,000 people at the close of World War II, The Hill recently reported. Educational choices and greater financial independence for women drive this decline, but it's also likely that fear—both of divorce and of risk-taking—contributes to it as well.

Yet those who avoid marriage are missing out, according to Shrier.

"You feel that frisson [or thrill in life] when you choose a person to commit yourself to, knowing full well that any marriage may fail," she said.

Committing is a risk. Those who don't commit will escape marriage difficulties. But in doing so, they forget that difficulties are what make someone a better person. Those who do make the commitment get the thrill of companionship and of looking out for someone besides themselves, along with the knowledge that traditional families make the world a better place in general.

*Continued on Page 2*

# The Magic Fix for Family Life Dinner Together

*Continued from Page 1*

There are other occasions in family life that meet this requirement, but none of them top the family meal.

At the dinner table, family members get to know one another better, and interestingly, they get to know themselves better. Through encountering the family as a group, as well as through the one-on-one interactions that occur, each person's individuality blossoms before their own eyes.

Effective communication lies in allowing each person to express their own ideas and feelings without fear of condemnation. If the subject is truly inappropriate, parents can guide the conversation in the right direction, speaking the truth without criticizing the individual.

As G.K. Chesterton once said, "The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to shut it again on something solid."

Parents want to find ways of communicating that suit what each person needs and to bring the family emotionally together during the meal. Periodic conversations between spouses are a great way of coming up with ideas of how to make some regular meals possible, to identify areas of difficulty or needed growth, to set goals, and even to come up with conversation ideas.

### Creative Parents

Make regular occasions for the whole family to gather. This may be impossible every day. The good news is that research shows that even if only one parent is present, the whole family will reap the benefits of mealtime. This is important because often both parents have to work and may have conflicting schedules. Lunch, breakfast, or snacks can be highlighted as opportunities to eat together.

The point is that the parent who is on "duty" must try to set the tone of cheerfulness and togetherness for the meal. If it happens regularly that only one parent is at the meal, then the other can find ways to talk together about the "aha moments" that arise. Research has shown that the more frequently the family eats together, the greater the benefits are for the children.

However, what's needed isn't perfection, but effort. Start with one meal per week if necessary, and most likely the meal frequency will increase from there.

### Informality

Family meals are informal, often lively, full of antics and spontaneity. Sometimes it's good to be proactive in dinner conversation to steer away from too much bathroom humor or squabbling. The Family Dinner Project (TheFamilyDinnerProject.org) has lists of conversation starters and mealtime games. Stories about our family members are also

a good idea—immigrating, falling in love, overcoming adversity, childhood memories, or funny real-life stories: All of these connect us to something bigger.

Another idea is a gratitude journal in which one person writes down something for which each family member is grateful. Current events, jokes, upcoming family outings, and the highs and lows of our day are all ways to get the conversation flowing. Children also learn much from watching their parents converse with each other about their day and about what's happening in the community and world. Try to engage each child.

You can enlist the help of the older children in drawing out their young siblings. With teens, sometimes simple ideas are best—maybe antics about the family pet or another subject in which they're interested.

### Managing Conflict

Conflict is inevitable in a family of any size. Irene Freundorfer, a mother of 10, suggested going easy on teaching manners. Rather than speaking, she uses hand signals to remind the children to eat with their mouths closed, to keep their legs down, and to keep their elbows off the table. Avoid contentious topics. Use humor to change the mood. Play some music and light some candles once in a while. Compile a list of the family's favorite foods to cut down on the complaining. Good food does help!

As for those little ones who keep getting up from the table, don't worry. Even a short meal together is still a meal together. Just being together, eating, and talking together for a short time puts you on the path to a happier, healthier family.

### Cooperation

Children helping with the family meals is another way of getting them to be invested in the meal ritual. One survey of 1,000 children showed that helping with dinner duties correlated with having good feelings. Have a child plan and make a meal with a parent one night. A weekly rotating schedule is one idea. Discuss this with the children. They often come up with good suggestions.

Special occasions help cement the family bond. The usual holidays are important—Christmas, birthdays—but also those other ones that arise—someone got their driver's license after three tries, special anniversaries in the family, or weekly Sunday dinners. On these occasions, the special plates can be brought out and a little extra decoration can be added to the table. One of the kids can learn how to fold napkins or make a dessert or appetizer.

Another way to breathe life into the daily meal routine is to take the oldest child or children out for a meal. This changes the dynamic and can allow for deeper communication. We took our oldest child to a restaur-



Making a priority of having meals together sends the message that family matters.

rant that serves pizza while diners play board games. Perfect for teens who view questions with suspicion! Or you could have your own game night at home, playing cards while eating. A high tea to show the grandmas how much they're appreciated allows the children to plan, execute, and participate in a special meal.

Having guests over for dinner occasionally can help the children to be better behaved and to interact in new ways. This is good for any age and may be especially good for teens as they pull away a bit and are in need of other, external good influences.

In the words of Irene Freundorfer:

"Supper time is an excellent occasion for everyone to review their day. Try to eat together as often as possible. Try not to eat in the car, on the run, or separately. Coming together around one table is very important. Share, talk, laugh, joke, enjoy. Your children are home for only a short time in your life. Build the memories. Plug into the power of family meals. Whether you talk about your work, the news, family lore, plans for vacations ... you are helping your kids develop criteria, values, identity, sense of belonging, and family intimacy.

"Too often the fast pace of today's life erodes this special family ritual. Try to take

care of it more. Keep extra-curriculars to a minimum. Safeguard mealtimes. They are sacred family occasions. Take the phone game night at home, playing cards while eating. A high tea to show the grandmas how much they're appreciated allows the children to plan, execute, and participate in a special meal.

"Set a nice table. Use proper serving dishes. Linger over the meal as the kids get older and have more to say. Learn to relax, slow down, and savor the moment. I cannot stress this enough. Don't allow the rush of life to encroach upon this valuable family time. You have the power to really make a difference in your family's well-being by this simple daily ritual. Don't be quick to let it slip through your fingers. Grab it while you can. You will be so much stronger for it."

*Ida Gazzola is the mother of six girls and one boy, and lives in British Columbia, Canada. Before embarking on the adventure of parenting, she studied and worked in the financial industry. "Team Baby: Creating a Happy and Rested Family," which she co-authored with Julia Dee, offers parents of new babies practical ways to develop a tranquil flow of life within the family. This article was originally published on MercatorNet.*

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/STANLEY  
PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/STANLEY  
PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/STANLEY  
PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/STANLEY  
PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/STANLEY  
PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/STANLEY

# 5 Rules for Finding Purpose in Life

*Continued from Page 1*

### Have Children

Birth rates are taking a beating along with marriage, and 2020 saw U.S. births reach their lowest point ever. Understandably, a world in chaos isn't exactly the type of environment people want to bring a child into. Children are also a lot of work and even put parents at a disadvantage monetarily and timewise.

But having children is still one of the most thrilling, purposeful moments of life, according to Shrier, even though there's always risk "when you bring children into a world where there are no guarantees of their safety or success." Children are an eternal investment. They bring joy, laughter, and even an opportunity for self-reflection—a mirror for your faults and an incentive for self-improvement in order to be a good role model to their little watching eyes.

### Work Hard

Great purpose comes "when you summon the courage to fashion a life, something that will remain after you are gone," Shrier said. There's a joy that comes from working with your hands on something meaningful, not only for your family, but for the world in general.

Landing a job in the corporate arena is considered the epitome of success. But sometimes those who have the most influence in life are those who do the simple things, doing their best to brighten their little corner of the world. As the classic Christmas movie "It's a Wonderful Life" demonstrates, the small things in life—such as providing daily meals for your family, befriending a neighbor, or volunteering at church—can have a greater influence for good in the world than we'll ever know, if they're done faithfully.

### Be Principled

"[Speaking] the truth publicly—with care

and lucidity," is the fourth thing that Shrier said gives her purpose in life. Speaking truthfully can get a person in major trouble these days, thanks to cancellation, job loss, or other things. Yet there's nothing like knowing that you've spoken the truth, regardless of the cost.

### Don't Be Bought

In conjunction with the above point, many are quick to cave or sacrifice their principles, whether it be for monetary gain, personal safety, or even to retain a good reputation in "woke" society. But by being principled and telling the world that "you cannot buy me with flattery," you also give life greater meaning and integrity, according to Shrier.

There's a commonality in each of the points Shier made: each involves an element of being selfless or self-sacrificing. In order to marry and have children, one must give of oneself continually, both to maintain the conjugal relationship and

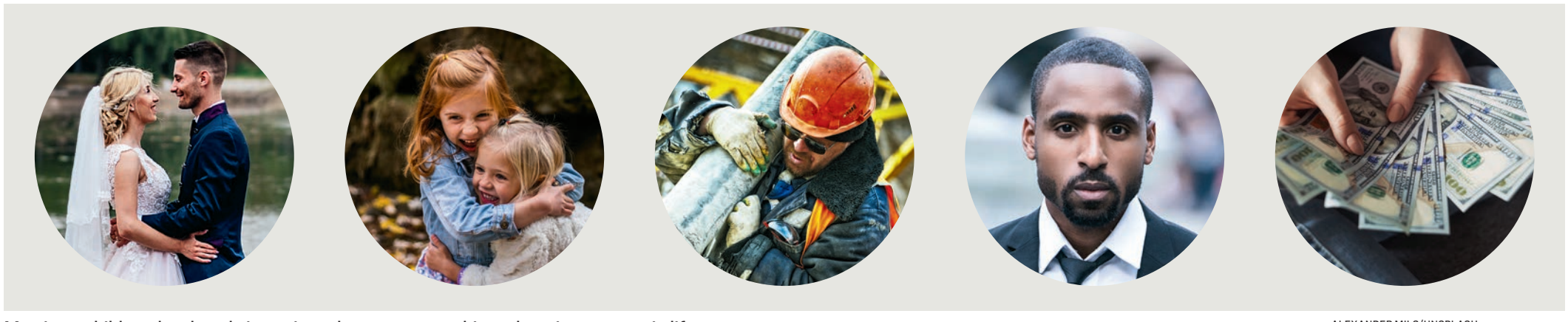
to ensure that the little ones survive. The same goes for working with your hands and helping others. And when it comes to being principled and avoiding flattery, you must lay aside your own good opinion of yourself, as well as the opinions others have of you in order to do right.

But then, isn't that what life is all about? Laying down one's self for others?

A wise person once told us that laying down our lives for others is a sign of the greatest love. Perhaps it's that reason alone why Shrier finds so much more life purpose in these things than in "marching lockstep" and "obeying the algorithm."

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

*This article was originally published on Intellectual Takeout.*



Marriage, children, hard work, integrity—those are some things that give purpose in life.

ALEXANDER MILLS/UNSPLASH

## PERFORMING ARTS

# A New Frontier in Classical Music

### Shen Yun Orchestra brings two traditions together

#### CATHERINE YANG

Once, at a classical concert, a man sitting the row in front of me in the orchestra level of Carnegie Hall got up for a standing ovation and stood there in almost reverent contemplation long after the musicians had left the stage for intermission. He had been moved to tears.

Seeing the curiosity in my expression, he said, "It took Haydn two hours to render the story of Creation. It took him 12 minutes! Bravo! Bravo."

The concertgoer was referring to a new composition by the artistic director of world-renowned Shen Yun Performing Arts, the New York-based premier classical Chinese dance company. It had premiered that season at a Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra concert—a rare opportunity to hear the company's unique East-West orchestra and original compositions unaccompanied by dance.

The original music tends to surprise lovers of classical music. It's new yet tonally traditional and euphonious. There's a positivity that leaves listeners wondering where these musicians come from and how they're able to accomplish such a feat.

"Right now, we are the only orchestra in the United States that has successfully mixed traditional Chinese instruments and original Western symphony orchestra instruments," Shen Yun conductor Milen Nachev said in a video introduction.

#### Positive Synergy

An orchestra is one of those entities whose total is much greater than the sum of its parts.

"Shen Yun's music is very, very traditional," said Liang Yu, a pipa virtuoso. The pipa, a five-stringed upright lute, is a traditional Chinese instrument that's a core part of every Shen Yun orchestral ensemble.

The music is traditional in the sense that the melodies are often ancient Chinese melodies. The music comes from ethnic folk dances that rely on the traditional tunes of the Yi, Tibetan, or Mongolian peoples. But the music is also traditional in a Western classical sense, in tonality and arrangement. With two sets of traditions, one from the West and one from the East, one may imagine that the work is doubly restricting for a performer. But in reality, "it's because of that ... you will be able to aspire to something higher," Liang said.

Listening to the works herself, Liang can feel a spiritual component innate to the music.

"Some audience members gave us feedback that they felt the inner meaning of Shen Yun's music is so deep that it's as if it encompassed the whole universe," flute player Lee Chia-Jung said.

It was an epiphany for Lee. Later, a professional musician friend of hers attended a concert and afterward told her how much



The Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra.

he enjoyed the clean field of sound in which he was immersed.

"I told him that we all abide by the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance in living in society and interacting with people. He said he could feel that energy coming from the music," Lee said.

Shen Yun is a performing arts company with its hopes set on reviving traditional culture, and as such their own artists follow a traditional path that includes cultivating kindness and mindfulness, as well as holding the ardent belief that art has the power to elevate humanity. This lifestyle is as much a daily practice for the musicians as their rehearsals, and by extension, it's communicated through their performances.

### The original music tends to surprise lovers of classical music. It's new yet tonally traditional and euphonious.

"Before, I would be very impatient when I performed music. I would also feel tense when playing my instrument," cellist Huang I-Chen said. "But in the process of performing with Shen Yun, I found that the more calm my heart was, the more I let go of things like fame and fortune, I would improve in making music.

"I would like to present to the audience members music that is truly beautiful and traditional."

Bassoon player Gabriela Gonzalez-Briceno shared similar feelings about Shen Yun's culture.

"Shen Yun also helps you to improve as a human, in being more collaborative, being more tolerant, and being more friendly with people, more able to help people," she said.

"The atmosphere is just very honest, and it's very genuine," violinist Nika Zhang said.

"And that definitely comes out, because when you're on stage, that unity is something that you can't fake," timpanist Brian Marple said.

The idea of this positive synergy has its roots in ancient Chinese culture as well.

"In Chinese culture, there are a lot of sayings about music, like 'virtuous music nourishes people's souls,' and it gives people guidance or connection with nature," said Chen Ying, a conductor with the company. "In ancient times, people perceived nature to have spirituality, with their connection to the heavens.

"I think from the time that music was formed, it resonated with the body, heaven, and earth."

#### The Process Behind the Music

Every year, Shen Yun produces a new program of 20 or so dance pieces, and during the process of choreographing these pieces, the music is written in tandem. And before any of that happens, the composers, arrangers, choreographers, and set and costume designers come together to find the idea behind each piece. The dynamic process ensures that every note, all the phrasing, and the arc of the music match exactly what the artistic director, Mr. D.F., envisions for the story that will come to life on the stage.

"In ancient Chinese times, people also believed the ideas behind the music were more important than what's on the surface," Chen said.

In one piece, the music might convey the

sweeping grandeur of the Tang Dynasty. In another, it could be an otherworldly serenity accompanying a dance set in the heavens. It could be humorous, provoking the audience to laughter just as much as the characters' antics on stage—or so heartbreakingly tragic that the viewers are moved to tears.

"I believe our music tries to warm and uplift people's hearts. It has something to do with our belief in the function of music. What music is meant to be is ... something positive for people. It comforts them and soothes them, or it inspires them and encourages them," Chen said. "At our symphony concerts, so often people tell us they were moved to tears, and we just feel that their hearts were touched. The messages we try to give them are positive ones and are genuine and powerful because it comes from kindness and sincerity."

*The Epoch Times is a proud sponsor of Shen Yun Performing Arts. For more information, please visit ShenYunPerformingArts.org*

Shen Yun's Upcoming Performances			
Berkeley	California	Dec. 29–30	
Costa Mesa	California	Dec. 30–Jan. 1, 2022	
Milwaukee	Wisconsin	Dec. 31–Jan. 2, 2022	
Raleigh	North Carolina	Dec. 31–Jan. 1, 2022	
Jacksonville/Orange Park	Florida	Jan. 1–2, 2022	
San Francisco	California	Jan. 2–9, 2022	
Greensboro	North Carolina	Jan. 4–5, 2022	

For additional performance dates, please visit [ShenYun.com/tickets](https://ShenYun.com/tickets)

# Year-End Reflections

### 6 questions to ponder before the New Year begins

#### BARBARA DANZA

The dawn of a new year beckons us to reflect on our life—how it's going, what's great, what could be better, and whether we're the person we believe we could and should be. The slower pace of life at the end of the year along with the collective momentum of the looming fresh start provides just the right motivation to pause for some self-reflection.

If you're carving out time to take stock and set a direction for the year ahead, here are some questions you may find helpful to consider.

**What Are Your Most Cherished Memories of the Past Year?** Looking back on the year about to con-

clude, what were the times you most enjoyed, felt most fulfilled, or simply valued the most? If you need some help jogging your memory, open up your photos from the past year and take a walk down memory lane. Chances are some wonderful times, even in a year like the one we've just had, will become clear in your mind.

Describe those fond memories in detail in a journal or as a voice recording. What was it about them that made them so special? What are the characteristics of those times that you value so much?

#### What Do You Wish You'd Have Done More (or Less) of?

Looking back on the year, what gaps do you see in terms of what you would have liked to accomplish? In what ways could you have better spent your time? What habits would you have liked to establish, and what behaviors would you have liked to curtail? Every single person has room for improvement in his or her life, so what

AARON BURDEN/UNSPLASH



Taking stock of the past year allows for reflection and to set a direction for the coming year.

are the areas that you could improve?

#### How Did You Make Yourself Proud This Year?

As you look back upon the past year, what are you most proud of? Perhaps you handled a family emergency with strength and leadership. Perhaps you stuck to a goal you laid out the year before. Perhaps you improved some aspect of your life or someone else's—even if ever so slightly. Perhaps you got over a hardship, got through a difficult situation, summoned the courage to do something difficult, tried something new, or let go of something that wasn't serving you well. Recognize the times when you lived up to your own expectations and made yourself proud.

#### What Does Your Current Daily Routine Look Like?

While the signpost moments of the year offer us insight, so too do the small, daily habits we maintain each day. Indeed it's these that make up the majority of our

lives. So take time to review what your current habits are and what your daily routine and rhythm look and feel like. Honestly assess how your daily routine currently goes so that you can see what's serving you and what you may want to change.

#### In Life, What Would You Say Are the Most Important Values to Uphold?

Stepping out of daily minutiae and flying high up into the sky to look upon life from the 30,000-foot view, as they say, is also important. What are the values in life you deem most important? What are the character traits you most desire to live out? What defines goodness for you?

#### What Are Your Hopes for Next Year?

After a solid review of some important questions, you can now see the things that are going well in your life and those that you may want to improve. Set realistic goals for the daily habits and larger accomplishments you might aim for in the new year. Taking one day at a time and celebrating every ounce of progress along the way will help to ensure that at this time next year, upon reflection, you'll look back on a year that more closely aligns with your core values and the person you most want to be.

DEAR JUNE *On Family and Relationships*

When a close friendship falters, it may be time to give it more attention.

## Woman Does Not Feel Supported by Close Friends

### Dear June,

I have a simple question about a close friend and her husband. Our youngest son recently was engaged. There will be an engagement party coming up and an e-vite was sent. Our friends responded “no” because they would be attending a college football game but would let us know if their plans change. We know they have not purchased tickets yet for this event.

Since they are among our closest friends it doesn't feel very supportive. Am I overthinking this?

Background: Our eldest son of four children was married two years ago. This same couple accepted the invitation but left right after dinner to attend another wedding that they were invited to. It left two seats empty at that table. We felt they should have accepted one or the other invitation, and once again it didn't feel supportive.

*Mother of the Groom*

### Dear Mother of the Groom,

I agree it doesn't feel very supportive to put a football game over a family celebration; to me, it also lacks consideration to respond with a “maybe” if a formal RSVP was asked for.

However, let's try to find some grace for them, because this is surely the best way to handle difficult relationship situations.

### It's human nature for us to grow and change throughout our lives.

Since you consider this couple to be one of your closest friends, I'll assume that these two situations you mention are aberrations after many years of a mutually supportive relationship.

The first thing that occurs to me is that it's human nature for us to grow and change throughout our lives. This leaves us with a choice—either we embrace our inner work and consciously strive to better and strengthen ourselves, or we don't and then the forces of the world work upon us, oftentimes to our detriment.

The past few years and ongoing pressure of the pandemic have changed all of us and created new dimensions in many relationships,

so from this perspective, it is perhaps not surprising that we might feel some tension with those close to us.

This brings me to my next thought, which is that perhaps it's time to give this relationship some more time and attention if you feel so called.

Maybe you and your friend can get together, just ladies, and you can have a heart-to-heart about how you are doing. This might give you some insight into how and who they are now, and why they've made the choices they have.

It might also be the case that they simply have no idea their actions were hurtful to you. Perhaps they see this engagement party as more akin to a casual backyard barbecue than a pre-wedding celebration, in which case their casual answer would feel perfectly fine to them.

Also, when we feel someone is not reciprocating, it's good to ask ourselves if perhaps they are feeling the same from us? Are we unknowingly doing something hurtful to them? It is easy to do.

And, as another way to explain their actions, perhaps these two situations you mentioned could be explained

by understanding what this football game and other wedding mean to them? Maybe they've realized that they need to prioritize being a couple over group engagements at this time? Perhaps their first date was a college football game and so this game has special significance for them.

Was the other wedding they left to attend a family wedding? Perhaps they carefully considered all options and decided that going to both was the way they felt they could best support and honor all their important relationships—even though it didn't feel this way to you.

Of course I don't know what was in their hearts, but maybe if you get closer to them, understand what has been happening in their lives, you will find peace and joy again in your relationship with them. Of course it might also be that your relationship expectations need to change—perhaps they are just not now people who can support you in the way you need to be supported? In which case maybe it's OK to let the relationship go a bit. Or maybe they need your support at this time more than you need theirs? In which case maybe it's time to forge a stronger friendship.

But of course, make sure your cup is full first. Do you have other relationships you can turn to now for support? Perhaps you could talk to your husband or son? I would guess either of them would be happy to give you a hug.

As a final thought, when a son marries, I think his mother needs to let go of him to some extent, in her heart; I imagine this is not easy. So maybe it's nice for you to honor this giving, and any feelings—perhaps a bit of grief—that come with it? But since this is your fourth, you would know more than I!

*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.

## How a Dad Started a Tree Fort-Building Business During the Pandemic

### EPOCH INSPIRED STAFF

When life gives you lemons, make lemonade ... or build a lemonade stand.

That philosophy inspired Mike Scaglione to put his hands to good use during the pandemic. Once employed in the medical device industry, he became stuck at home with endless time to kill.

So the dad from Georgia decided to build a tree fort for his kids.

Without any carpenter training, he looked up a few YouTube videos and went to Lowe's one day and came back with a truck full of lumber.

He'd always wanted to build a tree fort for the kids but never had time to do so.

“Seeing his kids lose everything they loved, from school to sports to time with friends, he wanted to create a place that would bring a smile to their faces,” his wife, Kristin, told The Epoch Times.

Working on the fly, without blueprints, he started building and was shocked to realize how much he loved spending hours outside working on the tree fort.

He built a bit at a time, and it was completed in six weeks.

“The kids loved it!” Kristin said. Meanwhile, she documented the building journey and posted pictures on social media. Based on some of the comments, she suggested to Mike the idea of building forts for other families.

“No one would buy these!” he replied, laughing.



“Seeing his kids lose everything they loved, from school to sports to time with friends, he wanted to create a place that would bring a smile to their faces.”

*Kristin Scaglione*

It all started when Mike Scaglione (C) built a tree fort for his kids—something he'd always meant to do.

But when she posted a picture of their fort on a local mom's Facebook page, that one post alone soon drew 60 requests.

Mike agreed to give it a try and called up his carpenter buddy, who's vastly more skilled than he is, and they struck out on a fort-building venture.

And thus, the family business Firefly Forts was born.

Since they started building in fall 2020, they've completed around 50 forts in their area, and are now booking early into the spring of 2022.

“Our first six months of builds were almost solely families from the very first Facebook posts,” Kristin said. “Word of our forts quickly began to spread in our town and then around the Atlanta area and even nationwide.”

She describes building a fort as being different from a deck, as a fort forges an emotional connection with families, and when the fort is completed, the kids often feel it's the “best day of their lives.”

What started out as a backyard pastime to kill time during a life lull became a fulfilling family business; the Scagliones are even planning to make Firefly a franchise so they can expand to more families nationwide.

Share your stories with us at [eng.inspired@epochtimes.com](mailto:eng.inspired@epochtimes.com), and get your daily dose of inspiration by signing up for the Epoch Inspired newsletter at [TheEpochTimes.com/newsletter](https://www.theepochtimes.com/newsletter)



Abigail Smith Adams (1744–1818), wife of American president John Adams and mother of president John Quincy Adams. From a painting by C. Schesele, circa 1775.

## Accidental Advantages: Lessons From Young Abigail Adams

### JEFF MINICK

Abigail Adams was an amazing woman. No—that compliment cuts in half her talents and her ardor. She was an amazing human being.

“Faced with the unfamiliar task of providing financially for her children while her husband was in Europe for four years, Abigail used her imagination and discovered talents she hadn't realized she possessed to accomplish her goal,” Natalie S. Bober wrote in the “Foreword” to her 1995 biography of this heroine.

Bober noted that Adams “must be viewed as a woman of her times, and in her own context.”

“She spoke out strongly for education for women and for legal status equal to that of men, but she valued the domestic role as the greatest in her life,” Bober wrote. “For her, a woman who spoke with wisdom was not ‘inconsistent’ with one who ‘cheerfully’ attended to her household.”

In her constancy to her country and to her husband and children, Adams was one of the great figures in U.S. history. Even today, long after her death, she offers us



A statue of Abigail Adams and her son John Quincy Adams at Adams National Historical Park in Quincy, Mass.

MP/DGETTY IMAGES

a shining example of an ardent patriot, a loyal and loving companion in marriage, a devoted mother, and an educator.

She was born Abigail Smith, the daughter of a New England Congregationalist Minister William Smith and his wife Elizabeth.

But we know her today as Abigail Adams (1744–1818), the wife of John Adams and the first lady during his presidency, as well as the mother of John Quincy Adams, our sixth U.S. president.

And it was in her early life, in ways often hidden from herself, that she acquired the tools and gifts that would make her such a remarkable person.

### ‘Wild Colts Make the Best Horses’

So said the beloved grandmother of Abigail Adams.

Though raised by a mother deeply concerned with the proprieties of society, Abigail was a headstrong, independent child who often fought to go her own way. She worked alongside her father during lambing season, despite her mother's belief that a woman's place was in the home and not a barn. She enjoyed shelling the peas that she would later eat at a table serviced with silver and linen.

This penchant to follow her own path and hold strong opinions came to the fore during her courtship with young attorney John Adams. At one point, he sent Abigail a “Catalogue of your Faults,” which contained such criticisms as her lack of skill at cards, her failure to learn to sing, her poor posture when seated, and even her habit of sitting with her legs crossed.

Abigail answered these charges.

“I thank you for your Catalogue, but must confess I was so hardened as to read over most of my Faults with as much pleasure, as [another] person would have read over their perfections,” she wrote back humorously.

### Getting Herself an Education

To her lifelong regret, Abigail never attended any formal school. In her later life, she attributed this neglect to the prejudices of her time against female education. However, to be fair to her parents, there were a few schools in Massachusetts that admitted females, and Abigail's parents were worried about their daughter's susceptibility to disease had she studied away from home.

Despite her misgivings, by today's standards, we would regard Abigail as highly educated, assisted in her schooling by a number of others. When older, she credited her grandmother as one of her early great teachers, someone who possessed “the happy method of mixing instruction and amusement together.” Once when she implored her father to send her off to school, he reminded her that the family had access to three fine libraries: their own and those of her Grandfather Quincy and Uncle Isaac Smith. And in fact, Abigail plundered these libraries to deepen her knowledge of subjects such as literature, history, and politics.

A few tutors also played a hand in her education. One of these was Richard Cranch, an amateur theologian, lover of literature, and watch repairman. As Natalie Bober tells us in “Abigail Adams: Witness to a Revolution,” Cranch “was probably the



The birthplace of Abigail Adams in Weymouth, Mass.



Peacefield, the home of John and Abigail Adams, Adams National Historical Park, Braintree, Quincy, Mass.

first man (other than Parson Smith and young Isaac) to take Abigail's passion for learning seriously. Abby adored him.”

### Letters

In her teenage years, Abigail also broadened her education and writing skills by corresponding with friends about books and poems they had read. These young women deliberately conducted these exchanges of letters as a means of furthering their education, especially in regard to literature, as well as fostering the intimacies of friendship.

During this time, Abigail pushed herself to become a better writer. Faulting her lack of formal education and her unfamiliarity with the classics in their original Greek and Latin, she “worried about her handwriting, her spelling, and her ‘pointing’ [punctuation], and apologized to her friends for being ‘a very incorrect writer,’” according to Bober.

“She hoped she wouldn't be thought stupid,” she wrote.

### The Pay-Off

Despite her fretful concerns over her academic shortcomings and her letter writing, which was considered an art form in the 18th century, Abigail's upbringing molded her into one of the most outstanding women in U.S. history.

The willfulness she exhibited as a girl evolved into the willpower that carried her through the long years of her husband's absence from their home. While John was attending to politics in places such as Philadelphia and Europe, Abigail relied on her earlier education to run the farm, oversee their children's upbringing and education, and barter goods to help make ends meet. She disliked performing these tasks alone, but she never flagged or faltered in her duties.

Abigail's dismay over her education led her to become an early advocate for women's rights in both education and in the political realm. She famously wrote to her beloved husband John to “remember the ladies” when he and others were creating the framework for the Revolution in the spring of 1776. Other letters urged him to grant rights to women both in marriage and in politics.

Her correspondence with her husband, with patriots such as Thomas Jefferson, and with family members and friends remains one of the hallmarks of our past. Historians have found in her letters thousands of details ranging from the days before the American Revolution to her time as first lady. Her prose is sharp and lively, raising a question: Would the lost education she so lamented have enhanced these letters or reduced their fervor and pith?

### Takeaways

The adolescence of Abigail Adams—and for that matter, hundreds of other renowned Americans—offers some lessons for today's parents, grandparents, and mentors of young people.

Abigail might easily have slipped into an entirely different life, a different destiny. Her mother was unhappy with John Adams's courtship of her daughter, regarding him as “a struggling country lawyer whose lack of grace and polish, rude outbursts, and moody silences were not a fit match for her fragile but gifted middle daughter.” Abigail might have succumbed to her mother's demands, but her determination to make John her husband—there's that adolescent willpower coming to the fore—eventually changed Elizabeth's mind.

Abigail's early life offers this major reminder of human development: We acquire gifts as we mature that may someday give birth to unexpected bounties. The training and education Abigail received, some of which she regarded as stumbling blocks, actually worked to her advantage and made her a success in her later years.

The same criteria might apply to our own young people. By their play and education and even by their bitter disappointments, they may later find themselves, like Abigail, inadvertently equipped with the tools they need for triumph and success.

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](http://JeffMinick.com) to follow his blog.

## DEAR NEXT GENERATION:

## ‘Grandpa’s Dozen’ and Career Advice

## → Advice from our readers to our young people

I wrote this list when blessed with having, from my daughter and son-in-law, three grandsons (my son later added another grandson). This list, to me, has stood for at least a short test of time as the grandsons are now ages 8 to 13.

Every item in “Grandpa’s Dozen” is worthy of a discussion, and every item advances in the value of its messaging as they mature.

I still remember No. 7, which was told to me by my dad before going to a school dance. It was in Kansas, and I was a grade-schooler. I don’t recall even being interested in girls then. But something in Dad’s demeanor told me that he meant business in his advice. This single admonishment has served me for about 55 years.

If I do my part, the attached list will do far more good for my grandsons than I received from my father and certainly more than either grandfather, as they were absent. And this signals zero ill will, only gratitude that I may leave the next generation better than myself.



JACK FROG/SHUTTERSTOCK

“I still remember No. 7, which was told to me by my dad before going to a school dance. It was in Kansas, and I was a grade-schooler. I don’t recall even being interested in girls then. But something in Dad’s demeanor told me that he meant business in his advice. This single admonishment has served me for about 55 years.”

Jeff Odland

“Aim high. In whatever you do, try to be the best,” advises Stan Laskowski.

12. Give me a hug as a sign of respect for your elders.

—Jeff Odland, Idaho

I’m now (almost) fully retired, but I thought that you may be interested in career advice that I shared with my students at the University of Pennsylvania when I taught environmental courses there as a second career (my first career was with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency). The students seemed to appreciate the advice, especially the last bullet!

## Career Guidance

The following is part “lessons learned” from years of personal experiences and observations of others. It’s also part personal philosophy on how to enjoy your career.

1. Decide what’s most important to you—maximizing your income, saving the world, significant amounts of free time—and develop your career objectives based on these priorities.
2. Do what you enjoy. You’ll be more successful working on what you like, and satisfaction, recognition, and money will probably follow.
3. Aim high. In whatever you do, try to be

the best. “Shoot for the moon—even if you miss, you will land among the stars.”

4. Work hard, be persistent, and persevere—everyone has setbacks: view yours as learning experiences.
5. Have fun, maintain a sense of humor and adventure, and take your work seriously—but not yourself.
6. Never stop learning new skills, new perspectives, and new ideas. “Move on” if you aren’t learning.
7. See the best in people: stay “above the fray,” be positive, and follow the Golden Rule.
8. Get out of your comfort zone: take some risks—work at places that allow for some risk-taking.
9. Maintain balance in your life—spiritual growth, family, friends, health.
10. Help others. There were many who helped you. Give freely.
11. Give credit to others, collaborate, and reach out to others.
12. Work for smart, positive, and caring people.
13. Learn by observing others (both positive and negative lessons).
14. Recognize a higher being and the unique gifts that you were given.
15. Most importantly, if these principles don’t make sense, throw them out and follow your own beliefs! Best wishes for a great career and a wonderful life!

—Stan Laskowski

## 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

## BOOK REVIEW

## ‘The New Trail of Tears’

A necessary read to understand the current crisis in Native American communities

## DUSTIN BASS

The Trail of Tears began and ended nearly 200 years ago. History looks at it as the exemplification of a people felled by war, disease, ignored treaties, and the destruction of its culture by internal and external forces. The Indian Nations and the American Republic (as well as Canada) proved incapable of co-existence, and as a result, the Indian removal effort began in the 1830s. There are more than 550 federally recognized Indian nations and more than 300 reservations left to them. You would be hard-pressed to articulate that as consolation.

## Riley takes the reader on a grim journey through many of these nations currently being ravaged by violence, drug abuse, and suicide.

But that is a time gone by. The Trail of Tears has been over for a long time. The Indian Tribes now coexist as sovereign nations within the republic. If popular culture, social activists, and the media are to be our guides, the only troubles currently facing the Native American population involve retelling the Native American story, changing the names of certain professional sports teams, and the advancement of sensitivity training. Naomi Schaefer Riley makes it clear that those issues pale in comparison to the real problems facing these nations, and unfortunately the

federal government again plays a large role in sustaining those problems.

In her book “The New Trail of Tears: How Washington Is Destroying American Indians,” she details the countless issues that have turned these sovereign nations into “what amounts to a third world country within our borders,” despite them residing in the most prosperous country on earth. Riley wrote her book in investigative journalistic form by conducting countless interviews, breaking down the numbers, and presenting the problems—along with potential solutions—to the public in an easily digestible way.

## Some of the Problems

The federal government with its land agreements, creation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and the institution of a demoralizing welfare system, have created what Riley rightly calls “The New Trail of Tears.” Ironically enough, one of the major issues involves land. The author points out that Native Americans suffer from what is called “dead capital.” She writes that Indians “may possess a certain amount of land on paper, but they can’t put it to use by selling it, buying more to take advantage of economies of scale, or borrowing against it.” The issue comes down to what American citizens plainly see as property rights.

But the federal government, though a major player, is only part of the problem. Many of the troubles facing these tribes are from internal causes.

Riley takes the reader on a grim journey through many of these nations currently being ravaged by violence, drug abuse, and suicide. The statistics aren’t merely staggering—they’re heartbreaking. And they’re due, among other reasons, to ineffective justice

systems, abysmal education, high unemployment, and extensive poverty. Without making the proper and very necessary changes, these nations are destined to remain in such abject conditions.

## Changing What’s Necessary

The fact is that both the federal government and the tribal nations are working hand-in-hand—incidentally or purposefully—to continue the trend. These tribes are provided hundreds of millions of dollars annually by the federal government, but the BIA, along with the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), has become prominent in the realm of financial mismanagement and corruption. When it comes to government agencies, they’re hardly anomalies.

Riley makes the case that the notion that Americans should continue to provide financial assistance to these nations because of the past misses the point. In fact, she says the idea of guilt is part of the problem.

“There’s so much guilt about racism, about what was done to these communities in the past, that they don’t want to shine a light on crimes taking place now,” the author writes.

As is often the case, the idea of throwing money at the problem and taking to social media or the news cameras to highlight one’s solidarity is considered a path to absolution, and often reelection. The problem isn’t financial, as Riley points out, but managerial. The problem isn’t about awareness of the past, but accountability in the present. Until Americans and Natives alike writhe out of their social paralysis, the course can only remain on the current “Trail of Tears.”

A few items that need to be reassessed are the relationships between the federal government and Indian nations, Native Americans and their property, and the tribal councils and their people. Riley provides in-depth detail on all three.

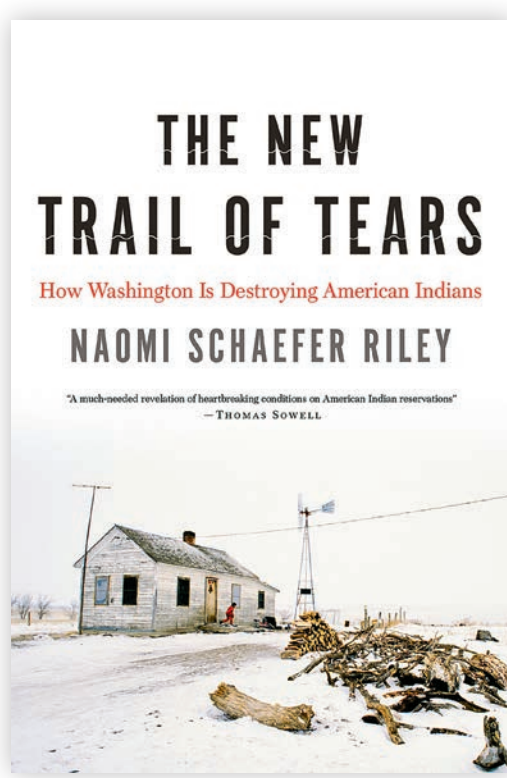
## A Book of Great Importance

The author states that the book isn’t “a comprehensive history of the American Indians or even a complete picture of American Indians today.” But what it provides is that “light”

that citizens—whether American or Native American—need in order to obtain a perspective on what is happening now.

This book is of the utmost importance and a necessary read to understand the current crisis in the Native American communities. It’s a book that should be read and referenced until the proper changes are instituted. Perhaps consider purchasing a copy for your political representative.

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



## “The New Trail of Tears: How Washington Is Destroying American Indians”

Author  
Naomi Schaefer Riley

Publisher  
Encounter Books, 2016

Pages  
232



A statue of Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky in Klin, Russia.

## MUSIC

## Tchaikovsky’s ‘Winter Dreams’ Finally Come True

## MICHAEL KUREK

“Tchaikovsky appears to be the victim of the epidemic of the Music of the Future that wallows in torpor and time and time again collapses in dissonant convulsions.” (Wiener Fremdenblatt, Nov. 28, 1876)

“Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto, like the first pancake, is a flop.” (Novoye Vremya, St. Petersburg, Nov. 13, 1875)

“Difficult, strange, wild, ultra-modern is the composition of Peter Tchaikovsky, a young professor at the Conservatory of Moscow.” (Dwight’s Journal of Music, Boston, 1875)

Thus was the young Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s music generally regarded around the time he finished his six-year-long reworking of his Symphony No. 1 in G Minor, subtitled “Winter Dreams” (sometimes called “Winter Daydreams”). Remarkably, today’s fans of Tchaikovsky’s much more famous “Nutcracker” will find this symphony nearly as delightfully tuneful and easy on the ears.

Tchaikovsky started the symphony in 1866 as a 26-year-old professor of harmony at the newly opened Moscow Conservatory. He had only composed a handful of shorter orchestral works and was ready to make his mark with his first “major” work, a symphony. It went on, indeed, to become his first important work.

At that time, Russia was not particularly known for its symphonies or for what we think of as a distinctively Russian style. His teacher at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Anton Rubenstein, had written three symphonies, but they were very much in the older German mold and its formal conventions. Perhaps that accounts for the harsh reviews, above, from those who were accustomed to that style.

The general consensus was that Tchaikovsky was talented but had too strange a style to amount to much as a composer. The composer and music critic Cezar Cui, in a scathing review of Tchaikovsky’s graduation piece (a cantata), called his music “utterly feeble.” When Tchaikovsky showed some of this new symphony in progress to his former teachers, Anton Rubenstein and Nikolai Zarembo, they both criticized it severely and refused to endorse a performance of it. So he went back to work on it, at great mental cost.

## Suffering for His Art

In his biography of the composer, his brother, Modest Tchaikovsky (1850–1916), wrote:



Tchaikovsky in 1863, three years before starting his first symphony.



A portrait of Nadezhda von Meck, Tchaikovsky’s patroness from 1877 to 1890.



Modest Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1850–1916), brother of the composer.

“No other work cost him such effort and suffering. ... Despite painstaking and arduous work, its composition was fraught with difficulty, and while pressing ahead with the symphony, Pyotr Ilyich’s nerves became more and more frayed. As a result of this exceptionally hard work he began to suffer from insomnia, and the sleepless nights paralyzed his creative energies. At the end of July all this erupted into a terrible nervous attack, the like of which he never experienced again during his lifetime. ... The most distressing symptoms of this illness were dreadful hallucinations, which were so frightening that they resulted in a feeling of complete numbness in all his extremities.”

The result was that “all his life he abstained from working at night. After this symphony, not a single note from any of his compositions was written at night.”

It had already been a hard road before this. With doubts about his ability to have a successful career in music, Tchaikovsky’s childhood music teacher and parents had advised him to take the safer route of law school. He then worked as a government clerk for three years. Eventually, the pull toward music drew him to quit law, and he enrolled in the first class of the new St. Petersburg Conservatory.

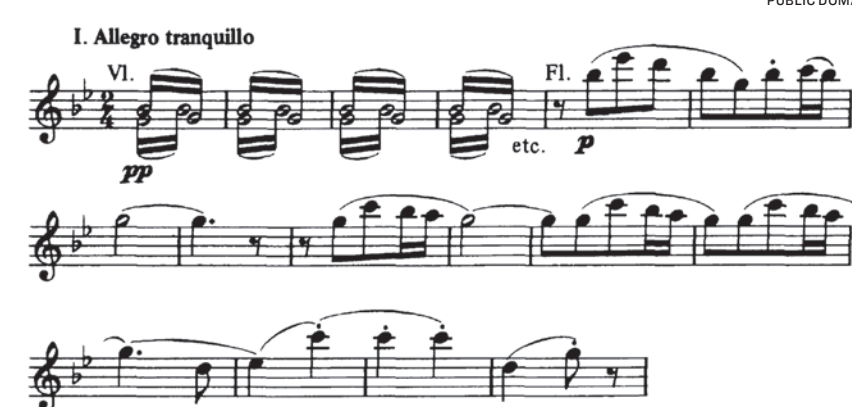
After that, based upon his musicianship skills (not his composing) Tchaikovsky was appointed as a teacher at the newly opened Moscow Conservatory.

All of this would seem to paint a portrait of a composer determined to persevere and succeed against all odds, even while plagued with discouragement and bouts of depression. It might lead us to wonder how many other such talents may be alive today and struggling against all opposition to have a breakthrough.

## Gradual Success

Tchaikovsky’s breakthrough did happen, but over a period of time, in the more open climate gradually engendered by the so-called “mighty handful” of young composers: Mily Balakirev, Alexander Borodin, Cesar Cui, Modest Mussorgsky, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. These five had joined forces in opposition to the old style, searching for a truly Russian sound, yet within the mainstream of European classical music.

After some revisions, two movements of Tchaikovsky’s original version of the symphony were performed in 1866 and 1867, but according to the composer’s brother Modest, these weren’t well received. The



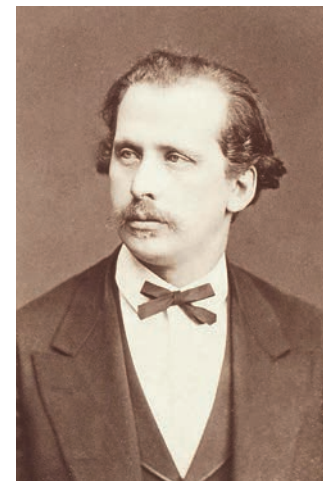
PUBLIC DOMAIN

A few bars from “Dreams of a Winter Journey,” Allegro tranquillo (G minor).

“It is ... richer in content than many of my other, more mature works.”

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, composer

Tchaikovsky dedicated his first symphony to the Russian pianist, conductor, and composer Nikolai Rubinstein, the younger brother of Anton Rubinstein and a close friend of Tchaikovsky.



full symphony in its original version was performed at the Russian Musical Society in Moscow in 1868 and was more successful, though Tchaikovsky was still dissatisfied with it and began an extensive reworking.

Finally, the revised version was ready, the version we now know, and premiered in Moscow in the fall of 1883, followed by performances in St. Petersburg in 1886, at New York’s Carnegie Hall in 1896, and in London in 1902. It remained one of Tchaikovsky’s favorites among his own works, in spite of “such an unhappy existence,” as he wrote to his publisher Pyotr Jurgenson.

In another letter to his friend Karl Albrecht he wrote, “Despite all its huge shortcomings, I still nourish a weakness for it, because it was a sin of my sweet youth.” And in another letter to his patroness, Nadezhda von Meck, he wrote, “In many respects it is very immature, although fundamentally it is still richer in content than many of my other, more mature works.”

The symphony consists of four movements, lasting in total from 45 to 50 minutes. In spite of the first two movements’ pictorial titles, the work as a whole is in keeping with a coherent (if looser than his conservative teachers would have preferred) symphonic form rather than a collection of tone poems:

1. “Dreams of a Winter Journey.” Allegro Tranquillo
2. “Land of Desolation, Land of Mists.” Adagio cantabile ma non tanto
3. Allegro scherzando giocoso
4. Andante lugubre—Allegro maestoso

The title of the work as a whole took its subtitle “Winter Dreams” from the title of the first movement, and even then, one can only imagine the suggestion of the music actually sounding like winter. The frequent tremolo chords in the strings and woodwinds does give an effect of sleigh bells jingling, and so it seems fitting for this time of year.

But perhaps the word “Dreams” is even more fitting, as an example for our New Year’s resolutions of sticking to our dreams, no matter what hardship and fortitude may be required to do so.

American composer Michael Kurek is the composer of the *Billboard* No. 1 classical album “The Sea Knows.” The winner of numerous composition awards, including the prestigious Academy Award in Music from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, he has served on the Nominations Committee of the Recording Academy for the classical Grammy Awards. He is a professor emeritus of composition at Vanderbilt University. For more information and music, visit MichaelKurek.com

HOMESCHOOLING

# 6 Happy Ways to Start Your Homeschool Day

JOSUE MICHEL/JUNSPASH

KAREN DOLL

A cheerful morning routine can really jumpstart your homeschool day like nothing else. Do your kids seem slower than snails some mornings? Or maybe they're lost in daydreams and just can't seem to get started on schoolwork. Well, you can put a little pep in their step and spark motivation with these happy, engaging morning routines.

**Stretch**

Ah, that feeling you get as you wake up your muscles with a good morning stretch. Stretching is a great way to ease into the new day and help your kids prepare their bodies and minds for the day ahead. And your kids will be wide-eyed when they learn they can start while still in bed. Demonstrate how to do a spinal twist by rolling to each side and how to pull their knees up to their chest. Once everyone hops out of bed, help your kids try simple neck rolls, arm and leg stretches, side stretches, and easy yoga poses, such as the downward-facing dog, child's pose, and the cat-cow.

Ideally, you should hold each stretch for about 15 to 20 seconds. All of these gentle movements warm up their muscles and get the blood moving throughout their bodies and boost energy.

**Listen and Move to Lively Music**

Happy music is powerful—it speaks to your heart, brightens your spirit, and the upbeat melodies are energizing. Pop on some folk songs, waltzes, and polkas even, and before you know it, your kids will be bobbing around the house on happy feet. For an extra treat, keep a basket of streamers, bells, and tambourines handy for your kids to twirl and shake.



the depth of their comprehension.

This is an ideal time for reading aloud. Fill your basket with fiction books, fables, seasonal poetry, Shakespeare plays, and exciting stories from history and other cultures, and so on. You can also practice foreign language and sign language lessons.

It's also the perfect time to recite affirmations. You can write a couple ahead of time and then model reciting one or two for your kids. Explain the purpose and encourage older kids to write and say their own. Then either you or your older kids can help the younger ones.

**Take a Nature Walk**

As Henry David Thoreau said, "An early-morning walk is a blessing for the whole day." Studies show that spending time surrounded by the beauty of nature boosts focus and short-term memory, sparks creativity, and has positive effects on your overall health.

A morning nature walk wakes up all of your senses and can stir up appreciation in your kids. Encourage your kids to look all around them. Point out interesting flora and fauna, bird and animal habitats, and any nests or tracks you may see. Be sure to take along a pair of binoculars for closer observation. If you have time, your children may want to take along sketch pads and nature journals to capture all the awesome sights.

Try starting the day with a nature walk.

Try walking on a nearby nature trail, at a state park, or on one of the many rail trails—former railroad corridors that have been converted into walking trails—located throughout the country.

**Play a Game**

Yes, you sure can start your day off by playing a game. Imagine that! Choose an educational game or play a family favorite, it doesn't matter. What matters is you're all together, brain cells are being stimulated, your kids are thinking, laughing, and chatting, and it's fun.

**Share a Breakfast Feast**

Starting your day with a delicious, hearty family breakfast helps to refuel all of your



TATYANA VYC/SHUTTERSTOCK

bodies after a long night of sleep and sets the stage for some quality family time and spirited conversation.

Surely your kids will leap out of bed and race to the table when they smell that bacon sizzling, but how about giving those mini chefs some aprons and enlisting their help with the prep work. Now you're cooking!

We did this every once in a while on snow days, as a way to ease into Monday mornings, and sometimes just because, but consider making this a monthly event. Your kids will look forward to this yummy, happy morning routine. So tap into that enthusiasm and encourage them to help with menu planning and adding a festive touch with DIY table decorations.

It's such a blessing that you, as home-schooling parents, can choose to begin your days in such bright and cheerful ways. It's quite freeing, isn't it? And knowing that you can ease into your day of learning while enjoying quality time with your kids might just help you sleep more soundly at night.

*Karen Doll is a freelance writer and homeschooling consultant based in the small village of Wassergass, Pa. She enjoys writing about homeschooling, gardening, food and culture, family life, and the joys of chicken keeping. Visit her at [AtHome-WithKarenDoll.wordpress.com](http://AtHome-WithKarenDoll.wordpress.com)*

**Happy music is powerful—it speaks to your heart, brightens your spirit, and the upbeat melodies are energizing.**

And listening to music strengthens the parts of the brain responsible for thinking, processing what you see and hear, and comprehending written and spoken language, as well as creating and recalling memories. That certainly sounds like an excellent way to prepare for a day of learning.

**Gather for a Good Morning Basket**

Gather your children all around you and pique their curiosity with a good morning basket overflowing with goodies—sorry, not the edible kind. A morning basket is a time when everyone gathers to learn together. If there is a wide age range between your kids, it's OK to gear the books and materials more toward your older ones. Just by listening, your younger kids will absorb so much. You just might be astonished by

# 'Let Your Heart Be Light': Putting Your Cares Away

BARBARA DANZA

Raise your hand if you thought the world would be feeling a little less heavy by now. It wasn't just me, was it?

As 2021 winds down to a close, so many are wishing for a joyful and peaceful holiday season. Here are a few ways to ensure "your troubles will be miles away."

**Here are a few ways to ensure your troubles will be miles away:**

and you'll be left devoting your time and energy to that which you truly value.

**Turn Off the News**

If you tend to have news channels running on your television all day, take a break from them over the holidays. Put on some music, read a book or two, or enjoy uplifting holiday movies instead. You don't need to be

kept up to date 24/7. The strategy employed by many networks is to emotionally agitate their viewers. Let that influence exit your home for a while and see if you don't begin to feel more at ease.

**Uphold Traditions**

Holiday time, like no other, calls on us to uphold our family traditions. Whatever activities, songs, foods, or decorations make this time of year so special for your family, uphold them all this year. Tell your children or grandchildren stories of holidays past. Enjoy looking through old family photos together. Allow nostalgia and tradition to warm your heart and bring you a sense of peace.

**Treasure the Simple Things**

This holiday season, slow down and allow yourself to recognize the beauty in life's simplest pleasures: a cup of hot cocoa with a candy cane to stir it or the sounds of your children laughing at their favorite holiday cartoon. There are so many simple joys to experience this time of year. Let those be your focus—not the weight of the world. As the Christmas song goes, "Let your heart be light."



Enjoy the simple pleasures of the season.

**Scale Back Your Plans**

It can be tempting to want to do all the holiday things, but if you overextend yourself, peace will be difficult to come by. Cut back just a little on the number of presents you plan to buy, the amount of cooking and baking you plan to do, and how many holiday gatherings you plan to attend. Scaling back forces you to choose your priorities,

# FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES

Week 52, 2021

## The Struggle for Peace

By Jonathan Griebahn, age 11

When brave men enlist, to go off to war, to fight for freedom and peace, They'll keep on fighting, and shooting, and winning, till the fighting and shooting have ceased. When needed, we'll conquer, and hardships endure, be it shells, artillery, or flak, But it's good to know, with rifle in hand, that your comrades are watching your back.

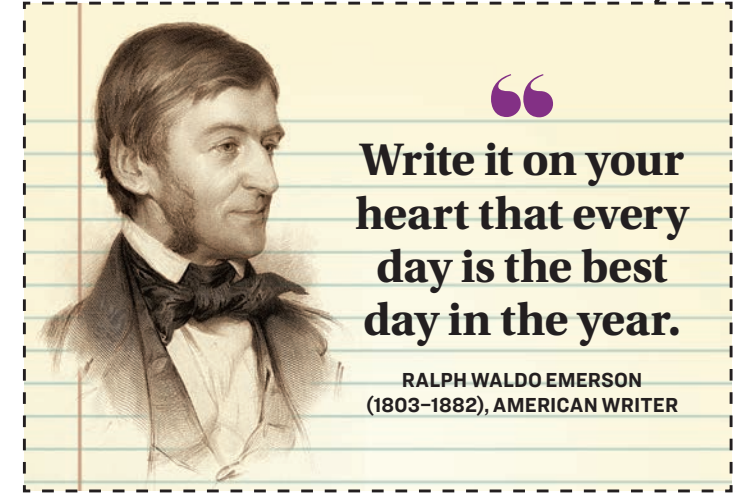
You jump out of the plane, at D-Day perhaps; quickly, your parachute unfolds. The question at hand is "Where will you land?"—Utah, Omaha, or Gold? When dictators rise, we'll push them right back, be it Tojo, Stalin or Castro, Or a shout-y socialist dictator, with an itty, bitty moustache-o.

They walk through the rain, over battlefields and hills, their uniforms completely drenched, Other dangers are gas (they'll wait till it's passed) and the rats that run through the trench. Bravery, Honor, and Brotherhood are what bonds these men of war, For they fight for those who'll come after, and those who came before.

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK



ZODAR/SHUTTERSTOCK



RALPH WALDO EMERSON (1803-1882), AMERICAN WRITER

PUBLIC DOMAIN

# This Week in History

## TEXAS BECOMES A STATE



On Dec. 29, 1845, Texas became the 28th state to enter the union.

Texas has a storied history. After achieving independence from Spain, and then Mexico, it existed briefly as an independent republic before becoming one of the United States. This significant event, along with America's pursuit of westward expansion, led to the Mexican-American War the very next year.

2004 U.S. commemorative quarter, with a Texas symbol

PUBLIC DOMAIN



ALLA-BERLEZOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK

By Aidan Danza, age 15

## SPARROWS

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

**W**e often overlook the small, brown, mouselike birds called sparrows that you probably see, if you look carefully, every day. If you really get to know them, however, they are quite charming little birds.

### SONG SPARROW

The song sparrow is probably the most common American sparrow. It is brown above, streaked brown and white on the bottom, with a large black eye and thick bill. It's around 5 to 7 inches long and forages for seeds on the ground, just like most sparrows.

While some birds hop, this one runs along the ground, flitting through vegetation if it's there. In the spring, the males begin their characteristic melodious song, high on exposed branches. Regionally, the song sparrow varies a lot. A song sparrow from New Jersey might look much different than one from Alaska, and both are different still than one from Arizona. Songs vary even more; personally, I've heard variations in song within distances of less than a mile.



Male house sparrow.

### WHITE-THROATED SPARROW

While the song sparrow is seen year-round throughout much of the lower 48, the white-throated is more migratory. In the east, it can only be seen in the winter, while going farther west, it's seen less commonly, and it's completely absent in the Rockies. Oddly, it's present on the Pacific Coast.

The white-throated sparrow's song is quite consistent, with a rhythm that sounds like the words "Old-Sam-Peabody" or "Oh-Sweet-Canada," depending on who you ask. They are also a frequent bird feeder visitor, just like the song sparrow, especially in the winter.



Female house sparrow.

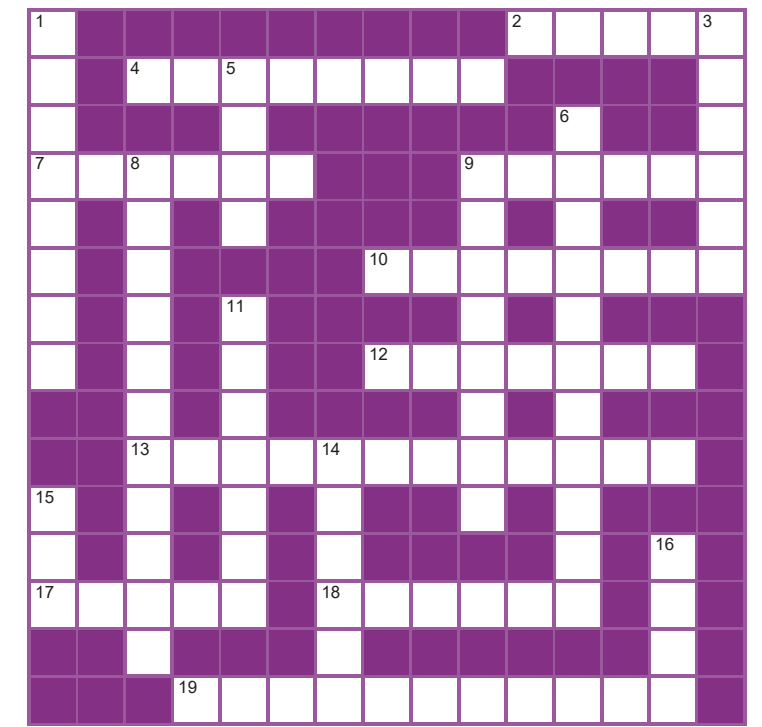
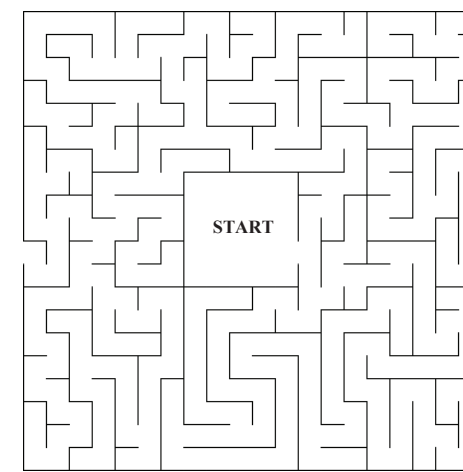
### HOUSE SPARROW

These birds are extremely common nowadays, but before 1851, they didn't exist in this country. House sparrows were actually introduced from Europe, but in the past 170 years, they've spread through most of North and South America.

They prefer to travel in small flocks. They can be a little pushy and aggressive around other birds, but they are nevertheless quite lovable, much like the rest of the sparrows.



## AMAZING ESCAPES!



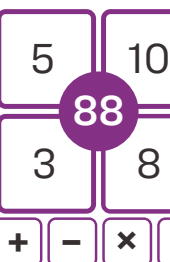
**Down**

- 1 It falls like snow at midnight (8)
- 3 What couples share at Midnight on New Year's (6)
- 5 This drops in Time Square (4)
- 6 They are put up before a party (11)
- 8 Boisterous celebration (11)
- 9 You will need a new one on 1 January (8)
- 11 Popular New Year's Eve events (7)
- 14 Cities across the world have these counting down to New Year's (6)
- 15 Big crowd (3)
- 16 Party toppers (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  
9 + 01 = (6 + 5)  
6 + 9 = 8 + 01

Medium puzzle 1

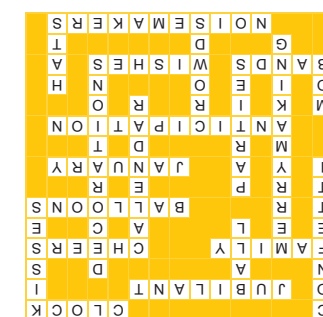


Solution For Medium 1  
11 + 2 = (91 - 91)  
91 - 2 = 91 + 21

Hard puzzle 1



Solution For Hard 1  
(12 - 92) = (92 - 82)



**Across**

- 2 Countdown dial (5)
- 4 Happy (8)
- 7 Mother, Father, Brothers & Sisters (6)
- 9 "Here's to you!" (6)
- 10 They fall at midnight (8)

- 12 New Year's is the first day of \_\_\_\_ (7)
- 13 What we feel on New Year's Eve (12)
- 17 They play music (5)
- 18 "Best \_\_\_\_!" (6)
- 19 Party supplies (11)

# Rediscover America— One Story at a Time

**Our nation like you've never seen it before**

American Essence is a magazine created for anyone who loves America. American Essence focuses on traditional American values and great American stories. It recounts significant historical events, from the time of the Founding Fathers to the Americans today who want to give back to their community and country.

American Essence celebrates America's contribution to humanity, and focuses on three pillars—from history to future, timeless values, and perseverance.

## American Essence

**Subscribe today at [AmericanEssence.net](http://AmericanEssence.net) or use this form.**



I want my world to be filled with positive real heroes that emulate, share and care [about] the authentic human values that make America great . . . creating a new set of hero values for our children to grow into as the “New America.” — *Laurel Young*

**Yes, I'd like to subscribe!**

**BEST DEAL**

- 1 Yearly (12 Issues) + 2 Free Issues\*\***  
**\$95.40 Save \$113.90 (63%)\***  
\$7.95/issue for the 1st year, \$8.95/issue from the 2nd year
  - 6 Months (6 Issues)**  
**\$59.70 Save \$30 (33%)\***  
\$9.95/issue for the 1st year, \$10.95/issue from the 2nd year
- \*\* No free issue(s) upon renewal. \*\*\* Based on a monthly rate of \$14.95. Rates are subject to change without prior notice.

**3 EASY WAYS TO SUBSCRIBE**

ONLINE : [AmericanEssence.net](http://AmericanEssence.net)  
HOTLINE : 888-805-0203  
BY MAIL: **American Essence\***  
Subscription Department  
5 Penn Plaza Fl. 8, New York, NY 10001

\* American Essence is part of Bright Magazine Group, a non-profit media company committed to bringing stories that elevate the daily lives of our readers.

PLEASE PRINT **LEGIBLY** (INCLUDE APT., STE., OR UNIT NO.)

**American Essence**

FIRST NAME \_\_\_\_\_ LAST NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ APT. # \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

PAY BY CHECK (PAYABLE TO **American Essence**)     USE MY CREDIT CARD / DEBIT CARD

**CARD #** \_\_\_\_\_  
We use your credit card solely, and securely, for your subscription. We do not share it with any third parties. The subscription is auto-renew with credit card payment.

EXPIRATION \_\_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_\_\_ Y \_\_\_\_\_ Y    **CARD CVV#** \_\_\_\_\_    ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

NAME ON CARD \_\_\_\_\_ SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

BY SIGNING THIS SUBSCRIPTION FORM, I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE READ, UNDERSTOOD AND AGREED TO THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS AT [AmericanEssence.net/terms](http://AmericanEssence.net/terms). I ALSO AFFIRM ALL INFO ABOVE IS COMPLETE AND ACCURATE.

**WEEKLY**  
**News Magazine**

# INSIGHT Magazine from The Epoch Times

**THOROUGH INVESTIGATIONS. GROUNDBREAKING FACTS.** While The Epoch Times' flagship paper gives you the important news of the day, INSIGHT is designed for a more leisurely read, filled with longform articles that give you in-depth coverage into the stories shaping our world.

The stories and perspectives you won't find anywhere else.

**In-Depth and Exclusive**  
Morale Collapse on the Border



**Global and Regional**  
Australians Lose Freedom Over Pandemic Response



**Focused and Relevant**  
Cover Story: Natural Immunity, an Alternative to Vaccines?

**Subscribe today at [ReadEpochInsight.com](http://ReadEpochInsight.com) or use this form.**

**Yes, I'd like to subscribe!**

**BEST DEAL**

- 1 Yearly \$3.83/week (Save 45%)\***  
(billed every year at \$199)
  - 6 months \$4.96/week (Save 29%)\***  
(billed every 6 months at \$129)
- \* Based on a newsstand price of \$6.95/copy. Please refer to [ReadEpochInsight.com](http://ReadEpochInsight.com) for details.

**3 easy ways to subscribe**

ONLINE : [ReadEpochInsight.com](http://ReadEpochInsight.com)  
HOTLINE : 833-699-1888  
BY MAIL: **INSIGHT**  
Subscription Department  
5 Penn Plaza Fl. 8, New York, NY 10001

PLEASE PRINT **LEGIBLY** (INCLUDE APT., STE., OR UNIT NO.)

**INSIGHT**  
by THE EPOCH TIMES

FIRST NAME \_\_\_\_\_ LAST NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ APT. # \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_  
EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

PAY BY CHECK (PAYABLE TO **The Epoch Times**)     USE MY CREDIT CARD / DEBIT CARD

**CARD #** \_\_\_\_\_  
We use your credit card solely, and securely, for your subscription. We do not share it with any third parties. The subscription is auto-renew with credit card payment.

EXPIRATION \_\_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_\_\_ Y \_\_\_\_\_ Y    **CARD CVV#** \_\_\_\_\_    ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

NAME ON CARD \_\_\_\_\_ SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

BY SIGNING THIS SUBSCRIPTION FORM, I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE READ, UNDERSTOOD AND AGREED TO THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS AT [ReadEpoch.com/terms](http://ReadEpoch.com/terms). I ALSO AFFIRM ALL INFO ABOVE IS COMPLETE AND ACCURATE.