

THE EPOCH TIMES

LIFE &

TRADITION

TRADITIONS

Some Hidden Holiday Gifts for the Kids, and for Us

The holidays are an annual boot camp for sharpening up our character

JEFF MINICK

Recently, I stumbled across this adage attributed to Ben Franklin: "Be at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let every new year find you a better man."

Often, we aim to become better people when the calendar flips us into January. Even the most common New Year's resolutions, to exercise more and to lose weight, require self-discipline and perseverance if we are to match desire with success.

For many of us, this busy season from Thanksgiving to New Year's brings other virtues into play as well. We try, for example, to maintain control of the amount of money we spend on food and gifts. In the hectic rush of the holidays, many of us consciously attempt to avoid Scrooge's "Bah, Humbug!" attitude and keep up a front of good cheer. We decorate our homes or send out Christmas cards when we'd rather be sprawled out on the sofa watching sports on TV.

In some ways, then, the holidays act as an annual boot camp for sharpening up our character. We may not see it that way, but it's there.

But what about children? Can festivals such as Christmas or New Year's serve as vehicles for building their character? And if so, are there ways we can boost those opportunities?

Let's take a look.

Old Movies, Old Books, and a New Set of Eyes

Experience may be the best teacher, but some groundwork always helps.

And stories can help lay those supporting stones.

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Holiday activities with friends and family strengthens relationships and teaches kids that fun and entertainment are best when it's homegrown.



COURTESY OF THE TIFFANEY LAWSON COMPANY



Family Revives Self-Sufficient Farming Wisdom

A determined homesteading mom set out to teach her kids the skills she learned from her grandparents

◀ Cortney Black with her goats.

LOUISE CHAMBERS

On their 23 1/2-acre farm in Tennessee, a homesteading mom is teaching her four kids the self-sufficiency lessons that her parents' generation missed out on, in hopes of keeping alive the skills that served her ancestors.

High school sweethearts Cortney and her husband, Samuel Black, were raised in the Appalachian Mountains of East Tennessee. Currently, they live at Highway Homestead, a small family farm in Knoxville, Tennessee, with their four kids, aged 9, 7, 4, and 2.

Cortney and Samuel follow a permaculture-style model for the family's plot. Cortney homeschools the kids in an un-

conventional way, enriching their curriculum with cooking, preserving, goat and cow milking, and tending to their numerous animals including egg-laying chickens, goats, and poultry for meat.

Samuel, a mechanical engineer, works full time outside the homestead during the day and on the land after dark.

When Cortney and Samuel were younger, their maternal grandparents' farms were adjacent, thus they have always known each other.

After getting college degrees and tying the knot, the couple moved to Cajun country, Louisiana, where Samuel worked in the oil industry.

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TRADITIONS

Some Hidden Holiday Gifts for the Kids, and for Us



Many older people take enormous pleasure in spending time with kids and teens.

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The realm of literature, for instance, gives us many holiday treasures: classics underpinned with a moral message. Perhaps best-known is Dickens's "A Christmas Carol," with its warnings against greed and selfishness, but that's only the lead-off hitter on this winning team. O. Henry's short story "The Gift of the Magi" makes for a great family read-aloud on account of its brevity, but even more for its lesson in giving. The sadness of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Match Girl" is not for all children, but from this fairy tale we learn the importance of kindness and the meaning of love. In Dr. Seuss's "How the Grinch Stole Christmas," the Grinch's heart grows three sizes, and this story can help us and our little ones do the same.

Hollywood is also a treasure trove of inspirational holiday films. Lots of fami-

Shared activities can teach virtues, and you don't even need to use words.



O. Henry's "Gift of the Magi" is a short story about how a gift honors the giver.

lies watch "It's a Wonderful Life" every year, with each visit bringing them the message that each life is precious. The 1951 version of "A Christmas Carol" might frighten some children, but Alastair Sim's Scrooge is, in my book, the best, especially in the scenes where he finally embraces goodness and charity. "A Charlie Brown Christmas" shows us that bigger is not always better and reminds us of the true meaning of Christmas.

Regarding movies in particular, everyone has their own holiday favorite. Show these to the kids, discuss them, and you're on your way to building character.

Home for the Holidays Shared activities can teach virtues, and you don't even need to use words.

Ready to bake up a batch of Russian tea cakes, spritz cookies, or other holiday treats? Invite the kids, young and older, to join in the action. Sure, it's messier, but



Hollywood offers many inspirational holiday movies, such as "It's a Wonderful Life."

put on some music, break out the sugar and flour, and go to town.

Overnight guests are expected? Have the kids ready up the bedroom and encourage any special touches they might like to add to make the room more appealing and more seasonal.

Decorate the Christmas tree together. If you own some heirloom ornaments, explain their meaning to the children. This may prompt questions that allow you to share the past with them.

Need to send out cards? Gather construction paper, scissors, glue, crayons, and other paraphernalia, and give the kids a blast making homemade greeting cards.

These times shared together can provide opportunities for thoughts and unexpected questions from your children. In addition, making cookies for a neighbor or sending out cards teaches them the importance of reaching out to touch the lives of others.

Party Time

Years ago, when my wife and I ran a bed and breakfast, business in the winter-time was as dead as Scrooge's doornail. Consequently, the place was mostly empty, which gave us plenty of room to invite a dozen or more families for a New Year's Day open house. That meant no conflicts with New Year's Eve parties. We provided a television for sports fans to watch some football, served heavy hors d'oeuvres, and enjoyed the company all afternoon.

The holidays are also a great time to have friends and family over for cookie exchanges, indoor games, or just a simple evening of conversation over a glass of hot apple cider.

From these get-togethers, we strengthen friendships with other parents and our kids get to spend time with their friends. Just as importantly, they learn that fun and entertainment, like food from a garden, is often best when homegrown.

Corporal Works of Mercy

That's a mouthful, but it's a Christian doctrine with simple messages such as feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and giving alms to the poor, all of which fit right into the holiday spirit.

Gather some friends and go caroling, either through the neighborhood or at a local nursing home. In the case of the assisted-living home, ask a supervisor if after Christmas might be better. When I used to take my students on these outings, I learned that many of these residences for the elderly and infirm are jammed with carolers, musicians, and other visitors until Christmas Day, and then interest plummets. Consider going instead in

ing forward to special moments now.

Holidays

Make the most of your favorite holidays by committing to fun festivities. A romantic dinner with your spouse for Valentine's Day, a get-together with loved ones for Thanksgiving, or a special event to ring in the new year.

Time Off

Peruse your upcoming work and school schedules and take note of the times you'll be off throughout. Those are great opportunities to hit the road or embark on a project or activity at home.

Local Fun

What local traditions do you enjoy partaking in each year? Be sure to mark your calendar with the seasonal fun and show up for it all this coming year.

Entertainment

Are you a fan of the theater, ballet, concerts, the opera, or comedy? Check venues and see what's coming up. It's always fun to look forward to a special night of entertainment.



Holiday cookies made and shared together can be a special event in and of itself.

PHOTO: JIM DUNN/SHUTTERSTOCK

Activities to Look Forward to, Year-Round

The new year is the perfect time to start filling up your calendar with a year of fun, joyful activities

BARBARA DANZA

One way to make life a lot more delightful is to ensure you've always got something to look forward to. When work gets busy or troubles abound, having something on the horizon to look forward to can be just the thing to pull you through with a smile.

The start of a new year is the perfect time to plant seeds of fun on the calendar and reap the joy all year long. Here are a few simple ways to do just that.

Celebrate

What will you be celebrating in the coming year? Is there a special birthday, anniversary, or graduation that calls for a big to-do? Will you be throwing parties for your children's birthdays? Is anyone getting married in your family? Start pinning down the timing of such celebrations and enjoy preparing and look-



Planning birthday parties ahead of time can draw out the fun and anticipation of that special moment.

CAVAN IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

January to add some post-holiday cheer.

Whether with toddlers or teens, donate canned and dry food goods to your local food bank or emergency shelter. This year, inflation has dramatically increased the demands on these centers for the hungry. At the same time, these centers have seen a drop in donations. The folks who depend on these places for food and the people who operate them need our help.

If you have a neighbor spending the holidays alone, send the children to invite him over for a meal. Keep in mind that many older people—I'm one of them—take enormous pleasure in spending time with kids and teens.

All these things, of course, teach our children kindness, again with no lectures.

The Main Actor in This Holiday Production

That's you. Kids are watching their parents and mentors all the time. Like Santa Claus, they "know if you've been good or bad." Being bad, for instance, means getting frazzled and short-tempered over the holidays. It's a common occurrence, but try to keep that frayed tiger on a leash. Staying upbeat, even when that smile hurts, provides your children and grandchildren with a wonderful example of cheerful perseverance in action.

And get a little goofy. Bellow out some Christmas songs when you hear them in the car. Surprise the kids with a batch of Rudolph pancakes. Ring in the New Year with some pizzazz. When the little ones get as fussy as you feel, distract them and get them laughing again.

Do these things, and you finish off the Santa Claus song. "So be good for goodness sake!" And you're teaching that same virtue to them. What's more, you're also sharpening up your own virtues.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year's, and all the best in 2023!

Jeff Minick lives and writes in Front Royal, Virginia. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust on Their Wings," and two works of nonfiction, "Learning as I Go" and "Movies Make the Man."



Kids young and old will enjoy putting on some music, breaking out the sugar, and baking a batch of Russian tea cakes, spritz cookies, or other holiday treats.

POINTSSTUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK



Cortney and Samuel Black and their four children.

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Family Revives Self-Sufficient Farming Wisdom

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When the couple became parents to their first child, Cortney began to think about the self-sufficiency skills that she had learned from her maternal grandmother while growing up.

She told The Epoch Times her grandmother would can thousands of jars of green beans, tomatoes, peppers, and pickles grown on the land every year. As a little girl, Cortney would also accompany her grandmother to the woods, foraging for blackberries to make a pie.

Once on their new property, they acquired a milk cow, but Cortney agonized over how to make butter.

"So the self-sufficiency part was already ingrained in me from the get-go," Cortney said.

While studying agriculture in college, Cortney further learned about gardening and preserving her own food.

Thus after the birth of her first son, she questioned herself.

"We grew up this way, but now we were living in a subdivision in Louisiana," Cortney said. "We grew up on 100-acre farms in the mountains ... so it was a big deal for us not to be able to provide our own food."

When Samuel got laid off during the oil crisis of 2015, the family moved back to Knoxville, Tennessee, where they bought 5 1/2 acres of land.

"I didn't care what the house looked like, I just wanted land," Cortney said. "We had to have land to be able to produce our own food ... we worked really hard to renovate it."

During this time, the couple built a barn, put up fences, and kept goats, pigs, ducks, geese, and a full egg-laying flock of chickens, as well as 150 organic meat birds.

Cortney said: "Difficulties in homesteading typically come in the form of death, and I don't say that lightly. You could have a plant that you didn't water and it dies, or you have an animal that doesn't thrive and it dies."

"I wasn't getting the temperature

right, it wasn't mixing the way I wanted ... I just cried because I knew that my grandmother knew exactly what to do but she wasn't there," Cortney said, whose grandmother passed away just five days after her third child was born. Cortney couldn't even turn to her mom because her mom had never learned.

"[She] didn't want anything to do with the farm," Cortney said. "There are skills like this ... cyclical seasonal living, that we're not passing down because we're not living it anymore."

Thus Cortney felt the need to pass down these skills to her children. Through teaching them, she has also learned a lot herself.

"Now I can make butter like no big deal," she said. "I've done it for months now and we haven't bought butter from the grocery store since June. We have been completely self-sufficient in our butter, yogurt, and mozzarella cheese. I'm working on hard cheeses."

She believes that if one day, her kids are unable to get to the grocery store, she wants them to have the skills to take care of themselves. While all her children want to learn, they all have different approaches.

Cortney said: "My 4-year-old, when she was 3, told us that she wanted a purple knife and she was going to kill a chicken ... my 7-year-old daughter, she's a little more withdrawn from it, her heart is a little softer, especially when it comes to harvesting our animals. My older son is interested, but he's definitely a boy and would much rather be outside with Daddy, using a gun."

Besides hands-on farm work, Cortney's children are also learning how to plan meals and understand the long process of growing and harvesting crops, raising and slaughtering animals, and finally, putting food on the table.

"For me, I want our entire homestead to work together; the animals provide fertilizer and compost for our plants, the plants will provide back for the animals, and the animals provide for us," she said.

But homesteading with a growing family hasn't been without its struggles.

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Cortney is against the use of chemi-



Cortney and Samuel's son feeds the goats.

cals and has had to investigate herbal wormers for her herd of Kinder goats, a Nubian-Pygmy mix prone to parasites. The entire family had a hard time harvesting their goats in spring 2021 since the cared-for herd was born on their farm.

"They were our babies," Cortney said. "But then the main reason we want to raise our own meat is because we do not want to support factory farming; I showed [the children] a video of a factory farm harvesting goats and sheep, the callousness ... you could see the tears in their faces."

The lifestyle can be expensive, too. When Samuel took a 10 percent pay cut in 2019, the couple panicked; would they be able to feed their goats through the winter, or would their children miss out on Christmas? But Cortney rose to the challenge and started a small business selling homemade goat milk caramels.

"[It's] not little anymore," Cortney said, who now works at a commercial kitchen making her signature elderberry syrup and chicken rub recipes to sell to the general public. She and Samuel share this, and much more on life at the homestead, with their followers on Instagram. Cortney also shares her holistic goat care course on the family's website.

Most people love learning about canning food, harvesting chickens, and raising goats holistically, Cortney said. However, there have also been some naysayers.

"Vegans do not like what we do at all," Cortney said. "Even though in all reality, when you start comparing the carbon footprint of an almond versus a cow, or tofu versus raw milk, and the fact that I go outside in my backyard and harvest my milk, and there's never any plastic used, it's all reusable glass ... the carbon footprint is so much different."

The family, however, has the support of family and friends and has even made new homesteading friends through social media.

Cortney said: "I think the No. 1 message that I'm trying to convey by being on social media is that everyone has the ability to do this ... it's difficult, but it's a dedication to this life, and knowing that this is what brings us closer to our food, closer to this earth, better-taking care of this earth, and closer to God, showing us how he meant for these animals to live."



(Left) It's all hands on deck on the Black homestead. (Right) Cortney and Samuel's daughters collecting eggs.





"Marley's Ghost," 1843, by John Leech, from "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens.



"The Last of the Spirits," 1843, by John Leech.



"Scrooge's Third Visitor," 1843, by John Leech.

All I Want for Christmas Is to Be Like Ebenezer Scrooge, and so Should You!

Lessons from 'A Christmas Carol' for every day of the year

JEFF MINICK

Other than the accounts of a birth in a manger, the most popular and best-known Christmas story in the English-speaking world is Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol." First published on Dec. 19, 1843, this novella about a miser, visitations from three Christmas spirits, and a conversion of the heart was sold out by Christmas Day of that same year.

Since then, generations have read this beloved tale. The miser's name, Scrooge, became a part of the English language, used to designate a grouchy money-grubber who despises the holiday season. In addition, more than 100 movies, television episodes, plays, ballets, musicals, and operas have recreated "A Christmas Carol." To find someone over the age of 12 who's never heard of the celebrated Scrooge would likely be a more demanding task than finding the proverbial needle in a haystack.

Consequently, there's no need here to recount even a barebones summary of "A Christmas Carol." We know the man, and we know his story—at least the gist of it. When I used to annually teach this novella to seminars of homeschoolers, every year, several students would ask me why we were reading a story everyone already knew. "For Dickens's words," I'd tell them, "which aren't the same as watch-

ing it on television or in a theater."

For reasons that don't bear repeating, I recently revisited that book and the final part of "A Christmas Carol," what Dickens called "Stave Five: The End of It." In that chapter is distilled the wisdom imparted to Scrooge by his Christmas ghosts, insights intended for the rest of us as well.

Awakenings

When morning comes and Scrooge finds himself safe in his own bed after his three Christmas ghosts have departed, his first words are, "I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!"

Here's the first gem of wisdom cut for us by Scrooge, particularly applicable to the upcoming New Year. We aren't meant to dwell only in memories of the past or in dreams of the future. No—we must recognize that we simultaneously inhabit all three of these time zones, past, present, and future, and that this blend of personal history, current circumstances, and visions for tomorrow is the essence of our humanity.

Scrooge next realizes that his ghosts have offered him release from his prison of greed and loneliness. In particular, he rejoices when he understands that his pitiable entreaties to the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come "to have his fate reversed" have been answered. "I am as light as a feather," he cries, "I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy, I am

as giddy as a drunken man." This newfound exultation is the engine that drives him as he charges off to change his ways and make amends to those he has damaged by his greed and ill will.

Here, Scrooge reveals to us the pure joy that can come from embracing goodness.



One of the most popular and best-known Christmas stories in the English-speaking world is Charles Dickens's "A Christmas Carol," first published on Dec. 19, 1843.

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Patching Up the Past

That Christmas morning, the deliriously merry Scrooge first dispatches an enormous turkey to the home of his impoverished employee, Bob Cratchit. Later, while strolling the streets, he meets a man soliciting funds for the poor, a portly gentleman who just the day before had approached Ebenezer asking for a donation for the poor and had been sent packing. Now, Scrooge promises the man a sizable sum for his cause, telling him, "A great many back-payments are included in it, I assure you." He proceeds eventually to his nephew's house, joins in the Christmas party there, and repairs that broken relationship.

The following morning, he arrives at his counting house early, catches Bob Cratchit arriving late for work, and rather than firing him, promises a raise and assistance to his family.

Offering genuine apologies and amends to those we have wronged or ignored, and for that matter, accepting those apologies in turn, is often missing in both the public and private spheres of today's society. When, for instance, someone on social media expresses her regrets for a careless, hurtful remark she posted online as an adolescent, those who attacked her in the first place frequently double down on their assaults, leaving forgiveness and mercy aside. Within our own circle of family and friends, some of us also find it difficult to ask for or grant pardon for wrongdoing.

Yet making amends, as Scrooge realizes, repairs and restores relationships. Today's 12-step programs recognize this healing grace.

Steps 8 and 9 for Alcoholics Anonymous asks recovering alcoholics to make a list of all persons they have harmed, while Step 9 directs them to make those amends a reality (unless they might harm others by doing so).

Here's a classic example of laying our wrongs on the table and asking for absolution. In the final months before his death in 1991 from a brain tumor, Republican Party consultant Lee Atwater apologized both publicly and privately to the political enemies he had wounded with his verbal attacks and accusations, including an apology to former presidential candidate Michael Dukakis. Whatever we may think of Atwater's politics—he was a hard-charging adviser to George H.W. Bush—like Scrooge, he'd come to a place in his life where he understood what was truly important and acted accordingly.

Spreading the Spirit

After Scrooge dresses and goes out into the streets, he encounters passersby, just as had happened during his time with the Ghost of Christmas Present. But there was the difference: "Scrooge regarded every one with a delighted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humoured fellows said, 'Good morning, sir! A merry Christmas to you!' And Scrooge said often afterwards, that of all the blithe sounds he had ever heard, those were the blithest in his ears."

A little later: "He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows, and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk—that anything—could give him so much happiness."

And near the end of "Stave Five," we learn that "he became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world."

From these passages, we know that Scrooge's happiness is contagious, that his interior delight and glee shine forth and bring light to those around him. Our culture is in need of such a pandemic of sunshine today, and though some people consistently deliver that illumination, many of us, including me, often walk past people on the streets while under a cloud.

Following in Scrooge's Footsteps

The spirits hold a mirror to Scrooge, reflecting a despised miser and a twisted man turned inward upon himself, and so transform him into a human being who could feel love and empathy. He becomes, as Dickens tells us at the very end of his story, a man "who knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge." From what Dickens tells us of this change of heart, Scrooge also knows how to keep Christmas well every day of the year.

As for us, this Christmas season we might all aspire to become more Scrooge-like, not the misanthrope who was "warning all human sympathy to keep its distance," but the reborn Ebenezer, the inmate newly sprung from his homemade prison who came to value laughter, generosity, and affection more than all the gold that had composed the bars and bricks of his cell.

Jeff Minick lives and writes in Front Royal, Virginia. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust on Their Wings," and two works of nonfiction, "Learning as I Go" and "Movies Make the Man."

Erasmus of Rotterdam: Acquiring Nobility Through Manners

A look back at the very first social etiquette book in Western literature, 500 years later

ANDREW BENSON BROWN

No one is short on advice, though advisers may be short on listeners.

Advice's effective motif: Be brief.

Desiderius Erasmus understood this. As one of the greatest scholars of the Renaissance, he had a profound effect on Europe's shifting educational values. He retranslated the New Testament from the original Greek for the first time in more than 1,000 years, helping to make the Bible more accessible to laypeople. So great was his influence upon the Reformation that a German monk was noted to have said, "Erasmus posuit ova, Lutherus eduxit pullos"—Erasmus laid the eggs, Luther hatched them.

Those who read Erasmus today tend to only be familiar with his satirical essay "In Praise of Folly." But his most successful book of all—the bestselling book of the 16th century, in fact—is a short treatise that most modern readers have never heard of.

'A Handbook on Good Manners for Children'

Erasmus wrote political advice for princes, counting some of Europe's greatest rulers among his pupils and admirers. As he aged, though, he felt it wasn't enough to instruct leaders. He complained that people were losing their manners—the eternal opinion, probably, of every older generation. In 1530, he wrote "A Handbook on Good Manners for Children" to direct his pen at young people. As Eleanor Merchant writes in her recent translation (Preface Publishing, 2008), while previous discussions on manners were mixed into books about other subjects, Erasmus's treatise was "the first book in western literature" to focus exclusively on "the question of how to behave in society."

It was important, Erasmus said, to inculcate good values at a young age—a novel idea at the time. At the core of the book's educational program, Merchant explains, is Erasmus's idea of "nobilitas," the virtue of goodness. Nobilitas was attained by reading texts that transmitted ancient wisdom, conversing about them, and practicing the moral behaviors they described. As he wrote, "No one can choose their own parents, or where they come from, but everyone can shape their own character and behavior."

The book opens with chapters on bodily habits, then moves to common social situations. Manners begin with the eyes: "The cultivated mind of a child is most evident from his expression." Quick darting and eye-rolling are signs of mental instability. Glancing sideways indicates mischief. Winking at people is an inappropriate gesture best left "to tuna fish." The forehead should be relaxed, not wagging "like a hedgehog." The key to a controlled expression is eyes that are "steady, respectful, and well-set," reflecting an "amicable mind." Humorous comparisons to animals abound when Erasmus is describing poor manners. Speaking with a nasal tone is

the practice of "elephants." Children who shake their head to ruffle their hair are like "frolicking horses." Children who gulp down food are "storks." All these metaphors express Erasmus's lifelong hatred of barbarism. Rude, extravagant, and violent behaviors all detract from nobilitas.

In his chapter on the nose, we learn that the predecessor to "bless you" was to say "Christ help you" when others sneeze. To reinforce this divine assistance, Erasmus suggests that children raise their cap when hearing the expression said to another person.

Witty counsel abounds in every section. Regarding the face, he says, "The face should express cheerfulness, without the mouth disfiguring it nor expressing a lax mind."

Few alive know anything about the original, 500-year-old text, but its traces are everywhere apparent underneath the cultural surface.

On posture, "Your shoulders should be balanced evenly, not like sail-yards, where one is raised and the other lowered."

In church, "Make sure your eyes remain fixed on the preacher, and your ears likewise attend to him, whilst your mind concentrates on him with every reverence, as if you're listening not to a man, but to God speaking to you through the mouth of a man."

While playing, "Someone who concedes a game with good humor gains more honor than one who always insists on winning."

More than a quarter of the book is de-



As one of the greatest scholars of the Renaissance, Desiderius Erasmus had a profound effect on the Reformation and Europe's shifting educational values.

voted to table manners, that most complex of social rituals. How should you respond if offered a seat of honor at dinner? Politely decline, Erasmus says—children shouldn't sit at the head of the table. But if the host keeps insisting, modestly accept so as to appear neither obstinate nor proud.

There are many funny tips: Do you throw scraps to dogs under the table? If so, you're little better than a dog yourself. Some instructions are also surprisingly subtle. What if someone raises their cup to you, but toasts you in a teasing way that doesn't express genuine praise? Erasmus's advice is to respond by raising the cup to your lips, "sipping a little and giving the impression of drinking" without really doing so. In this way, he indicates, you can avoid the awkwardness that would follow from not accepting the toast while preserving your honor at the same time.

He closes the book with a maxim: "The key to good manners is that you should readily ignore the faults of others, but avoid falling short yourself."

Nobility Over Barbarism

The "Handbook" was so influential, spawning so many imitators and variations, that it became something of a palimpsest for modern society: Few alive know anything about the original, 500-year-old text, but its traces are everywhere apparent underneath the cultural surface. Contemporary people have absorbed its principles without knowing it.

This influence wasn't apparent to the book's author. Once Europe's most celebrated living writer, Erasmus died hated and despised only a few years after the "Handbook" was written. As it turns out, his opinion that Europeans were becoming more ill-mannered wasn't just an old man's idle grievance.

Toward the end of his life, the religious divisions the Reformation had unleashed exploded into violence and bloodshed—the very barbarism Erasmus so loathed. His own nuanced scholarship had recognized valid points in Luther's criticisms of the Catholic Church, while advocating for unified reform rather than sectarianism. For his neutrality, he was denounced on both sides: Rome declared him a heretic, while the Lutherans saw him as a traitor to the protestant cause. In the same year that he wrote the "Handbook," his powerful protectors abandoned him. His intellectual disciples were persecuted, his French translator burned at the stake. He died feeling he had failed in his life purpose of championing reasonableness, civility, and culture.

Despite all this, Erasmus's "Handbook" continued to be popular and went through many editions. It outlasted the European wars of religion and remains in print today. The triumph of nobility over barbarism sometimes takes centuries. In the end, though, talented minds who devote their pens to improving understanding will always survive intellectual prohibitions. Wisdom is democratic.

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The Dangerous Evolution of Dolls: From Nurturing to Narcissism

KIMBERLY ELLS

I happened down the toy aisle last week and was confronted with a host of hideous, creepy dolls. Fearsome mini fashionistas with pouting lips, bare stomachs, and gigantic eyes stared down at me as I scooted forward, fighting off that feeling you get when you're in a haunted house.

The line of O.M.G. (Outrageous Millennial Girls) dolls was especially unnerving. One even sporting a bandage on her face along with neon hair, a miniskirt, mismatched thigh-highs, and the label "FIERCE" on the box. Another brand of dolls—with skin of every color of the rainbow including green, pink, and silver metallic (and microphones attached to their heads)—barely looked human.

I couldn't help thinking, "What does this say about society? About girls? About the manufacturers who make these repugnant things and the mothers who buy them? What precipitated the hideous fall of dolls and where does this path end? The Strawberry Shortcake dolls of the '80s also had neon hair and outlandish clothes, but they exuded a certain innocence

utterly lacking in today's mainstream dolls.

Evidence suggests that dolls have existed for millennia and have served mainly three purposes: companionship, simulated caretaking, and roleplaying. A little doll owner finds comfort in having a doll with her in bed at night, practices being a big person by taking care of the doll, and finally, acts out various roles by playing with dolls.

It used to be normal to see a little girl (yes, girl) carting a doll around and pretending to feed it, burp it, change its diaper, and wrap it in blankets. This simulated caring for someone else was valuable developmental play and helped a little girl practice for the role roughly 90 percent of women eventually embark on: motherhood. And what's more, little girls seemed to like playing with dolls.

Valuing Nurturing Above All Else

But buying a little girl a baby doll these days is seen as encouraging a girl toward motherhood—a grave crime in today's world. Inspire a girl to become a mere mother? You've got to be kidding. And waste all her potential? And waste her time caring for others? And waste her life rais-

ing up the next generation of humanity?

Herein lies the problem. We have ceased to sufficiently value nurturing in our society, especially the nurturing of mothers. To nurture means "to care for and encourage the growth and development of someone or something." And nurturing is something babies need a lot of in order to grow up to be secure, well-adjusted humans and to simply survive.

Erica Komisar, a psychologist with more than 25 years of experience in private practice, has observed what she calls a "failure of society to value nurturing and family above all else." And the results have been significant. Many young adults have no memory of being nurtured as children; they no longer prioritize having children; and when they do have children, they are underprepared to make the sacrifices necessary and express the empathy necessary to care for them.

Once heard it said that being grown-up consists of being able to take care of someone else. If this is true, then by undercutting and belittling the value of caretaking, we are

reaping a generation of people who never grow up, who never learn to value someone else's welfare as much as their own, and who are unwilling or unable to sacrifice sufficiently for the well-being of others.

Komisar said that if you choose to have children, you take on what she calls "the sacred obligation of nurturing." This requires time and sacrifice and "being there," especially during the child's first three years of life.

While mothers don't have to be present every minute and don't have to fill all of their children's needs, they do need to be present consistently, and they—along with their husbands—need to become proficient at caretaking. Playing with dolls facilitates some of this proficiency.

And yes, it's perfectly acceptable (and now en vogue) for boys to play with dolls. However, they haven't gravitated toward it en masse despite efforts like the "My Buddy" doll of the 1980s, which was designed for boys. The battle over whether the preference or nonpreference for dolls is a natural phenomenon or a socially constructed

one is ongoing. But what I find concerning is that while boys are encouraged to play with dolls in order to develop and roleplay empathy, girls are discouraged from doing so, or are encouraged to play with dolls that invite them to model the behavior of pop icons and porn stars rather than mothers.

The Decadence of Dolls

Two episodes of recent social media uproar illustrate the decadence of dolls and why it matters.

First, when the now-infamous Balenciaga ad campaign featuring little girls holding teddy bears in sexual bondage gear surfaced, masses of decent people rose up to express their concern and horror at seeing sexualized toys in the hands of little children. Only the father of one of the girls in the photo shoot seemed not to understand the problem.

Second, the American Girl doll franchise, which has long produced wholesome dolls and accompanying movies featuring spunky heroines, just released a book instructing young girls on transgenderism and telling them that "the doctor might offer medicine to delay your body's changes" and that "you can appreciate your body for everything it allows you to experience and still want to change certain things about it." So much for body acceptance.

And so much for encouraging children to learn to care for and about others in their

imaginative play.

When dolls are used to promote body disfigurement, we are light-years away from fostering empathy and nurturing; we are way down the road to engineering raging narcissism that focuses intensely on "being your true self." Instead of encouraging our daughters to discover the joy of committing to a life full of service to one's own children, we are encouraging them to maim their bodies in ways that may permanently exclude them from having children at all.

Buying a little girl a baby doll these days is seen as encouraging a girl toward motherhood—a grave crime in today's world.

The Fear of Babies

I was talking with a group of young women in their early 20s about what fears they have concerning motherhood and what obstacles they face in becoming mothers. A common thread was this: They didn't grow up around babies and had no idea how to take care of one. Because of the trend toward smaller families, not only

did these young women not grow up with young siblings to learn to help care for but because of the vilification of dolls, many of them likely didn't even practice caretaking to any significant degree.

No wonder they're afraid of babies.

Does any of this matter? Does it matter if the rising generation doesn't grow up to "value nurturing and family above all else"? With the rate of emotional instability in children at its highest in history, teens barely able to master basic empathetic social skills, young adults cringing at the thought of parenthood, and little girls embracing a culture of fame, selfishness, greed, and fashion, the answer might be yes. The girls playing with porn-fied dolls—despite being mentored away from motherhood in every way possible—will become the mothers of the future.

Something Beautiful

To the one brave mom I saw perusing the meager offering of baby dolls at the local store, I say stand strong. Don't buy the repulsive doll on the shelf that you probably don't want your daughter to emulate. Hold out for something beautiful. Demand better from doll manufacturers and consider your options.

One of my best Christmases ever was when my mom made me a doll as big as I was. I named her Carol and she had cas-

cading yarn hair and blue eyes. I loved the heck out of that doll. My mom didn't go buy me the first piece of disfigured neon plastic she saw on the shelf. She created something beautiful just for me. And it mattered.

So this Christmas, refuse to send the message to your daughter that nurturing and mothering don't matter. Because they do. In fact, humanity depends upon them. Might be accused of wanting to turn the clock back to the 1950s? Well, in the case of dolls, perhaps we should.

This article was originally published on MercatorNet

Kimberly Ells is the author of "The Invincible Family: Why the Global Campaign to Crush Motherhood and Fatherhood Can't Win" and is a policy adviser for Family Watch International, where she works to protect children from early sexualization, defend parental rights, and promote the family as the fundamental unit of society. Ells is an avid researcher and writer on family issues and has authored policy briefs for international distribution. She graduated from Brigham Young University with a degree in English. She is married and is the mother of five children. Contact her at kimberlyells@hotmail.com and InvincibleFamily.com



Caring for a doll is valuable developmental play and helps little girls practice caretaking.

DEAR NEXT GENERATION

Game of Thrones and Psychology

At the request of his daughter, a father begins writing the wisdom he's accrued in his lifetime



“You may not realize it and you may not want to be part of it, but each day, you’re playing a game of thrones.”

Tim Carter

To read a chapter of Tim Carter’s book, please see go.timcarter.com/paperroute



“Adventures & Advice” by Tim Carter. He is also the author of the syndicated newspaper column “Ask the Builder.”

Eight years ago, my youngest daughter, who’s now 30 years old, asked me to write a book for her. It was in the middle of winter and dusk had just turned to darkness as I landed at the Dayton, Ohio, international airport. Hours before, I was at our home in New Hampshire. Two weeks prior to this, she and I had driven from home to Cincinnati, Ohio, so she could find a job and be close to her best friend.

It was now time to drive back across the often snowy and icy tundra of I-90. After asking me how my flight was, the next words that flowed from her lips were, “Dad, I need you to write a book for me. I want it to be filled with all you know about business, real estate, investing, finance, relationships, home improvement, politics, etc. I don’t want to slog through life making the same mistakes you made and the book will be a shortcut to success and happiness. Oh, and I also want it filled with our family history and all of the stories about you growing up that you shared many nights at the dinner table when I was growing up.”

As you might imagine, I was overwhelmed by the request. Swirling inside my head was a vortex of emotions. First and foremost, I was so proud of her to recognize she didn’t know it all. Secondly, my baby had truly grown up and recognized what she was up against. Several other thoughts flashed past my tiny gray cells and the last one I remember was fear. Would I be able to do this massive brain dump and fulfill her wish?

As we drove away from the airport into the inky darkness, she began to rattle off chapter titles in the book. I retrieved my reporter’s notepad in my backpack and began to write them all down. I still have that cherished piece of paper.

Once home, I set the paper on a shelf in my office where it started to gather dust. Nothing happened for five years. One day, my sweet daughter said: “Dad, I know you’ve not started to write my book. I want it for my next birthday.”

Gulp. I had five months to get it done. Being a professional writer, within minutes, I sprang into action and rapidly discovered the book would be about six to eight inches thick! I had to split it apart into volumes.

Believe it or not, I got volume one finished by her birthday. I even designed the color cover for the hardbound book. I had 15 copies printed and distributed them to my wife, my other two children, and a very few close friends. My daughter’s eyes were as big as saucers when she opened the package on her birthday and saw her request had come to be.

Game of Thrones

As I started to write the initial chapters of volume one, it became crystal clear that my parents, my aunts, my uncles, my grandparents, and just about every person mentioned in the book were all participants in a never-ending daily game of thrones. It was similar to me playing the game of Monopoly with friends on my street when I grew up. Often, a game would span for a week until the last person was cut off at the knees by Butchy Tallarigo, the older kid who always outsmarted us. Each game ended up with him having all the money, all the property deeds, and all of the little green and red houses.

You may not realize it, and you may not want to be part of it, but each day you’re playing a game of thrones. You play it at home, with your friends, your co-workers, and your relatives. It’s being played in your apartment building, your HOA, your town, your city, your state, and your country. It’s played by all the leaders of countries all over the world. At the highest level, it’s a never-ending game between good and evil.

You don’t believe me? Just look at the news headlines, for goodness sake! When you drill down into each story or scandal, one of these three things is at the core: money, power, and sex. Often, the trifecta is at the core as all three things are intertwined within the scandal.

If you want a shortcut in life like my daughter, then you need to realize that everyone around you is motivated by those three things, and often, they want all of them in large quantities. You need to be hyper-aware that you’re almost always being played. Or, in the worst cases, you’re using people like tissues to get what you want no matter the collateral damage.

Those who are active players almost always cloak their desires. They’re often mendacious and mask what’s really going on in their minds. In other words, it’s almost always about them achieving their goals at your expense. Start doing autopsies on all of the drama in your past life and look at what caused the problem. I can assure you it was one, or all, of the three game of thrones goals.

Powerful Psychology

How do those active players get what they want each day from you? The sooner you realize that powerful psychology is being used on you all day long, the sooner you’ll be able to defend yourself. Baked into your brain stem are several psychological buttons that others can push to persuade you to do something they want you to do. If you’re not aware of these buttons and how they work, you will almost always succumb to the desires of those that know exactly how to press them.

It took me decades to figure this out. I can assure you that your quality of life will be so much better if you know that people around and above you are always trying to play you like a cheap fiddle. Armed with how this psychology works, you’ll be able to protect yourself and only do what you want to do.

Here are a few simple examples. Reciprocity is the easiest of the psychological

buttons to push. If someone does something nice for you, you often reciprocate and do the same for them. Have you ever bought that small block of cheese or tube of summer sausage at the store after eating a small sample piece that was on a toothpick? You just got played.

Have you whipped out your credit card to respond to a buy-one-get-one offer? That’s reciprocity. You were played again.

Did you sign up for all that special weight-loss food to be delivered to your home because you were bombarded by seeing 5 or 10 other people who magically lost 20, 30, or 50 pounds? That’s the social proof psychology button.

Were you swayed to think one way about an issue because 5 or 10 celebrities pontificated on Twitter or some other social media platform telling you how they feel about the issue? Did you toe the line about some topic because you saw TV news anchors, talk-show hosts, and an army of pundits lecture you on how you should feel? If so, the psychological button of authority in your head was pushed harder than a D8 bulldozer shoves 20 tons of dirt across a construction site.

The ultimate power of psychology rests in just one button. It’s the one that has printed on it in capital letters, “SCARCITY.” Convince someone that something will disappear and that person will do almost anything. When was the last time you bought something when you got the email or text that said, “The sale ends TONIGHT!”

That’s double scarcity. Not only is the company taking away the sale price in hours, but they’re also convincing you that they’ll take away extra money from you if you don’t take advantage of the sale price.

What happens if you make someone think that the oceans are going to rise up and flood all the land they live on? What happens if you tell someone that some invisible thing is going to kill them? Yes, you’re making scarce the very thing most people value the most—their lives. If you want to make the world a better place and experience true happiness in life, then simply become aware of what’s really going on around you each day. Don’t succumb to the psychology. In fact, use it to your advantage, and persuade others what the truth is, about any and all things.

Start your journey by politely refusing that small tasty piece of summer sausage. You really don’t need that extra item in your shopping cart.

—Tim Carter, New Hampshire

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.*

In life’s game of thrones, the sooner you realize that powerful psychology is being used on you all day long, the sooner you’ll be able to defend yourself, says Tim Carter.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF JEFF HOMAN



1. The children’s room is apportioned with less-ornate furnishings, yet the room’s main element is a decorative turned-leg, four-poster bed. Adding to the décor is a practical, fancifully designed bed step, a side table with glass knobs, and a burl-faced dresser with carved, shell-like pulls. 2. For playing games, studying, reading, and more, the adjacent sitting room next to the children’s room is displayed with damask upholstery and an empire-style desk. Double and triple moldings define many of Merrehope’s wide door frames, and historic-print wallpapers run from floor to ceiling in most rooms. 3. Arches and columns throughout Merrehope’s interior, most prominent in the main library, are carry-throughs of the early 20th-century focus on neoclassical elements. Elegant brass lighting fixtures descending from detailed, molded ceiling roses define some of the rooms at Merrehope, as do heavily carved Victorian furnishings such as the wood and upholstery settees and the clawfoot grand table. Books in 19th-century houses were often stored in glass-front armoires, such as the one in this library. 4. Second-floor wide hallways in imposing historic homes allowed storage in the form of immense, solid-wood armoires, such as the stately mahogany piece at Merrehope (not shown). Anytime other than the holiday season, when the upper-room hallway is adorned with festive trees and decorations, the tall and wide antique armoire, as well as the marble-topped, scroll-leg table, are the focal points.

LARGER THAN LIFE: ART THAT INSPIRES US THROUGH THE AGES

Merrehope Pre-Civil War Home Dresses Up for the Holiday

DEENA BOUKNIGHT

What started as a wedding gift in 1858 of a small cottage and 160 acres from one of Meridian’s first settlers to his daughter has grown in square footage and height over the past 164 years. Originally designed by Juriah Jackson, the home was remodeled in the Neoclassical Revival style by S.H. Floyd when he purchased it in 1903. The home’s architectural style has been added to through the years to transform it from quaint Greek Revival to ornate Italianate to grand Neoclassical.

Located in Meridian, Mississippi, the home has witnessed not only its own architectural evolution, but that of history’s impact on the area as well. Union Gen. William T. Sherman famously marched with 10,000 troops on the Confederate-loyal town in February 1864, and although he burned much of Meridian, the antebellum mansion was spared—perhaps because of its aesthetic beauty, though

no one knows for certain. The estate was purchased by Meridian Restorations Foundation in 1968, and it was named “Merrehope.” The mansion sports 24 rooms and 13 coal-burning fireplaces. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places and as an official Mississippi Landmark, the property has been showcased lavishly for 54 Christmases through a regional event spotlighting elaborately themed trees, some with handmade ornaments. Visitors from around the United States and many countries admire this restored home of Southern beauty.

A 30-plus-year writer-journalist, Deena C. Bouknight works from her Western North Carolina mountain cottage and has contributed articles on food culture, travel, people, and more to local, regional, national, and international publications. She has written three novels, including the only historical fiction about the East Coast’s worst earthquake. Her website is DeenaBouknightWriting.com



(Top) Libraries have often doubled as music rooms in grand homes. Merrehope sports a baby grand piano in its library, with a themed Christmas tree this season that is accented in black to coordinate with the piano’s finish. An authentic Persian rug is the main artistic focal point in this spacious room, which, instead of having massive doors, is open and distinguished by a set of columns and arches.

(Above) While the original 1858 Greek Revival cottage exterior is now part of the backside of Merrehope, the front exterior became Italianate in architectural style due to two stories added in 1868. Other Italianate distinguishing factors are the decorative corbels (projections that support or decorate a structure) under the wide roof molding, the imposing columns, and the ruby-red, main-door side-lights (glass). Neoclassical style was added as part of the 1904 wrap-around porch and a cantilevered upper porch.

(Far Left) A double parlor is essentially two adjacent main living spaces, and one end of Merrehope’s spacious room magnifies its oriel-style (bay window that protrudes from the wall but doesn’t reach the floor) window with decorative moldings and heavy gold drapes to marry the gold velvet in the hand-carved, Victorian queen chair.

(Left) Volunteers for Merrehope’s annual Trees of Christmas event attempt to zero in on each room’s historic wallpaper design to establish tree vignettes and color schemes. Bold golds and dusty blues, which were popular Victorian-era interior colors, are accentuated by the elaborate tree’s feathers and bows.

ALL ILLUSTRATIONS BY SHUTTERSTOCK





FEI MENG

PARENTING MATTERS

Lessons About Giving From Christmas Past

From his first Christmas with electricity to a lesson of a lifetime, the author learned the true meaning of the season of giving

PARNELL DONAHUE

Everyone remembers being a kid and running down the stairs on Christmas morning to find a brilliantly lit Christmas tree with toys under it.

Sorry, I should have written “most everyone,” because back then, many of us didn’t have electricity or lots of presents under a tree—except for one Christmas.

We had gone to Midnight Mass, and on the way home, we dropped Grandma off at her house. Dad walked her carefully through the fresh snow and into her house, while we kids and Mom waited in the car, protected from the cold, Minnesota wind. Dad seemed to take a very long time returning to the car.

We had wanted to get out of the car and run to the barn because our Uncle Jesse told us that at midnight on Christmas Eve, the animals talked in praise of God. Mom said, “If they do, they’re quiet now because it’s almost two hours after midnight. Stay where you’re at.” Finally, Dad came out with a bag tucked under his arm and wouldn’t tell us what was in it.

It didn’t take long for us to drive that last half mile to our little house. We kids were

whisked off to the bedroom, the door was closed, and we were told to stay there. What seemed hours later, Mom opened the door; we were awed! Our Christmas tree was filled with red, green, blue, and yellow lights. The colors reflected off the walls, and the windows above the frost. Even the frost on the windows was turned into rainbows of color. I still get a knot of excitement in my stomach just remembering that night.

Dad told us that Grandma had purchased some battery-powered lights and gave them to him in that brown bag. While Mom filled the stockings, he took the battery from the car and hooked up the lights. What an awesome sight!

Too excited to sleep, we delighted in emptying the long, brown, winter stockings we had put under the tree. We each had a fresh apple, an orange, and a candy bar in our sock. But even more exciting, we each had our own new coloring book and a box of eight crayons. We knew for sure there was a Santa Claus.

That was way back during World War II; today, it’s a different story. So many of us find ourselves caught up by the TV, newspaper, and radio ads hawking the latest toys that “all kids need and will love.” But too often, kids neither need nor love so many

Get your kids one or two of the things they request, but to make their Christmas special and exciting, get them a surprise—something they didn’t know existed.

toys. Too many toys are not good for kids. Get your kids one or two of the things they request, but to make their Christmas special and exciting, get them a surprise—something they didn’t know existed. My wife is so good at that!

Simple Gift, Lifelong Lesson
With the end of the war, the economy improved. We moved to a bigger house with electricity, hot and cold running water, and a telephone. Life was good.

My hands were shaking, my heart was beating like I just climbed Mount Everest.

When I was 12, I asked for a wristwatch for Christmas. I didn’t care if I received any other gift; I wanted a watch. Mom ordered most if not all the presents from Sears or Montgomery Ward catalogs. When the mailman dropped off boxes, Mom made sure to hide all the contents and warned us not to go looking for them. She liked surprises, too. One evening, a week or so before Christmas, while putting away dishes, I saw the unwrapped gifts high on a kitchen shelf. Could my watch be among them?

The suspense was more than I could bear! The next morning, the devil got hold of me

and kept whispering in my ear, “Your mom is at the grocery store.” “Your dad is in the barn.” “Your brother is taking a shower and all the girls are still in bed.” “Get a chair, climb up there.” “You aren’t afraid, are you?” “I’ll hold the chair!”

I resisted. “Scared, are you?” the devil said. “Do it, you’re old enough to know what’s in those boxes.” “Are you a chicken or a man?”

After a couple of days of this, I became determined! “I am old enough, and no one will know.” So I pulled a chair over to the cabinet, climbed onto the cabinet, stood up, and opened the cabinet door. I lifted a large box, and there, under the box, was my watch! My hands were shaking, my heart was beating like I just climbed Mount Everest.

Five days and I would be like the boys in school. How could I wait? I closed the cabinet door, climbed down, and pushed the chair back into its place. No one would know!

I learned I was getting a watch, but I learned, too, what guilt feels like. For five days, I couldn’t look my mother or father in the eye. I tried to avoid being in the same room with them. There was no one to share my guilt; I felt sick all over.

What would I say when they were to hand me the wrapped box and ask me to guess? If I were to guess a watch, they’d know I peeked. If I were to say anything else, they’d see my nose grow!

Christmas Eve came, Christmas Day came. When it was time to open the presents, I wanted to run out of the house. My youngest sister passed out the gifts. She held mine behind her back and looked coyly at me and said, “Guess!”

“I can’t,” was all I could say. Young kids, like pets, know stress when they see it. She handed me the box and ran to her chair. Tears filled my eyes when I opened the box and saw the watch. “Thanks,” I cried.

I never told my parents, my sisters, or my brother that I peeked. I think Mom and Dad knew why I was acting so strange, but they never said a thing about it. That was probably the best way to handle a little thing that wasn’t really a little thing. I haven’t been able to peek at presents since.

A guilty conscience can sometimes be a good teacher. Some years ago, a wise mother told me that, often, it’s best to tell your guilty child his punishment is coming and wait for something he really wants and then forbid it. Is that mean or wise? What do you think?

When our 13 grandkids were aged 5 to 15, my wife Mary and I took them and their parents on the General Jackson, a local river boat that featured a first-class dinner and music. They played a version of “The Christmas Carol” in which the reformed Scrooge was generous and loving. They sang every Christmas carol you have ever heard and more. When the ship docked, the grandkids were so excited, they asked if we could go there every year. One boy even wanted to go every month. Mary and I enjoyed it just as much as the kids!

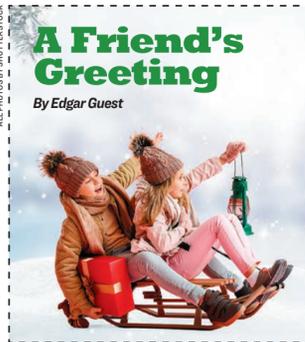
Merry Christmas, enjoy your family, and may God continue to bless you all.

Dr. Parnell Donahue is a pediatrician; a military veteran; an author of four books, a blog, and “parentingwithdrpar.com”; he writes The parenting matters Podcast and is host of WBOU’s Parenting Matters show. He and his wife, Mary, have four adult children: all hold Ph.D.s, two are also M.D.s. Contact him at Parenting-Matters.com



FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES



A Friend’s Greeting

By Edgar Guest

I’d like to be the sort of friend that you have been to me; I’d like to be the help that you’ve been always glad to be; I’d like to mean as much to you each minute of the day As you have meant, old friend of mine, to me along the way.

I’d like to give back the joy that you have given me, Yet that were wishing you a need I hope will never be; I’d like to make you feel as rich as I, who travel on Undaunted in the darkest hours with you to lean upon.

I’d like to do the big things and the splendid things for you, To brush the gray out of your skies and leave them only blue; I’d like to say the kindly things that I so oft have heard, And feel that I could rouse your soul the way that mine you’ve stirred.

I’m wishing at this Christmas time that I could but repay A portion of the gladness that you’ve strewn along the way; And could I have one wish this year, this only would it be: I’d like to be the sort of friend that you have been to me.



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

HAMILTON WRIGHT MABIE (1846-1916), AMERICAN ESSAYIST



WHAT DO SANTA’S ELVES DO AFTER SCHOOL?

THEIR GNOME WORK.

By Aidan Danza

THE HUMBLE DONKEY



The donkey has been the object of quite a bit of verbal abuse throughout human history, but it has also gained some prestige by being the choice steed of many illustrious figures in history, especially Jesus and Mary. So, I thought it fitting to describe the donkey around Christmastime.

There are various types of donkeys living in the wild (in the Middle East and parts of Africa) and also in captivity, usually as a farm or pack animal. Today, donkeys aren’t used very often, but they played quite a part from ancient times all the way to the turn of the 20th century. In modern times, 90 percent of the donkey population lives in developing countries, including in South America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. There they are used as pack animals. For example, in India, donkeys are still the main vehicle to carry bricks from place to place, from the kiln all the way to the job site. They can carry 25 bricks at a time and often walk up stairs with them, delivering directly to bricklayers.

Here in the United States, donkeys live a more comfortable life, often as pets or standing around pastures guarding herds of sheep, cows, and goats. When a predator comes into these pastures, it’s the donkey’s job to scare it away or fight it, protecting the herd. Some gardeners and farmers also use donkeys for light farm work or pulling small carts. The preferred diet of a donkey, as with many farm animals, is grass, although they will make do with shrubs and desert plants. It’s estimated that one donkey can eat up to 6,000 pounds of food per year. Wild donkeys live in herds, headed by one dominant male called a jack, a few females called jennies, and young called foals.

Parenting With Patience

When your children start pushing your buttons, take a deep breath and try these simple tips

BARBARA DANZA

Parenting calls on us to bring forth every talent, skill, and virtue we can muster. It shows us, often in technicolor, the many ways in which we fall short and the many aspects of ourselves we can improve.

Perhaps the most coveted of all parenting virtues is patience. Whether our children are in the newborn, toddler, little kid, or big kid stage, they require more patience and forbearance than most parents could have imagined before having children. What parent hasn’t struggled at one time or another to find the patience to do well what they know they should do in their role as parent?

Here are a few simple tips to increase the amount of patience you have available for your family.

Check Your Screen Time
Do you ever find yourself annoyed by someone in real life interrupting you while

you mindlessly scroll Instagram or check your email? Yikes. If you’ve been finding your patience at home running thin, check the amount of time you’re spending on screens. The more fragmented your attention, the shorter you’ll tend to be with those vying for it.

Review Family Photos
Fundamentally, to become patient, one needs to foster compassion for others. When our children challenge our patience in some way, it’s actually selfishness that takes hold—a desire for comfort or ease, perhaps.

One simple way to engender more compassion for our children is to look back at family photos. Reminiscing through fond memories, seeing how much our children have already grown, and appreciating who they are as conveyed in those precious moments can help grow compassion for their hearts and increase the well of patience from which you can draw.

Slow Down
So often, the reason we lack patience is because we’re trying to multitask or simply have too much on our plate. Simplify the schedule, the to-do list, and the level of pressure allowed into every day. If we’re constantly overwhelmed, patience is hard to come by.

Audit your expectations for each day. If your task list is 10 items long, that’s probably unrealistic. Choose one or two must-do items and then leave open space for enjoying time with your family and offering them your undivided attention.

Pray for Your Family
As parents, the responsibility on our shoulders



Simplifying the to-do list leaves plenty of open space for enjoying undivided time with family.

can feel immense. It isn’t something most parents take lightly.

Sometimes, our lack of patience has little to do with our family members and more to do with ourselves. We can easily feel like we’re falling short of our own expectations.

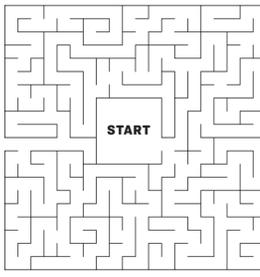
Seek higher wisdom when your confidence is waning. Ask for guidance in being the best mother or father (or spouse, for that matter) that you can be. Seek to understand who the true spirit of your loved ones is and give them just what they need.

Look in the Mirror
Another reason parents find their patience dwindling when interacting with their children is because their children are showing them characteristics they deem subpar in themselves. Our children are truly mirrors who can show us all of our many flaws. When confronted with these hard-to-handle truths, we may find our patience lacking.

Take a break when needed, and thank your children in your heart for providing you with such a fortunate opportunity to improve.

Parenting is a process of giving our all while refining our spirit. It’s miraculous, if you think about it. Almost as if it were designed to be so.

AMAZING ESCAPES!



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

Easy puzzle 1

3	8		
56			
2	4		
+	-	x	÷

Solution For Easy 1
 $2 \times (9 + 6) = 30$
 $9 \times (8 + 2) = 90$

Medium puzzle 1

10	17		
28			
7	11		
+	-	x	÷

Solution For Medium 1
 $2 \times (11 - 0) = 22$
 $(2 - 1) \times (0) = -2$

Hard puzzle 1

21	30		
72			
1	21		
+	-	x	÷

Solution For Hard 1
 $1 \times (12 + 12 + 0) = 24$



HIDDEN TREASURES by Liz Ball
www.HiddenPicturePuzzles.com

WORD SEARCH: Merry Christmas

C A R O L E R S D I S P L A Y
A N O E L F I R E P L A C E C
R W C E L E B R A T E B C C H
D K H Q J L G L E L A E O C R
S F I M F I B G E R S L O H I
I R M C C Z S D N K L K A S
C O N O Z N I E A C C S I R T
I S E A Y A A C H E B G G E I M
C T Y L V N O E L F E S T A
L Y L L F I G R G I F T C Y S
E O L K D E A O Z A M A Y T
J O V N I A L T O Z M R N T R
H Q A Z U D H E S A I F D J E
C R E C H E E L E R L P L O E
F E S T I V E R W D Y P O Y E

- | | | |
|----------------|---------------|--------|
| Angel | Cookie | Gift |
| Bells | Creche | Goose |
| Blizzard | Decorate | Holly |
| Candle | Display | Icicle |
| Cards | Eggnog | Jolly |
| Carolers | Elves | Joy |
| Celebrate | Family | Noel |
| Charity | Feliz Navidad | |
| Chimney | Festive | |
| Christmas tree | Fireplace | |
| Cider | Frankincense | |
| Coal | Frostv | |

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