



LARGER THAN LIFE
A medieval-style castle in Calistoga, Calif., enchants visitors.
C8

Life&Tradition

THE EPOCH TIMES

C1 FEB. 5–11, 2025

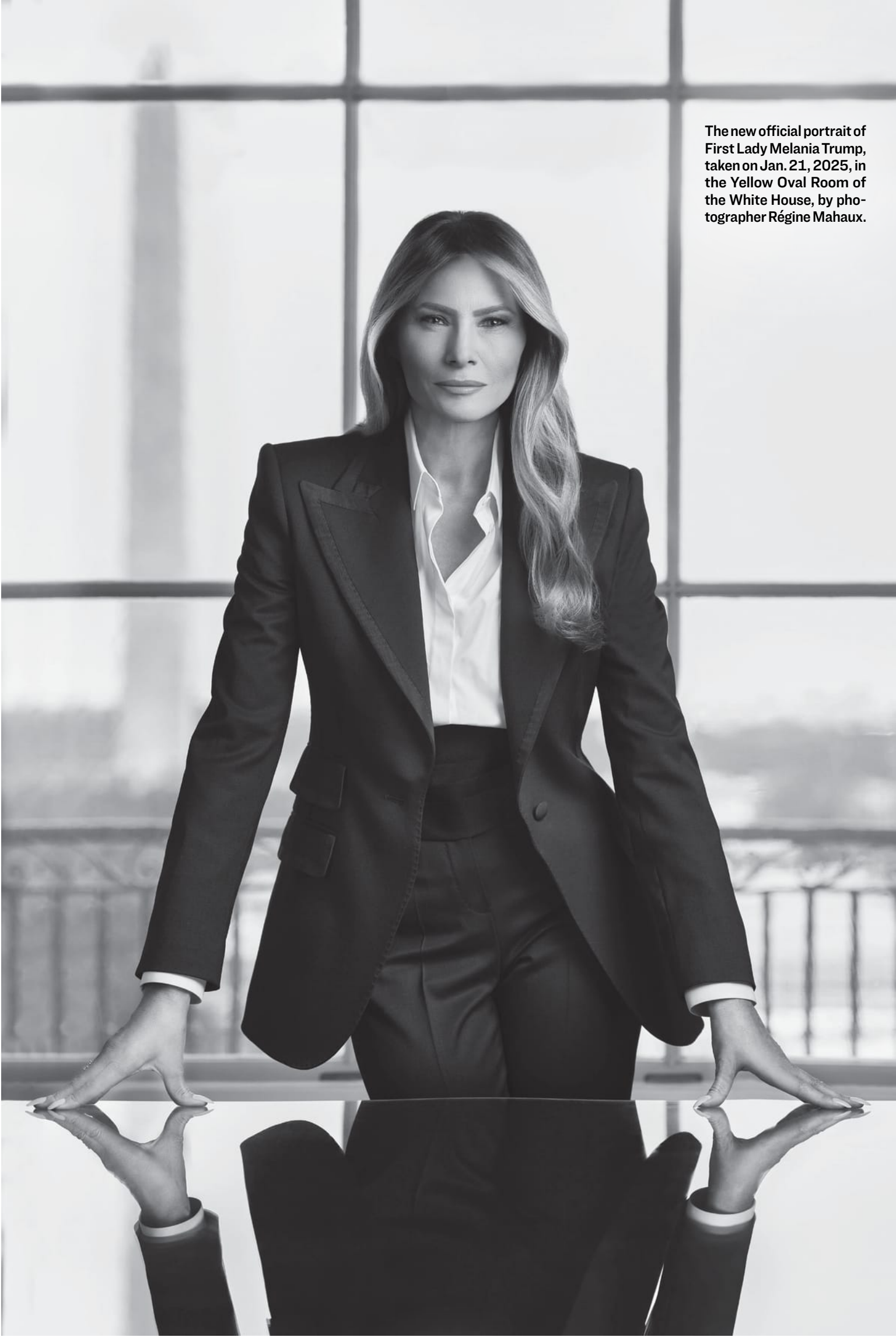
HOLIDAYS

Valentine’s Day can be full of pitfalls. Here’s how to avoid them. **C6**

DOCUMENTARY

A human rights lawyer investigates the CCP’s crimes with courage and rigor. **C5**

PUBLIC DOMAIN; (BOTTOM RIGHT) THE WHITE HOUSE VIA GETTY IMAGES



The new official portrait of First Lady Melania Trump, taken on Jan. 21, 2025, in the Yellow Oval Room of the White House, by photographer Régine Mahaux.

FIRST FAMILY

Portrait of a First Lady

Melania Trump’s new official White House portrait shows her posing against the background of the Washington Monument

By Ileana Aleacio

The White House has unveiled a new official portrait of First Lady Melania Trump—an image that signals a notable shift in her approach to the role of first lady in President Donald Trump’s second term. This new image presents the first lady in a dark suit with a crisp white shirt, hands placed firmly on the table. The black-and-white color palette and her lack of accessories make it clear: she means business.

Her straight stance parallels the Washington Monument in the background and her reflection in the mirror-like table echoes the reflective pool in front of the monument. “Her style is about presence—silent and powerful,” Lauren A. Rothman, a Washington-based style strategist and image coach, said about the portrait. “It reinforces the image of composure and elegance.” Belgian photographer Régine Mahaux took the photo in the Yellow Oval Room the day after the inauguration. *Continued on C3*



First Lady Melania Trump’s first official White House portrait in 2017, taken by photographer Régine Mahaux.

BREA KATZWICH



▲ Playfulness is good for both body and soul.

MINDSET

When Life Feels Heavy, Take a Lighter Approach

A positive attitude brings health benefits and a more fulfilling life


By Gregory Jantz

Let’s start with a true story of two perspectives. Yesterday morning I stopped by my go-to coffee shop to get my chai latte. I asked the 30-something barista how she was doing and got more than I expected. “Honestly, my life is pretty lousy right now,” she said. “My kids are annoying, I can’t sleep most nights, and my ex is driving me crazy. I did get a promotion, but it’s turning out to be more hassle than it’s worth. Sometimes it just seems like the universe is out to get me.” That was a lot of venting packed into a few sentences. Later that day, I called to check in with my 74-year-old friend Bob. He was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease four years ago and is now struggling with daily tasks such as cooking and cleaning. Two years ago, his wife of 45 years passed away, leaving Bob alone and lonely. Plus, he lives on his modest Social Security checks, making each month a penny-pinching challenge.

People with a positive mindset often demonstrate greater problem-solving skills and adaptability during tough times.

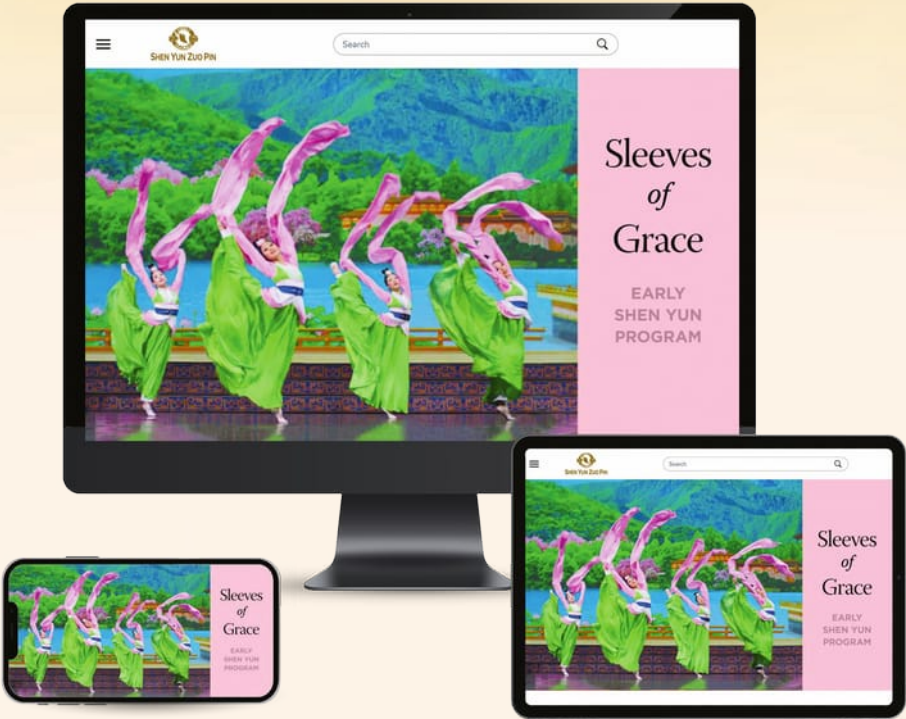
But when I asked Bob how he was doing, he replied with his usual answer: “I’m grateful!” He went on to say, “I’ve got my problems, for sure, but I wake up every morning quoting Scripture: ‘This is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it.’ I’m always on the lookout for blessings, big and small. Life is heavy, but my spirit is light.” Who would you want to spend time with—Bob or the barista? And which person do you think lives with more contentment, resilience, and joy? Life has a way of presenting challenges that feel overwhelming, leaving us carrying a weight that seems impossible to set down. In those moments, cultivating a lighter attitude and outlook can help us navigate burdens with grace, rediscover joy, and find moments of peace amid the chaos. **Benefits of a Bright Outlook** Taking a lighter approach when life feels heavy doesn’t mean avoiding challenges or ignoring responsibilities. It’s about shifting your mindset and embracing humor, balance, and gratitude. Life’s challenges—from minor headaches to major heartaches—can feel like insurmountable mountains. But *Continued on C2*

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MINDSET

When Life Feels Heavy, Take a Lighter Approach

Continued from C1

developing a lighter, brighter approach to life has profound benefits that extend beyond mental well-being—it can transform your mental clarity, emotional resilience, and even physical health.

A report by the National Institutes of Health states, “Research has found a link between an upbeat mental state and improved health, including lower blood pressure, reduced risk for heart disease, healthier weight, better blood sugar levels, and longer life.” Benefits of a positive attitude include:

Improved Mental Health
Positivity reduces rumination—the habit of replaying negative events in our minds. This allows the brain to focus on productive thoughts and opportunities. People with a positive mindset often demonstrate greater problem-solving skills and adaptability during tough times.

Positive individuals often engage in proactive coping strategies, such as reframing negative thoughts and focusing on solutions. That’s important since chronic stress can be mentally exhausting and lead to a host of mental health issues.

What’s more, positivity rewires the brain to seek out joy in everyday life. Neuroplasticity—the brain’s ability to change and adapt—means that regularly practicing optimism strengthens neural pathways associated with happiness, making it easier to maintain a positive outlook over time.

Enhanced Emotional Health
Positivity nurtures emotional resilience by instilling hope and a belief in your ability to overcome challenges. It shifts your focus from “What have I lost?” to “What can I still create or cherish?”

Positive individuals tend to recover from emotional setbacks more quickly. This mindset encourages self-compassion and helps combat feelings of guilt, shame, or despair often associated with grief or hardships.

Positivity also creates balanced emotional responses, reducing the tendency to react impulsively or disproportionately to difficult situations. By maintaining a lighter perspective, you are better able to respond thoughtfully, fostering a sense of peace even in turbulent circumstances.

Better Physical Health
Positive thinking reduces the production of stress hormones such as cortisol, which can wreak havoc on the body when elevated over time. Research shows that upbeat individuals have stronger immune responses, which helps to fend off an array of ailments. Conversely, chronic stress and worry weaken the immune system, making you more susceptible to illness.

Your attitude also dramatically affects your cardiovascular health. A lighter outlook reduces blood pressure and decreases the risk of heart-related conditions. Researchers at Johns Hopkins reported, “People with a family history of heart disease who also had a positive outlook were one-third less likely to have a heart attack or other cardiovascular event within five to 25 years than those with a more negative outlook.”

Shift From Negative to Positive
No one’s disposition and temperament are set in stone, meaning everyone can grow and develop in many ways. That includes the ability to enjoy a positive outlook on life. Start with these steps forward:

Embrace Humor and Playfulness
One of the most effective ways to take a lighter approach in heavy times is to embrace humor. Laughter has an incredible way of diffusing tension, minimizing stress, and shifting our focus away from problems. It offers a momentary escape from the intensity of life and can help us regain perspective. Even in difficult moments, finding something to smile or laugh about can be a reminder that life is not all hardship.

Humor doesn’t trivialize serious situations; rather, it helps us approach them with a mindset that’s not weighed down by fear or anxiety. Playfulness, whether it’s

engaging in a lighthearted activity or simply taking a more relaxed attitude toward small frustrations, allows us to see challenges through a new lens. It invites us to think more creatively and approach problems with a sense of curiosity instead of dread. When you’re feeling overwhelmed, take five minutes to watch a funny video, play with a pet, or share a moment of laughter with a friend or colleague.

Shift Your Perspective
Sometimes, when life feels heavy, it’s because we’re carrying unnecessary burdens—expectations, assumptions, and pressures that we’ve placed on ourselves. Taking a lighter approach involves letting go of the need for perfection and acknowledging that it’s OK not to have everything under control. It’s about recognizing that life is full of ups and downs, and that it’s unrealistic to expect things to go perfectly all the time.

A powerful strategy for shifting your perspective is to practice reframing. Instead of focusing on what’s going wrong, ask yourself, “What can I learn from this?” or “How can this challenge help me grow?” This mindset shift can make even the toughest situations feel less like a burden and more like an opportunity. It allows you to see setbacks not as failures, but as temporary obstacles you can overcome with patience and perseverance.

Practice Mindfulness and Presence
One of the key reasons life can feel heavy is because we get caught up in future worries or past regrets. Mindfulness—being fully present in the moment—can help break this cycle. By focusing on the present, we reduce the mental clutter of worrying about things we can’t control. Mindfulness allows us to engage with what is happening right now, making life’s challenges feel less overwhelming and more manageable.

Take a moment to pause and breathe. Notice your surroundings, the sounds, and the sensations in your body. By anchoring yourself in the present, you may find that the heaviness begins to lift, even if only slightly. The weight of tomorrow’s worries no longer dominates your thoughts, and you can focus on what you can do today.

Let Go of Control
A significant part of feeling overwhelmed often comes from the desire to control outcomes. We want to ensure that everything goes according to plan. When it doesn’t, we feel like we’ve failed. But life is unpredictable, and trying to control everything can be a futile and exhausting effort.

Taking a lighter approach means letting go of the need for total control. This doesn’t mean giving up or being careless, but it involves having faith that things will work out in the end. By releasing the need to manage every detail, you free up mental space and emotional energy to focus on what truly matters.

When faced with a situation that feels out of control, ask yourself, “What can I influence, and what can I release?” Allow yourself to surrender to the unknown and trust that, in time, things will unfold as they should.

Cultivate Gratitude and Joy
Gratitude is one of the most powerful ways to lighten your emotional load. When life feels overwhelming, it’s easy to focus on what’s going wrong or what’s missing. But taking a moment to acknowledge what’s going right can shift your perspective and help you see that not everything is as heavy as it seems.

Intentionally practicing thankfulness reminds you that even in the midst of hardship, there are still things to be thankful for—small blessings that can bring light into dark moments. Make it a habit to write down or reflect on a few things you’re grateful for each day. Even on the toughest days, this practice can bring a sense of peace and lightness.

Gregory Jantz, Ph.D., is the founder and director of the mental health clinic The Center: A Place of Hope in Edmonds, Wash. He is the author of “Healing Depression for Life,” “The Anxiety Reset,” and many other books. Find Jantz at APlaceOfHope.com

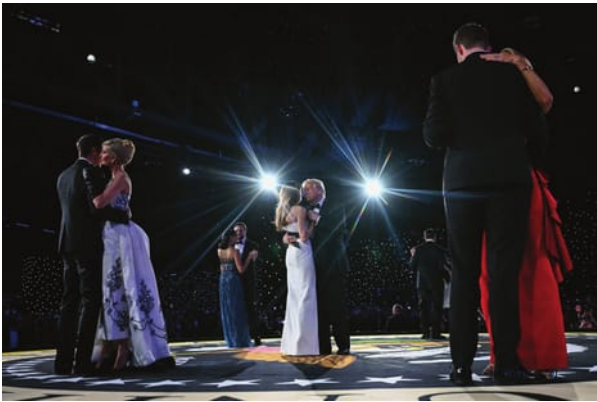




JIM WATSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



GREG NASH-POOL/GETTY IMAGES



JIM WATSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

MANDEL NGAN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



◀ President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump arrive for the Liberty inaugural ball in Washington on Jan. 20, 2025.

◀ First lady Melania Trump looks on as President Donald Trump addresses guests in Emancipation Hall at the U.S Capitol on Jan. 20, 2025, in Washington.

◀ President Donald Trump (C) and First Lady Melania Trump, Vice President J.D. Vance (4th L) and his wife Usha Vance, and Trump's daughter Ivanka Trump (2nd R) and her husband Jared Kushner, dance during the Liberty inaugural ball in Washington, on Jan. 20, 2025.

◀ President Donald Trump, First Lady Melania Trump, and son Barron Trump make their way to board Marine One from the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, on Jan. 17, 2020, to travel to Palm Beach, Fla.

FIRST FAMILY

Portrait of a First Lady

Continued from C1

The portrait, taken on Jan. 21, 2025, is a departure from Melania Trump's first official photograph in 2017, which was noted for its soft, inviting smile, and curved lines.

"Now we're seeing something much more sleek, structured, minimalistic," Rothman said. "The lighting, her expression, the framing, they all work together to project confidence and sophistication, that is a departure from how we've seen those expressed in the past."

This shift echoes the president's new portrait, which shows him with a stern expression and dramatic lighting, in contrast to his first official White House portrait, which depicts him smiling.

The First Lady's Fashion Choices

Melania Trump's fashion choices for the inauguration events also conveyed strictness and precision. Her sharply cut, navy blue double-breasted coat had a military flair, and her wool boater-style hat obscured her eyes.

The outfit was designed by Adam Lippes, a New York-based designer, a label that the first lady wore several times during President Trump's first term.

"The tradition of the presidential inauguration embodies the beauty of American democracy and today we had the honor to dress our first lady, Mrs. Melania Trump," Lippes said in a statement. "Mrs. Trump's outfit was created by some of America's finest craftsmen and I take great pride in showing such work to the world."

At the Commander-in-Chief Ball, the first lady wore a black-and-white strapless gown by designer Hervé Pierre that matched her husband's tuxedo, complementing him in a reversal of his suit's classic colors.

In a statement, Pierre said, "It is a big honor to have collaborated with the first lady on the design for her inaugural dress. It was clear that Mrs. Trump was gravitating toward a combination of black and white—true to her own style and vision."

Jamila Musayeva, an international etiquette consultant and graduate of George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs, said that Melania Trump is always appropriately dressed for events, respecting dress codes while following her own personal style.

"I think her style is definitely some-

thing that can be described very much so by words like timeless, elegant, reserved. In some cases, I would even note it's quite conservative for today's modern world," Musayeva said. "Melania always wears something below her knees that's not too tight, and it has a line structure to it. So it's always fitting, but not [...] inappropriately tight for her position."

She noted that the first lady prefers monochromatic looks, in classic, timeless colors, while adding personal statements with her accessory choices.

"I think she's one of the most fashionable first ladies that the United States has had," Musayeva said. "I'm sure that she's going to leave her mark. She's definitely going to be remembered as a fashion icon."

Projects and Plans for the New Term

Before the inauguration, Melania Trump gave an interview to Fox & Friends where she said her second term as first lady will be different than the first.

"I have much more experience and much more knowledge," she said. "I was in the White House before. When you go in, you know exactly what to expect."

In the interview, she said she's first of

all a mother, so she'll be traveling between Washington, New York—where her son Barron attends New York University—and Palm Beach, Florida, balancing her family roles while serving the country as first lady.

She's also the executive producer of a documentary based on her memoir. The book, titled "Melania," was released in October 2024 and is an Amazon bestseller.

Filming began in early December 2024, and the documentary will premiere during the second half of the year in theaters and on Amazon Prime Video. In a statement the company said that the film will provide viewers with an "unprecedented, behind-the-scenes look" at the first lady.

Melania Trump told Fox News that she will continue and expand "Be Best," her initiative on the importance of children's social, emotional, and physical health.

She felt her Be Best campaign didn't build as much momentum as it could have, saying, "In the first administration, I didn't have much support from anyone," including from streaming platforms.

This term, things are different. Amazon is producing her documentary, and the CEOs of major social media platforms attended the inauguration. Her initiatives may reach a bigger audience this time.

Looking ahead, she said, "It will be an exciting four years. We have a lot to do."

The Epoch Times Interviews Shen Yun Audiences

Shen Yun's Beautiful Message

New York-based Shen Yun Performing Arts, established in 2006, is the world's premier classical Chinese dance and music company. Aiming for an artistic revival and celebration of China's rich cultural heritage, the company performs classical Chinese dance, ethnic and folk dance, and story-based dance, accompanied by orchestral and solo performers.

Shen Yun's Upcoming Performances

Fresno	Calif.	Through Feb. 5
Detroit	Mich.	Feb. 7–9
San Juan	P.R.	Feb. 7–10
Tucson	Ariz.	Feb. 8–9
Springfield	Mo.	Feb. 11
Mesa	Ariz.	Feb. 11–13
Cincinnati	Ohio	Feb. 15–16
Houston-Cypress	Texas	Feb. 15–16
El Paso	Texas	Feb. 15–16
Memphis	Tenn.	Feb. 18

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



“ [Shen Yun] exposes people to things that they might not have known about in the world.

BRUCE VAN DAM,
U.S. naval commander (ret.), Jacksonville, Fla.



“ We come with expectations; we leave with lots of good vibes and positivity.

LEO-PAUL VAURS,
Michelin engineer, Bordeaux, France



“ I just feel that it was very spiritual for me. I'm a very spiritual person anyway, so I found that stirred my emotions.

EIRY KELLY,
retired interior designer, Oxford, UK



“ I love the message. It's a really, really nice spiritual message of peace and love and hope and God.

KELLY BARNSON,
opera singer, Portland, Ore.

Inspiration for Jamey Johnson's country hit came from vintage black-and-white photos.



COUNTRY MUSIC

Celebrating Grandfathers: Jamey Johnson's 'In Color'

How black-and-white photos sparked a hit single

By Rebecca Day

In the early 2000s, Nashville songwriter Lee Thomas Miller attended a Broadcast Music International awards ceremony. During the event, a series of black-and-white photos was featured on a screen for guests to view. Miller didn't recognize many of the industry professionals in the photos from the 1960s, but he did pick out some of the artists, such as pioneering country musician Kitty Wells.

As Miller thought about how much he would have loved to get to know all the people in the photos, the seeds of a country song were planted. Weeks later, when he chatted with fellow country music songwriter Jamey Johnson about the old photos and how there could be a song inspired by the images' nostalgia, the two quickly came up with the future hit single's concept. They planned to meet up later and write the track. As their conversation came to a close, Johnson said: "There's your idea. ... You should've seen it in color."

When Miller spoke with country news site The Boot about co-writing "In Color," he explained the lyric idea that set off the progression of the moving country tune:

"You look for the phrase that gives you a reason to write a song," he said.

'In Color' won the 2009 Song of the Year at the Academy of Country Music Awards.

A Tribute to Grandfathers

It was months before the duo met up and wrote "In Color," but when they finally did, they invited their friend and fellow songwriter James Otto to join them. As the trio worked on the concept and initial lyrics for the song, the conversation turned to the black-and-white photos of their own familial histories. Soon, the three musicians found them-



Jamey Johnson onstage during the 44th annual Academy of Country Music Awards' Artist of the Decade at the MGM Grand on April 6, 2009, in Las Vegas.

ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

selves getting emotional as they shared stories about their loved ones.

Miller said of the track, "In a lot of ways, it's a song about our grandfathers."

The song's opening lyrics set the stage for a conversation between a grandfather and his grandson:

"I said, 'Grandpa, what's this picture here?/ It's all black and white, and it ain't real clear/ Is that you there?/ He said, 'Yeah, I was 11.'"

The song then takes the listener on an image-rich journey, from the Great Depression and the battlegrounds of World War II to the grandfather's marriage to his blushing bride. The song culminates in the lyrics' two-line climactic bridge: "That's the story of my life/ Right there in black and white."

The lyrical couplet that ultimately became the bridge started as the song's repeated hook at the end of each verse. When talking with The Tennessean about how the trio achieved the song's final draft, Miller emphasized, "We worked a lot on the language."

Their hard work paid off. Not only did "In Color" receive multiple Grammy nominations after its successful release, it also won Song of the Year at the Academy of Country Music Awards and the Country Music Association

Awards in 2009. In 2010, "In Color" was certified gold.

Honoring Military Veterans

In 2008, "In Color" appeared on Johnson's breakout album, "That Lonesome Song." The song's rich imagery and clarity of writing, as well as Johnson's masterful baritone performance, have contributed to its enduring popularity among country music listeners.

It has even become a part of families' most emotional and intimate life events. Miller said, "Every now and then, people will tell me that their grandfather put it in his will to have that song played at his funeral."

Over the years, interview requests for Miller regarding "In Color" have helped him keep alive memories of his own grandfather, a Kentucky farmer and veteran. Johnson is also a military veteran, and Miller has said he will always be proud of the way they were able to honor veterans by telling their story with "In Color."

"We had a long conversation about how normal people were sent away to war," Miller said. "My grandfather was a ... farmer in Kentucky, and he was drafted. He went in as a private and came out as a private. He literally went and saved the world and went back to the ... farm. That was the beautiful thing about those who serve. They are just normal people. There was a lot of that conversation."

Painting With Words

Since its release, "In Color" has become a perennial country song and one of Johnson's signature closing tracks for his live shows.

It's a celebration of grandfathers and men everywhere who demonstrate bravery in times of danger, love to those they cherish, and humble benevolence to humankind.

Thanks to the beautiful story of "In Color," the black-and-white photos of men from what's known as the Greatest Generation (those born in the early 1900s and who served in WWII) can now be viewed through a richly hued lens. The touching song brings to light lives of honor, dedication to family, and love of country.

Rebecca Day is an independent musician, freelance writer, and frontwoman of country group, The Crazy Daysies.

DOCUMENTARY REVIEW

A Quiet Hero’s Battle for the Oppressed

David Matas helped expose the CCP’s systematic oppression of Falun Gong practitioners

By Ian Kane

Heroes don’t always command headlines or appear on podcasts. Sometimes, they are quiet warriors, fighting battles of justice in courtrooms, at the negotiating table, or through tireless advocacy. “The Justice Hunter” is a poignant documentary that shines a spotlight on one such hero: David Matas, a real-life crusader for human rights.

Directed by Yolanda Papini-Pollock, the 2023 film expands on Matas’s extraordinary legacy, delving deep into his global efforts to combat human rights abuses. This film is not merely biographical; it is a galvanizing battle cry to action. As Matas’s story unfolds, viewers are introduced to the tireless work he has done to protect the oppressed, often in the face of immense adversity.

Papini-Pollock’s personal connection to “The Justice Hunter” brings emotional depth and authenticity to the film. As the daughter of a Jewish Holocaust survivor, she frames Matas’s work as a universal fight against injustice, drawing poignant parallels to her own family’s experiences.

Through interviews, archival footage, and Matas’s reflections, Papini-Pollock’s heartfelt storytelling inspires viewers to reflect on their own roles in defending human rights.

Leah Ross, a former lawyer and one of Matas’s students, narrates the film and includes personal reflections. Her memories are interwoven with touching moments, such as a gathering of friends celebrating Matas’s 80th birthday, providing glimpses into the humanity behind the hero.

Matas also knows a thing or two about the Holocaust. As we learn in the film,

he derives much of his resolve from the lessons of his formative years when he addressed various Holocaust issues. Since then, Matas has achieved worldwide recognition for his lifelong work advocating on behalf of repressed minorities across the globe.

The film delves deeply into the Chinese regime’s appalling record of persecution, particularly under the control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It examines the systematic oppression and, often, execution of Falun Gong practitioners. Falun Gong is an ancient spiritual practice in the Buddhist tradition, introduced in 1992 by Li Hongzhi.

One interviewee, Joel Chipkar, a spokesperson for Falun Gong in Canada, states: “Virtually overnight, thousands of Falun Gong members were either disappeared into the night or imprisoned and sent to forced labor camps. Many suffered far worse fates, such as torture and, as the film makes a strong case for, forced organ harvesting.”

As I covered in previous reviews of films on this subject, including “Finding Courage” (2020) and “State Organs” (2024), the spiritual practice emphasizing truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance spread rapidly due to its healthful practices—perhaps too rapidly for the CCP’s comfort. The communist regime, and its paramount leader at the time, viewed any independent movement such as Falun Gong as a threat to its iron grip on power, and thus initiated a brutal campaign of suppression that continues to this day.

At just 53 minutes, the film maintains a brisk and engaging pace, interspersing brief yet impactful interviews with individuals whose lives have become intertwined with Matas’s over the years. Notable figures, such as Irwin Cotler, a lawyer and former minister of justice and attorney general of Canada, provide valuable perspectives on Matas’s work and legacy. Matas himself offers key observations about his career and the tireless fight for justice that has defined his life.

The documentary doesn’t shy away from exposing the dark realities of the Chinese regime’s persecution of Falun Gong practitioners. One of the more unsettling segments delves into the global industry fueled by organs harvested from executed practitioners.

Dr. Jacob (Jay) Lavee, founder and former director of the heart transplant unit at Israel’s Sheba Medical Center, recounts a chilling story involving one of his patients. This patient, placed high on the transplant list, was told by his insurance company that he could receive a new heart within just two weeks if he traveled to China, a claim that defied logic.

As Dr. Lavee points out, organ transplants always happen the same day a donor dies. Yet when the patient traveled to China, the operation went ahead as promised. The dissonance between the logistics and the proce-



▲ David Matas (C) standing with Falun Gong practitioners in a still from “The Justice Hunter.”

‘The Justice Hunter’ is not merely biographical; it is a galvanizing battle cry to action.

sure led Dr. Lavee to question, “How can someone promise you a heart transplant ahead of time?”

Matas confirms the chilling reality, revealing how the communist regime has advertised globally for people to travel to China and secure organ transplants, with dates scheduled months in advance. The revelation of this systematic, state-run operation of organ harvesting shows the brutal measures the CCP is willing to employ.

As Cotler aptly states, Matas is not only an exceptional litigator and legal scholar, but also possesses a “unique investigative capacity,” which has been integral to his success in exposing some of the world’s most egregious human rights violations. This combination of legal expertise and investigative rigor makes Matas a force to be reckoned with.

With “The Justice Hunter” continuing to receive positive responses, it is incredibly heartening to witness the far-reaching influence of a tireless champion for human rights. For anyone committed to standing up for truth and justice, and to exposing the darkness that lingers in the shadows of the CCP, this documentary is an absolute must-see.

‘The Justice Hunter’

Director
Yolanda Papini-Pollock

Running Time
53 minutes

Release Date
Jan. 10, 2023

★★★★★

Ian Kane is an U.S. Army veteran, author, filmmaker, and actor. He is dedicated to the development and production of innovative, thought-provoking, character-driven films and books of the highest quality.

“The Justice Hunter” is available to watch on GanJing World website: <https://ept.ms/GJW-JusticeHunter>



BOOK REVIEW

A Cozy Amish Mystery

An entertaining story that reminds us where blessings come from

By Adam H. Douglas

There are cozy mysteries, and there are cozy mysteries—and then there is “The Rise and Fall of Miss Fannie’s Biscuits” by Wanda Brunstetter and Martha Bolton, perhaps the coziest of them all.

Like watching a mild spring rain cascade down from the porch of a farmhouse, Brunstetter and Bolton’s new novel is an experience of gentleness. The two authors weave a simple, delightful story about a small community in Sugarcreek, Ohio, and the modest dramas that occur around the Tenth Annual Tuscarawas and Surrounding Counties Baking Contest.

▲ A baking contest is at the heart of all the trouble in Sugarcreek, Ohio.

Brunstetter, a celebrated Amish fiction author, and Bolton, a skilled comedic writer, have created a story that is both entertaining and uplifting while reminding us of the blessings that come from acts of kindness and reliance on faith.

Is Sugarcreek Baking Something Nefarious?

The story centers around Fannie Miller, a determined, middle-aged Amish woman who decides to enter the famous Tuscarawas and Surrounding Counties Baking Contest with her late aunt Selma’s prized buttermilk biscuit recipe. Fannie hopes to honor her aunt’s legacy and claim the coveted first-place ribbon—not to mention the enormous \$25,000 prize money.

However, mysterious disappearances of contestants, vaguely threatening notes written on red stationery, and escalating small-town dramas make her wonder if something else is going on. Worried that the contest could transform from a simple town event into something more nefarious, she enlists her dear friend, retired Chicago police officer and local private investigator Foster Bates.

Bates, seeking something completely different from the gangs and grit of Chicago, thinks Sugarcreek might be the perfect spot. Hardly anything happens here at all, and he likes it that way. He is looking forward to many years of whiling away the hours with his dog, Chief.

Unfortunately, the unmarried (and somewhat attractive) Fannie keeps coming to his office and insisting that there is something funny going on at the contest. Soon, Bates finds himself thrust into the center of small-town intrigue, where clues are hidden among suspi-

cious contestants, mischievous gossip, and local secrets.

Fannie and Foster’s teamwork is equal parts amateur sleuthing and heartfelt camaraderie, enabling the plot to amble along like a summer evening stroll. The story is a simple mix of humor and suspense, occasionally offering us a reminder of how faith, persistence, and a touch of ingenuity can solve perplexing puzzles.

Contestant Bakers and Suspects?

Of course, no mystery is complete without a variety of colorful and memorable characters. The Blustery Sisters—naturally called Faith, Hope, and Charity—run the local bakery and have a penchant for stirring the gossip pot. They share a deep love for a somewhat ill-mannered parrot named Peggy, whom they take turns caring for.

Michael and Melissa are a young couple trying hard to overcome marital strife and hoping to use the contest winnings to fund an adoption journey.

Meanwhile, in the household of the highest member of the local Amish parish, Bishop John seems so engrossed in his church duties that his wife, Iva, worries that he’s practically ignoring their young son.

The Appeal of an Amish-Themed Story

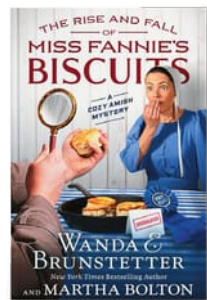
Admittedly, I haven’t read many novels set in an Amish community. Picking up “Biscuits,” I wasn’t sure what to expect. The writing style is uncomplicated and straightforward, almost with a kind of Zen directness. Some may not care for the way characters spell out their thoughts and motivations like they’re giving a bullet-point presentation—but for others, this will be part of the appeal.

If readers expect characters with dark motivations hatched from a deeply troubled psyche, they’ll be sorely disappointed. You’ll not encounter any-

thing close to brutal noir dialogue of conventional mystery novels. Story elements like these are so far from this book’s point, it’s almost ludicrous to contemplate. The appeal here is to find solace in lives unburdened by modern technology and societal pressures.

“The Rise and Fall of Miss Fannie’s Biscuits” is a delightful read. Those who seek out the coziest of cozy novels can warm themselves on a fresh batch of Miss Fannie’s biscuits. (Literally, as well as literarily, since the recipe is included at the end of the book).

Adam H. Douglas is an award-winning full-time freelance writer and author of over 20 years. His work has appeared internationally in publications, including Forbes, Business Insider, MyPerfectMortgage, and many more. His creative works tend toward speculative fiction and horror fantasy. He lives in beautiful Prince Edward Island, Canada, with his wife of 30 years and his dogs and kitties.



‘THE RISE AND FALL OF MISS FANNIE’S BISCUITS’

By Wanda E. Brunstetter and Martha Bolton

Barbour Fiction

Jan. 1, 2025

Paperback

256 pages

HOLIDAYS

Pitfalls to Avoid on Valentine’s Day

Whether you’re single or have a romantic partner, embrace the opportunity to shower genuine affection on loved ones

By Jeff Minick

Valentine’s Day brings a broad range of responses. Stalwarts embrace and celebrate the Day of Hearts, while cynics consider it a gimmick for selling greeting cards, flowers, and chocolates. Some use Valentine’s Day to pursue a new romance, while the recently brokenhearted may view its profusion of roses and candies as salt rubbed into fresh wounds.

Wherever we fall on this spectrum, Valentine’s Day can hardly be avoided. Grocery stores, pharmacies, card and flower shops, confectionaries, and restaurants all do booming business when Cupid comes to town. Consequently, we’re surrounded with an array of that chubby archer’s tokens of the season. Like it or not, we’re part of Valentine’s Day.

And so, whether you want to make the most of the occasion or slip past it with as little fuss and bother as possible, you may find some of the following “Don’ts” helpful.

Don’t Be Snarky
For the Day of Hearts detractors: When friends or family members are excited about cards that they’ve received or special meals that they’ve planned for their significant other, keep your Valentine’s Day Scrooge under wraps. Even if you find these verbal darts humorous, avoid quoting writers such as Oscar Wilde in his play “A Woman of No Importance” when he writes: “One should always be in love. That is the reason one should never marry.”

The planet has more than enough scoffers and naysayers, so why add your voice to that chorus? When you encounter a devotee of doves excited about plans for the Big Day, a discreet silence or a bland “well, that’s nice” is very much in order.

A suitable response is even more important for those skeptics who are involved with a Valentine’s aficionado, a spouse, or a companion for whom candy hearts and bouquets of roses mean the world. If you love that person, avoid all sarcasm like the plague and join wholeheartedly in the festivities. Who knows? You might even enjoy it.

Don’t Write an AI Poem or Love Letter
Recently, when I was talking about Valentine’s Day and poetry with one of my



▲ This Valentine’s Day, try surprising a loved one with a gift.
BIBA KAYEWICH

sons, he whipped out his phone, tapped a few keys, and four seconds later up popped a Valentine’s haiku, courtesy of that digital bard, Artificial Intelligence.

No, no, no, and no.

The poem was passable, but the idea of making that verse a Valentine’s Day gift is horrible, especially if you try to pass off that electronic bit of sorcery as your own composition. Either write your own poem or love letter, however rough the result, and present it to your beloved, or copy out some poem such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “How Do I Love Thee?” or e.e. cummings’s “somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond” and gift it with proper attribution to your spouse or special friend.

Remember: In matters of the heart, even disheveled sincerity beats slick deception, hands-down.

Don’t Stop With the Roses
This one is mostly for guys. You’ve paused at the grocery store on the drive home from work to pick up some roses, or maybe you’ve even gone the extra yard and ordered them ahead of time from a florist. You present the bouquet to your beloved, offer up a Happy Valentine’s Day, and then settle on the sofa as you so often do to watch the evening news while enjoying a beer.

Again, no, no, no. The roses are the hors d’oeuvres for the banquet of this special evening, not the main course. If the two of you have planned a date together or you have some surprise in store for your queen of hearts, then kudos to you. If not, bear in mind that it’s never too late to im-

provise. Suggest a walk around the block, a bottle of wine shared in the twilight, and a romantic movie.

The roses say “I love you.” The time spent together underlines and puts that declaration in bold print.

Don’t Forget the Chocolates
Some of us are not avid chocolate fans, but who would refuse a square of Ghirardelli’s?

On a first date, a chocolate bar tucked into a purse or pocket can be brought out, opened, and offered as a way to break an awkward silence. If a conversation with a disheartened spouse needs some sweetness, produce a bar of milk chocolate or, more significantly, perhaps, a few Hershey’s Kisses.

Medical and nutritional researchers have found that dark chocolate is good for the heart and circulatory system. Fans of Valentine’s Day have long known that chocolate is good for the heart and the amatory system.

A confectionary addendum: Sweethearts and their knock-off brands—candies stamped with short, goofy inscriptions such as “Be Mine” and “Cutie Pie”—can also be produced and bring some laughter during a tense moment or a break in a conversation.

Don’t Ignore the Power of the Unexpected Gift
In the film “Finding Forrester,” writer William Forrester offers this advice to a young protégé who is attracted to a girl: “The key to a woman’s heart is an unexpected gift at an unexpected time.”



Clarifying the “why” behind a resolution helps to establish the motivation to accomplish it.

RESOLUTIONS

Don’t Give Up on Your Resolution Just Yet

Rethinking your goal and how to accomplish it may be just the thing to get it done this year

By Barbara Danza

Statistics tell us that most people who make New Year’s resolutions on January 1 give up on them within the first two weeks. If you’ve lost hope in the possibility of achieving your goals or if you’re beating yourself up for not following through on the aims you defined for the year, consider the following: The problem isn’t your willpower—it’s your strategy.

Oftentimes, people decide on a goal, declare their wish, and maybe even lay out some steps they plan to take to work toward their objective. Some days in, however, they lose steam or encounter obstacles, and before they know it, the dream has died.

It’s not too late to revisit your New Year’s resolution and develop a better strategy with a stronger foundation that will allow you to persist throughout the year and beyond.

Clarify Your Reasons
You can begin by clarifying your goal and then identifying why you’re aiming to achieve it. Often, simply wanting something is not enough. You need to have compelling and important reasons that will keep you going when obstacles inevitably arise.

For example, if your resolution was to lose weight or improve fitness, you might not have fully thought through the reasons you want to achieve that goal. When the first delicious tempta-

tion crosses your path, it may be quite easy to give in.

If your reasons for such a goal are meaningful, however, you might find your willpower is much stronger. For example, you may want to be able to actively participate more in your children’s or grandchildren’s lives; to have more confidence to fully show up and do the work you deem important; or to be an example of discipline, good health, and responsibility to people around you. These reasons may be compelling enough to keep you on track.

Emulate Success
You should further clarify your vision for success. Picture what it will look like to fully accomplish that goal and what that will mean to your life, your work, and your relationships. See in your mind’s eye the ripple effects that achieving your goal will have on every aspect of your life—really see it, as if that achievement has been fulfilled.

Ask yourself: What habits, thoughts, and behaviors does a person who succeeds in this area need to foster? Again, with the fitness example, this would surely include exercise, healthy eating, positive self-talk, and perhaps weekly meal preparation.

Develop a lifestyle similar to some-

one who has successfully accomplished your goal. Schedule the actions you’ll need to take, measure your adherence to the habits you’ll need to stick to, and design your life in a way that supports your goal.

Don’t Give Up
Take a long view and understand that you’ll run into pitfalls, challenges, obstacles, and failures along the way. As long as you don’t give up, success is bound to be in sight.

See in your mind’s eye the ripple effects that achieving your goal will have on every aspect of your life—really see it, as if that achievement has been fulfilled.

Enjoy the Process
As you get better and better in the process of achieving your goal, do all you can to enjoy the process. If you’re aiming for fitness, for example, the goal is actually not something you’ll achieve and then stop working toward. It’s a lifetime goal that you’ll clearly want to maintain over the long haul. So, celebrate any milestones you get to. Make the steps you take as fun, enjoyable, and delightful as you possibly can. As you go, improve and change your strategy to adjust to what’s needed.

You may have lightheartedly made a New Year’s resolution, but by adjusting your mindset and strategy, you can still make this year the one that you actually achieve your goal.



FOR KIDS ONLY

THE EPOCH TIMES



To My Brother and Sister in the Country

By Felicia Hemans

Happy soon we'll meet again,
Free from sorrow, care, and pain;
Soon again we'll rise with dawn,
To roam the verdant dewy lawn;
Soon the budding leaves we'll hail,
Or wander through the well-known vale;
Or weave the smiling wreath of flowers;
And sport away the light-wing'd hours.
Soon we'll run the agile race;
Soon, dear playmates, we'll embrace;
Through the wheat-field or the grove,
We'll hand in hand delighted rove;
Or, beneath some spreading oak,
Ponder the instructive book;

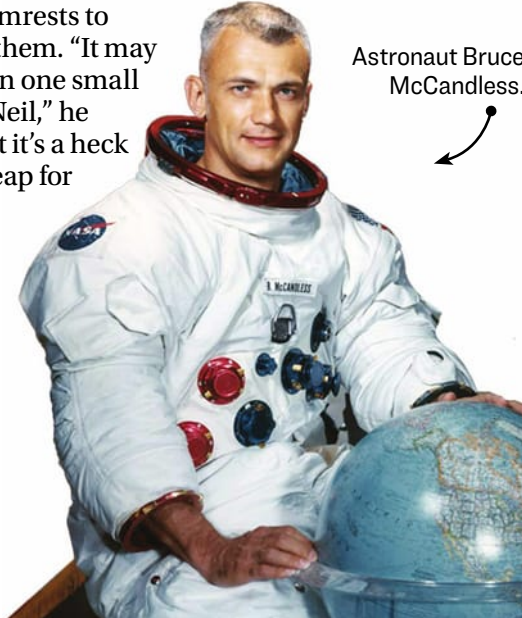


Or view the ships that swiftly glide,
Floating on the peaceful tide;
Or raise again the caroll'd lay;
Or join again in mirthful play;
Or listen to the humming bees,
As their murmurs swell the breeze;
Or seek the primrose where it springs;
Or chase the fly with painted wings;
Or talk beneath the arbour's shade;
Or mark the tender shooting blade:
Or stray beside the babbling stream,
When Luna sheds her placid beam;
Or gaze upon the glassy sea——
Happy, happy shall we be!

UNTETHERED

IN SPACE

Neil Armstrong may have been the first man on the moon, but Bruce McCandless II was the first man to perform an untethered spacewalk. On Feb. 7, 1984, he ventured 300 feet away from space shuttle Challenger without any lifelines. His spacesuit was equipped with 24 small compressed nitrogen thrusters that gave him the ability to maneuver in space. All he had to do was use two motion-controlled handles on his armrests to activate them. "It may have been one small step for Neil," he said, "but it's a heck of a big leap for me."



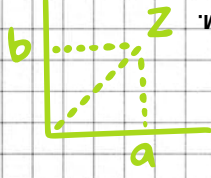
Astronaut Bruce McCandless.

“A sibling is not just family, but a partner in the journey of life.”

MITCH ALBOM, "THE FIVE PEOPLE YOU MEET IN HEAVEN"

WHY DID THE STUDENT TAKE HER BIG BROTHER TO MATH CLASS?

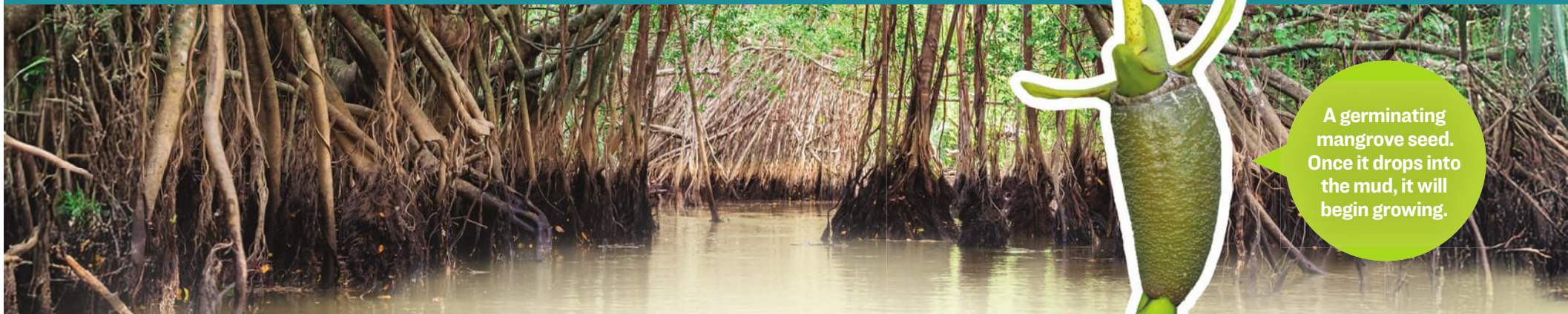
BECAUSE HE TOLD HER SHE COULD COUNT ON HIM.



By Aidan Danza

ALL PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

THE MANGROVE TREE



It can be difficult for most trees to tolerate salt water—the salt actually causes water to be drawn out of the tree's systems, dehydrating and killing it.

However, the mangrove tree does not have this problem; it can live in salty conditions that other trees cannot tolerate.

Of course, like many things in life, there is a catch: while mangroves can tolerate salt, they cannot tolerate cold, and thus, they can live only in tropical and subtropical areas. In America, they only live on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico or the eastern coast of Florida.

Within their range, though, mangroves thrive to an almost unbelievable extent. They grow in extremely dense forests, with trunks seeming to sprout from every square inch, even in the water past the shoreline. Even in tidal waters, the mangrove still manages to survive. Some species have roots called pneumatophores, which are vertical roots that act like snorkels during tidal flooding. Like humans, trees also need access to air, and when the root system

is submerged, this cannot happen without the pneumatophores acting like snorkels. Mangroves also have arching knee roots, which extend from the tree into the sediment, anchoring the tree and keeping it from floating away.

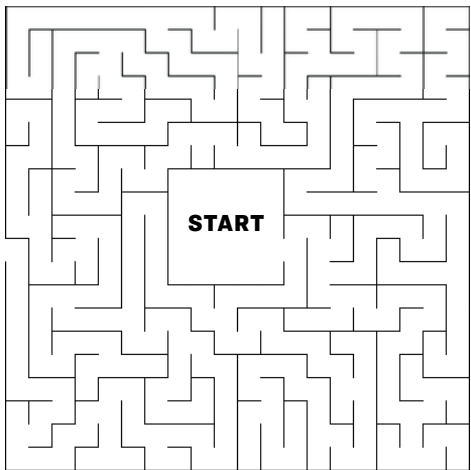
Mangroves have a unique system of reproduction: instead of releasing seeds or nuts, they actually begin growing while still on the "mother tree." When they reach a certain point, the cylinder-shaped baby trees, or propagules, break off and float away into the ocean. After a certain number of days (different for each mangrove species) they become waterlogged and fall to the bottom, hopefully near a coast.

Then, it will sprout, and form a new tree.

Of course, the big question is how exactly can mangroves put up with salty environments without dying, and the answer is simple, actually. There are two types of mangrove trees which do different things to the salt. Some filter it, and succeed in blocking 90% of the salt from entering their systems. The other type does not filter the salt, but instead allows it in and secretes it through pores in the leaves, leaving noticeable salt crystals. Eventually, the leaves become heavy with salt and aged, and they fall off the tree, taking the salt with them.

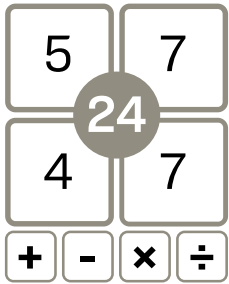
A germinating mangrove seed. Once it drops into the mud, it will begin growing.

AMAZING LABYRINTH



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

7 × 5 - 7 - 4

Medium Puzzle 1



Solution Medium 1

(13 - 7) × 4 × 1

Hard Puzzle 1



Solution Hard 1

(27 - 23) × 9 - 12



HIDDEN TREASURES by Liz Ball
www.HiddenPicturePuzzles.com

WORDSEARCH: Who Is a Sibling?



Aunt
Brother
Cousin
Daughter
Father
Grandchild
Grandmother
Grandparents
Husband
Nephew
Niece
Parent's sibling
Sibling's child
Sister

Son
Spouse
Uncle
Wife

LARGER THAN LIFE: ARCHITECTURE THROUGH THE AGES

Castello di Amorosa: California Medieval

A Medieval castle in Napa Valley’s wine country

By Deena C. Bouknight

Perched on a hill overlooking vast fields in Calistoga, California, is an enchanting medieval-style castle: Castello di Amorosa. Authentically designed to mirror centuries-old castles in Europe, the vast 121,000-square-foot structure’s construction began 30 years ago.

The goal of Castello di Amorosa owner Dario Sattui was to achieve as close to the look of a 14th-century castle as possible. He said: “I used only old, handmade materials. and I built it employing the same methods and materials that would have been used 700 to 800 years ago.”

Comprising three acres, the sprawling 107-room castle has four underground and four above-ground levels. It features many of the same characteristics of a historic castle, including a moat, drawbridge,

towers, a chapel, and loggias. Plus, the ceilings, walls, and windows in many of the rooms are bedecked with exceptionally artistic design elements such as frescos, arches, stenciling, and more.

Situated on 171 acres in California’s Napa Valley wine country, Castello di Amorosa opened to the public in 2007 as a winery and event venue.

“You simply can’t build an ‘old structure’ using modern techniques and tools,” Sattui said. “It would look fake, and everyone would realize it’s an imitation. Rather, we were going to build the structure ... using the same techniques medieval builders had relied on 800 years ago.”

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

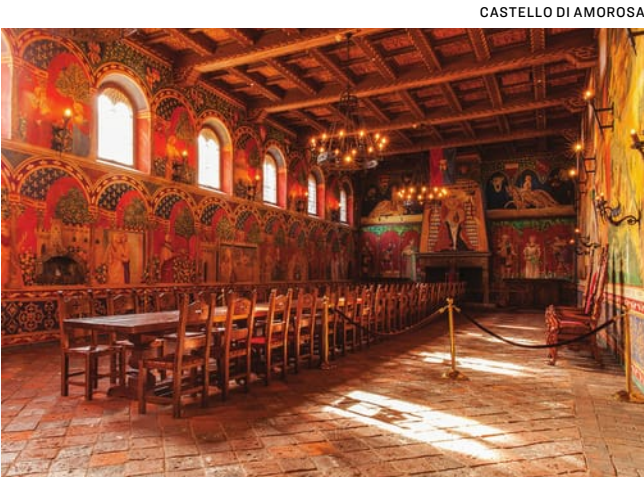
The goal of Castello di Amorosa was to achieve as close to the look of a 14th-century castle as possible.

More than 8,000 tons of hand-chiseled, locally quarried stone and almost a million antique, European bricks went into Castello di Amorosa’s construction. Owner Dario Sattui was “determined to make the Castello authentic in every respect.” Surrounding the castle are manicured lawns and trees as well as acres of vineyards.



CASTELLO DI AMOROSA

▲ While the 12,000-square-foot barrel room is a functioning space to store wine barrels, it also showcases a ceiling of multiple cross (also referred to as groin) vaults made with distinct sandstone bricks. To achieve the elaborate ceiling display of 40 ribbed vaults, the two barrel vaults (essentially extended arches) must intersect at right angles. The wide arches are perched on sandstone brick columns.



CASTELLO DI AMOROSA

▲ The Grand Hall is the most elaborate chamber at Castello di Amorosa. A 500-year-old fireplace from Umbria, Italy, was installed at one end. But most significant are the hand-painted Italian-style frescoes adorning the walls. The cross-beamed ceiling is stenciled, and massive hand-forged iron candelabras are suspended from the ceiling.



CASTELLO DI AMOROSA

Covered walkways at monasteries and cathedrals are called cloisters, which sport a medieval loggia design with one side that typically opens to a garden. Castello di Amorosa’s brick and stone cloisters embrace the Gothic-style pointed arch design in the loggias’ ceilings. The outward facing arches are more classically Roman in design and sit above square brick columns.



KIT LEONG/SHUTTERSTOCK

A staple aspect of European castles was a chapel. Castello di Amorosa is no exception. The chapel’s most ornate element is the chancel, or space behind the altar, where a multi-hued fresco depicts the birth of Jesus. A pointed Gothic-style arch made of stone surrounds the doorway, while a hand-forged iron lighting fixture hangs from a massive beam secured between stucco walls.



PUBLIC DOMAIN



KIT LEONG/SHUTTERSTOCK



CASTELLO DI AMOROSA

▲ “You simply can’t build an ‘old structure’ using modern techniques and tools,” Sattui said. “It would look fake, and everyone would realize it’s an imitation. Rather, we were going to build the structure ... using the same techniques medieval builders had relied on 800 years ago.”

◀ The functioning drawbridge that leads to the castle’s south tower is made of iron, wood, and heavy metals. The stone surrounding the drawbridge was individually chiseled and secured in place to form the walls, railings, and columns. A portcullis, or heavy, pointed, metal gate, descends in front of main wooden and iron double doors.

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