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Coming Soon: *The 59th Annual TN Valley Old Time Fiddlers Convention*



By Ali Elizabeth Turner

On Wednesday, September 30, an "especially special" Fiddlers Convention is going to kick off once again on the campus of Athens State University. "Fiddlers" always serves as the official start to the fall festival season in Athens-Limestone County, and this year will mark

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Rachael Marsh And Mainline Benefits: *Making Insurance Easier To Understand*

By Ali Elizabeth Turner

Rachael Marsh is from Washington State, and moved here four years ago with her family to be with family. She had worked for years for a company that had allowed her to work from home, had steady benefits, and she could "work her work" around her family, which for Rachael was and is a very high priority. Well, that all went away in a moment and without warning. After several years of faithful service, the company called

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Publisher's Point

Dearest Dolly



Dearest Dolly,

As you are perhaps aware, you are OWNING the airwaves. Or, maybe you are only slightly aware, but you don't care. That is what makes the most sense to me. You are in a realm and with a company of "praisers" that are all the way around the Throne, and I don't think that "Earth tones" can begin to compete with what you are hearing, seeing, and singing. The president of the United States has ordered flags across the nation to be flown at half-staff. Your house in Brentwood is plastered with flowers, letters, cards, and more. The Nashville airport is going to be renamed after you. A friend went to Dollywood, and for the first time ever, did not wonder if you might make a surprise appearance. Another friend posted on Facebook, "If you have people in TN, check in on them. We are NOT ok!!" In that particular post, you were sporting the distinctive orange of the Vols, and while in this state of Alabama the Beautiful most folks holler, "Roll Tide!" or "War Eagle!" you can drive down the street and more than one business has posted on their reader board, "I Will Always Love You." There is absolutely no need for any explanation.

I have known since your passing that I wanted to say something about the way you touched my life, but it seems like it has all been already said. However, I am going to go ahead and write it anyway, and I trust that soon (seconds, actually, in Heaven



Central Time) I will be able to tell you face to face. After all, aren't we going to spend eternity hearing each other's stories, telling each other the "great things He has done," and getting comfy with the great cloud of witnesses?

When I was a teenager and you first came on the scene, I did not get you at all. The look, the wigs, the nails, the spangle, the bling, and all the rest made no sense to me. Nevertheless, over time you captured my heart. How did you do that? Well, thankfully I was surrounded by "family" members who made sure that I began to be "edumacated" regarding all things Dolly. They took me to Dollywood on several occasions. They made sure I knew about your

"Coat of Many Colors," and the remarkable story behind it. They challenged me in my early '70s to go on the roller coaster called Thunderhead; I had a blast and hollered my fool head off to prove it. It was at Dollywood that I learned of your heart for literacy, and how hard it had been on your daddy to not be able to read and write. It was there that felt that I got a significant peek into your precious heart, and I know that now you have gone home, you will never again feel the need to go under the knife or joke about modeling your sense of style after the "town tramp." Never again will you have to look into the camera with a twinkle in your eye and say, "It costs a lot of money to

look this cheap." To say that down here on Earth you were a complete conundrum, my dear, is an understatement. And, I don't think we would have had it any other way.

With regard to your being a savvy and successful business woman, I am so grateful that you provided 4,000 people with employment in a gorgeous part of the country that had known a level of scarcity that had shaped your soul long ago. As Providence would have it, it was that economic extremity paired with lots of love that made you into you. And, I want you to know that the brisket I had a few weeks ago at the I-65 Exit 22 Dolly Parton Truck Stop is truly some of the best I have ever tasted.

I have thought long and hard about my favorite "Dolly moment," and I have chosen the video of "There Was Jesus," because of the great comfort it gave millions, including me. It was fitting that you sang in a barn, dwarfed by Zach Williams. We owe you, girl. We surely miss you. We will always love you, and, we shall see you soon.

With love,

*Ali T and the rest
of the planet*

Ali Elizabeth Turner

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9/11 -- Looking Back, Forward, And UP

by Ali Elizabeth Turner



In one week, we will be doing that odd and important thing that humans do, and that is to put special significance on a historical event based on a year that fits evenly into the number one hundred and its multiples. By that, I mean it has been 25 years, a quarter of a century since we were shocked by an attack on our land that cost around three thousand lives and in a moment changed everything. The shorthand of the English language is simply, "9/11."

We speak in terms of "before 9/11," and "after 9/11." Sometimes we say things like "on 9/11" to illustrate the indescribable things we felt, heard, saw, experienced, or were spared from experiencing.

Everyone remembers where they were when they got the news and then got in front of a TV and watched planes fly into buildings. We had lived in Alabama a little over a year, having come here from the mission field at an orphanage in Mexico. We were visiting friends, and I literally was on my knees, praying, but not re: 9/11. I was just doing my morning thing when a friend with whom I had gone to theological school walked in, inter-

rupted my prayer time, and quite soon after that I had an experience that I shall never forget. It is stronger than watching the planes go in or the buildings come down. It was the sound of a human voice.

My sister Kathryn lives in New York City and was walking my niece to school when they heard the first plane go in, turned around, and saw the second plane go in. I called her, managed to get through and the first words that came out of her mouth were, "I'm OK. Jay (my brother-in-law) is OK. He was up the street." I don't believe I have ever been more relieved to hear a human voice, and as I write this, it still brings tears to my eyes. Then she said, "I've got to go -- Caitlin (my other niece) is calling."

Four years later, I was in the middle of my three years in Iraq, and the entire theatre took time on 9/11 to pause and remember what had happened on that day five years earlier. Remarkably, on a base known as Radwaniyah, our National Guard unit that was tasked with perimeter patrol on was the Fighting 69th out of New York, and they had been immediately mobi-



lized on 9/11. For them, the war was already five years old. There was a man whose nickname was Smitty Jingles. He would come to our MWR center, which once upon a time was Uday Hussein's hunting lodge where he hunted humans, and we would play Yahtzee by the hour. One night we had a "where were you on 9/11" session with the guys, and they began to talk about where they actually were,

and then, their assignment. Turns out, Smitty Jingles was the one who stood outside my sister's apartment in SoHo and guarded it. That is another thing that brings tears to my eyes. A kind man, a warrior, and a patriot who became a friend was the one that guarded my sister and her family. So, I am grateful for the "looking back" part for far more than the reasons I just gave.

Looking forward blends in with looking up. Those of us who are "people of the Book" have read the end of the Book, and there is no mistake who wins. Until then, there will be people who think that what happened on 9/11 was justified, and some are "serving" in our national legislative bodies. Thankfully there are far more who don't agree, and our job is to keep going and pray for those who think that they are doing God a service when they kill in the manner of what will always be known as 9/11. We look back, we look forward, and most importantly, we look up. Our Redeemer is the only one who can and will put an end to this madness, and I think it's reasonable to say, "It won't be long."



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Finishing The Race

by Carissa Lovvorn

Bang! This past weekend, the familiar sound of a single blank-gun shot signaled the start of the 2026 fall high school cross-country season.

I'm always amazed by the number of students who willingly wake up at the crack of dawn on a Saturday morning just to run for miles. I tend to subscribe to the whole, "If you see me running, you may want to run too because something is going down" sort of group.

The fact that my oldest daughter chose this as her sport makes me giggle. Not me...

The typical 5K cross-country course consists of various terrains including hills, rocks, creeks, mud, and more. Races are held rain or shine, in the heat or the frigid cold. The students, ranging

from seventh to twelfth grade, look determined as they gather at the starting line. But once the race begins, differences in speed and skill quickly separate the runners into their respective groups.

Spectators rush from one checkpoint to another, eager to catch a glimpse of their runner and cheer them on toward the finish line. By the time they reach the end, some runners are so exhausted that they experience extreme thirst, overheating, or even fainting spells.

When I asked my daughter what she thinks about while running, she replied, "There is a mix of singing, praying, and questioning my sanity going through my head. I ask myself, 'Should I walk? Should I run? Why can't this just be over?'"

In my opinion, these are all extremely valid questions!

I've come to believe that a cross-country race is very similar to what we experience in our spiritual lives. Sometimes

the temperature is perfect, and the terrain is smooth. These are the times when life is good and believing is easy. Other times, the course is nothing but hills, rocks, and mud, and our efforts are spent fighting against the elements. These are the moments when believing is hard and when our strength wavers. We endure it all without being able to see the finish line or the rest that awaits us there.

It's easy to allow the negative aspects of life to overwhelm us, but we must rely on our faith to sustain us. Faith in our heavenly calling urges us to forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead—the ultimate prize. Our Heavenly Father encourages us to not only run this race with en-

durance but also to rejoice in our sufferings, allowing suffering to produce character and character to produce hope. (Romans 5:3-4)

What faith it takes to start a race knowing the finish line is literally miles away. Yet, we press on toward the goal. And oh, to make it to the finish line of life! Unlike a runner who collapses to the ground in utter exhaustion, we'll fall into the warm embrace of Jesus, where we can finally say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7 KJV).

Keep running.

*Many blessings,
Carissa Lovvorn*



Calendar of Events

Gospel Fest 2026 September 5

7 pm. Featuring Dante Pride & More. Free concert in Doug Gates Park (Athens Farmer's Market), 409 W. Green St. Athens, AL 35611.

Gospel Fest 2026: "This Is A Move" September 5

Athens Arts League presents their annual Gospel Fest. 6:30PM-9:00PM. Athens Farmers Market at Doug Gates Park. 409 W. Green St., Athens, AL.

13th Annual Sporting Clay Tournament September 18

It's almost time for the Athens-Limestone Chamber's 13th Annual Sporting Clay Tournament Presented by Ridgeline Construction! Join us for a morning of friendly competition and great shooting at one of the Chamber's favorite traditions. 8:00 AM. Old South Clays. 27246 Wooley Springs Rd, Athens, AL.

Little Lambs Consignment Sale September 18-19

It's almost time for one of the BIGGEST children's clothing consignment sales in Athens, AL. Proceeds benefit Moms of Many Strengths, a local 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to helping mothers and families in the community. Friday, Sept. 18, 9 AM - 7 PM, and Saturday, Sept. 19, 9 AM - 2 PM. Saturday is half-price day and select items will be marked 50% off. Located at Family Life Center behind Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, 1300 Lindsay Lane, Athens, AL. <https://llbcconsignment.home.blog/>

Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Concert Series September 24

Please join us for a special performance by Wyatt Ellis Band on Thursday, September 24 at 7:00 PM in historic McCandless Hall at Athens State University. 7:00 PM. 300 N. Beaty St., Athens. Purchase your tickets today! <https://athensstate.ticketspice.com/wyatt-ellis-band-fiddlers-concert-series>

Fiddlers 5K Fun Day September 26

The Athens State University Alumni Association is

hosting the annual Fiddlers 5k Race, Kids Fun Run, and Family Fun Day event. Proceeds from this event will provide scholarship benefits for new and current students and the Nazaretian Scholarship in honor of Dr. Angeline Nazaretian. This fun day will feature a kids' fun zone with inflatables, face painting, and hot dogs. A paid race entry is required to access the fun zone. Our USATF-certified race route will begin and end at Athens State University and will showcase the historical district in Athens. Our Kids' fun run will start and end on the Athens State Campus and will be highlighted by an appearance from Hebrew the Bear. Our goal is to have 250 runners, showcase the history and beauty of Athens, and provide our community with a family-friendly event that everyone can participate in. 7AM - 10AM

Cakes & Quilts October 3

Athens Arts League is calling on the area's most talented bakers and quilters to showcase their creativity and skills! Compete for the title of Best Cake at Big Spring Memorial Park and compete for the title of Best Quilt at The Scout House. All Day. Big Spring Memorial Park & Scout House. 313 E. Washington St, Athens, AL.

Pink Lady Walk 5K Race October 10

Participate in the Pink Lady Walk 5K Race to promote breast cancer awareness. 8:00 AM-11:00 AM Race will start at 8:00AM at Big Springs Park in Athens, AL.

Athens Honey Bee Festival 2026 October 17

Come out to the Athens Farmers Market on Saturday, Oct. 17, for the first ever Athens Honey Bee Festival. 10:00AM-3:00PM. 409 W. Green St, Athens, AL 35611

Digital Literacy Classes

Athens-Limestone County Public Library will host a series of Digital Literacy Classes in conjunction with Calhoun Community College & Drake State Community & Technical College. Classes will boost your digital confidence & provide you with skills and training needed in today's job market. Courses include: Computer & Internet Basics, Email, Windows OS, & Microsoft Word®. M-W 9:00 – 12:00 or M-W 1:00 – 4:00. Classes start January 24th. Call us at (256) 306-2830 to learn more.



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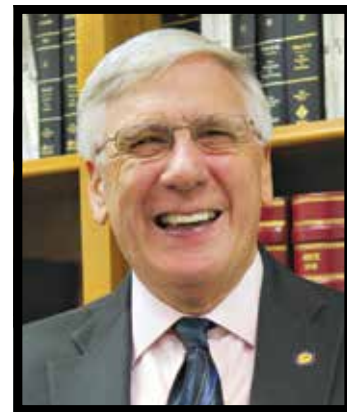


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The Advance Of “Athensness”

by Ali Elizabeth Turner



Back in May of 2021, the City of Athens hosted what to date have been my all-time favorite set of Town Hall Meetings that were known as Planapalooza. For several days, Athenians met together and discussed future developments for everything from commercial endeavors, downtown renovation, the redemption of Athens Creek, and for the purposes of this edition of *Ronnie*, the development of several parks.

Quality of life is one of the most important parts of running a city well, and in our case, parks have always served to “advance our Athensness.” Studies have shown that cities are healthier, physically, mentally, socially, and economically when they have enough parks to service the city.

As of September 1, 2026, progress has been made on several fronts, the most notably on parks. The old Pilgrim’s Pride chicken plant that had been abandoned, then fell apart, and became a true blighted property, was deconstructed and then prepared to actually



become a park. The park on Pryor Street has been named Sunrise Park, and phase one is just about finished. “We have a punch list to complete,” said Mayor Ronnie. Most notably there was some fencing that needed to be adjusted for what he called “the safety of our kids.” Sunrise Park will have a splash pad and all-access playground equipment, and there is more to come. There will be a proper “grand opening,” and everyone hates to use the word,

“soon,” but it will have to do for now.

Moving on, the mayor revisited the topic of Easy Street, which has been slated to be a historical walking tour from the AL Veterans Museum down to Patton’s to Old Black Bear. In the 1930s, there were a number of African-American businesses all along the railroad tracks on the west side. The City of Athens is in the process of working with CRX Railroad to secure easements

and other conditions to make it happen. There are improvement projects in play at Lincoln-Bridgeforth Park and plans for Swan Creek. The mayor also mentioned potholes. “We’ll take care of the parks AND the potholes,” said Mayor Ronnie.

Finally, we talked about what is going on at Five Points in Athens next to the Farmer’s Market. The medallion in the street is stunning. In addition, Jimmy and Audrey

McMeans, owners of Baw Baw’s BBQ, have been busy at beautifying. Not only did they remodel the old church at Five Points that has become the restaurant, they planted grass, sunflowers, and cotton, and added picnic tables. And they have received a Main Street of Alabama Award for all their hard work. I spoke with Audrey and asked her if you have to be a patron of Baw Baw’s in order to use the picnic benches, and she looked at me like I just sprouted an extra head. She erupted with a friendly, “Of COURSE not!” I chuckled and said, “I figured as much, but wanted to make sure.” My conversation with the mayor had been by phone, and he had to roll...to Montgomery...to make Athens even more awesome.

Ali Elizabeth Turner
Publisher

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Cooking with Anna

The 5 Ds That Try to Pull You Away From God

by Anna Hamilton

Sometimes we imagine that the enemy's greatest strategy is to completely destroy everything God is doing in our lives. But often, destruction isn't necessary. Sometimes all it takes is a little distraction. A little doubt. A little discouragement. A little delay.

The enemy understands that if he can slowly pull our attention away from God, we may eventually stop pursuing the very things God has called us to do. We see this pattern in Genesis 3. The serpent didn't begin by destroying everything. He began with a question: "Did God really say...?" It started with a whisper. And sometimes, that is exactly how the enemy works in our lives today.

Doubt whispers, "Can God really be trusted?" It causes us to question God's promises, His goodness, and sometimes even His presence. When circumstances don't make sense, doubt can make us believe that God has changed. But God's character does not change, just because our circumstances do. When you don't understand what God is

doing, remember what you already know about who He is. He is faithful. He is trustworthy. He is good. Don't allow an uncertain situation to make you question a certain God.

Discouragement whispers, "Look at everything going wrong. Nothing is working." And let's be honest—sometimes things really are hard. Faith doesn't mean pretending that everything is wonderful when it isn't. It means remembering that our problems are never greater than the God who walks through them with us. The enemy wants you focused on the size of the mountain. God wants you to remember the One who can move it. When you're tired, frustrated, and tempted to give up, don't mistake exhaustion for failure. Sometimes you simply need to rest, pray, and let God strengthen you again. Your difficult season is not the end of your story.

Diversion whispers, "This other thing will satisfy you faster." This one can be especially subtle. Not everything

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Chicken Street Corn Salad

Ingredients:

*2 cups cooked chicken breast, diced
3 cups corn (fresh, frozen, or canned)
1/2 cup red onion, finely diced
1/2 cup crumbled cotija cheese
1/2 cup fresh cilantro, chopped
1 jalapeño, seeded and minced
1/2 cup sour cream
1/4 cup mayonnaise
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
1 teaspoon chili powder
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
Salt and pepper, to taste*

Directions:

In a small bowl, whisk together the sour cream, mayonnaise, fresh lime juice, chili powder, cumin, garlic powder, salt, and pepper until smooth.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the diced chicken, corn, finely diced red onion, crumbled cotija cheese, chopped cilantro, and minced jalapeño.

Pour the dressing over the chicken mixture and gently toss until everything is well coated.

Taste and adjust with additional salt, pepper, or lime juice if



needed.

Cover the bowl and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes to allow the flavors to develop.

Stir once before serving and garnish with extra cotija cheese and chopped cilantro, if desired.

Tourism To Tourist

by Stephanie Reynolds, Athens-Limestone Tourism Association



Hello, my amazing and fabulous neighbors and friends! I hope this finds you well and enjoying the last few moments of summer.

I am SO excited! This Tourism Professional is about to be a Professional Tourist! (Okay, not really professional, and I'm only going to be gone a few days, but the play on words was too good to resist). I am taking myself and my sweet daughters to the beach!

I know a lot of folk go to the beach, but we really don't. I have only been to the beach twice since we moved here almost 14 years ago, which is really a shame. It isn't that I don't like the beach. I am not a total beach baby, but I do love watching the sky and the water, especially if there are storms coming in.

It's more like we rarely vacation at all. We have a farm and animals and work, so vacations become staycations which become "How far down the Everlasting Pez Dispenser of Chores can we get through before I go back to work?" There are always things to

fix, plant, prune, clean, build, shovel, tear out, and put in.

But for some reason, the Lord gave me this huge drive to take my fabulous daughter and amazing daughter-in-love to the beach. I am the "stay home and don't spend money" introvert, but this decision just felt right on so many levels. Life is short, sometimes tough, and sometimes you need to just take a breath, you know?

So, I have been having so much fun with the planning! Let me ask you, isn't planning the best part of the trip? Days (or, in my case, weeks) of dreaming and buying and planning and packing...I absolutely love it! I poured over condo descriptions until I found the perfect one. I watched a few YouTube videos and bought a bunch of stuff (more on that later). I did take a small break in planning just so I have something to do in September to keep the excitement going with the ladies, and now I am ready to go "full beach excitement build-up mode"!

Now, y'all have heard me say I am not the best



hostess on the planet. Or in the state. Or on my street. Or in my house. But the one thing I have going for me is a strong, inherited, Louisiana tradition of lagniappe—"a little something extra." Lagniappe (pronounced "LAN yap") is the most delightful act of adding in more than someone expects. For example, a business might surprise you with a free car wash coupon if you buy a car from them. Or a bakery might throw in an extra cookie. It's one of my favorite things because it is a surprise, it is generally small, but it makes such a huge difference in someone's day.

Yes, what I lack in actual cooking or cleaning skills, I try to make up for in "WOW!" via little special touches and gifts. My mother taught me this trick with things like having real gold-

fish swimming in the flower vases on the table and giving us little "am/pm" presents on car trip travel days. She was an expert in making car trips fun, EXCEPT she always brought Tootsie Rolls and Starbursts for snacks instead of real chocolate. I get it now that I am an adult--kids are messy--but chocolate-flavored rubber nubbins wasn't my fave candy as a kid.

Anyway, I am making lagniappe the whole theme of the trip: "Where can I sprinkle a little happy in this moment? What might we need that we didn't think of, and how can I make them cute and fun instead of just tossing whatever in a box? How can I treat my girls and myself?"

Just going to the beach is going to be wonderful. But if I can make it more special for my sweet

girls with extra fun and surprising touches, how much more wonderful it can be!

Next article I will list all the things I was able to do. If you have any ideas for me, though, please reach out to me; I would love to hear how you would make our trip "a little something extra." Have you dolled up your car for a trip? Any beachy gift bag/basket/box recommendations? Let me know!

Quick note about Tourism happenings:

The Airshow at Pryor field is coming up September 12-13. Come see me at the booth!

The Cemetery Stroll will be in October, reach out if you want to be a character.

Storytelling Festival is coming soon, as is Fiddlers! Head to our Facebook page for updates and announcements.

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Coming Soon: *The 59th Annual TN Valley Old Time Fiddlers Convention*

by Ali Elizabeth Turner

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the 100th anniversary of the Delmore Brothers' first competitive appearance here in Athens. Yes, we had a Fiddlers' Convention here a century ago, and then for several decades it went by the wayside. Then, in 1967 it "fired back up" and has been going strong ever since.

Recently, I met with Brandy Conway, who is the Executive Director of Foundation and Corporate Relations at Athens State University, and her particular joy about this year's festivities was contagious. "We are having to begin competitions earlier because we have so many contestants," she said. All the wonderful things that "make Fiddlers Fiddlers" are in place -- the music making workshops in Ka-

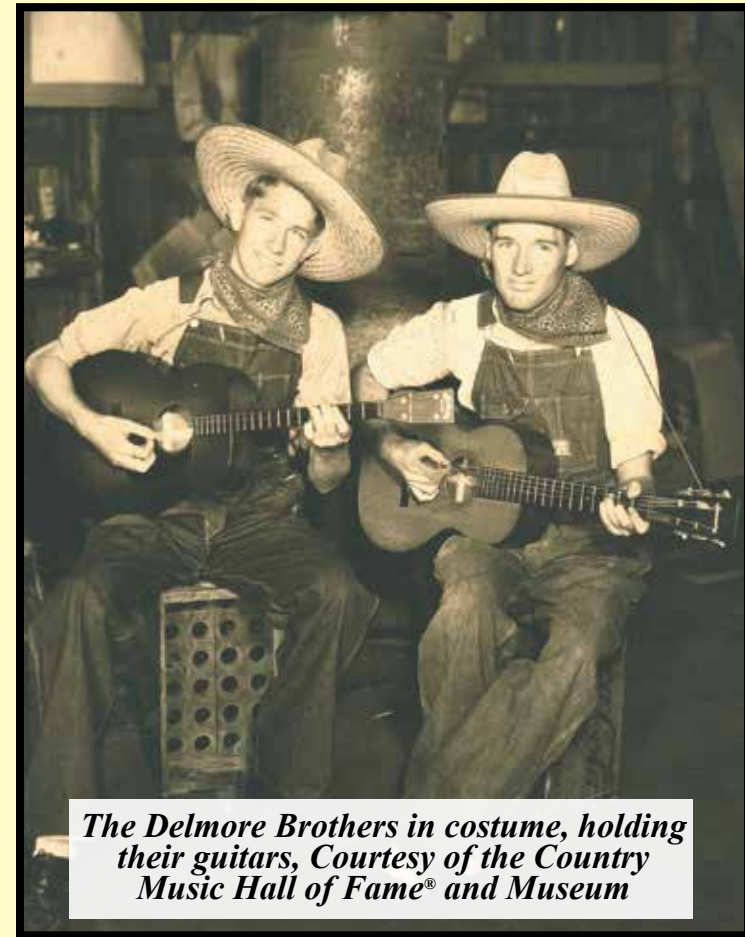
res Library that are free to the public and designed for every skill level; the Jerry McGlocklin music shop in Sandridge Ballroom where you can purchase all manner of instruments; the vendors and artisans, and my most favorite, the spontaneous formation of groups that sing and play all over the campus.

"A Century of Strings, Stories and Songs" is the theme of Fiddlers 2026, and is also the title of a special tribute album of all things Delmore. The release date for the album is October 1, and it will be available on vinyl, CD and USB. In addition, the Athens State University Nazaretian Alumni Welcome Center will display an exhibit of the Delmore Brothers' memorabilia that was donated in 2008 by Debby Delmore, the youngest

daughter of Alton Delmore. The exhibit will feature Alton's typewriter, glimpses into their autobiography, which is entitled, *Truth Is Stranger Than Publicity*, as well as a "time tour" of the brothers' Grand Ole Opry career along with numerous awards. The exhibit opens on September 21 and will continue through the first of the new year. Regarding the Delmore Brothers, Bob Dylan once said, "... I really loved them! I think they've influenced every harmony I've ever tried to sing."

It is not uncommon for Fiddlers to draw 15,000 attendees from all over America and beyond, along with upwards of 200 contestants. The chances are good that this year there will be considerably more. There is more than \$47,000 in prize money available, and the purpose of the convention is to raise money for student needs at Athens State University.

Fiddlers could not exist if it were not for the sponsors. This year's presenting sponsor is Goodwyn Mills Cawood. Other sponsors are Pettus Plumbing and Piping, Fly HSV, Redstone Federal Credit Union, TriGreen Equipment, Bryant Bank, Aetos Systems, Nanny's Old Fashion Lemonade, Edward Jones - Micah Joy, Pepsi, Caps-haw RV, TOC, Marin & Cobey, Trustmark Bank, and Bank In-



The Delmore Brothers in costume, holding their guitars, Courtesy of the Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum

dependent. In addition, WHNT is going to be broadcasting onsite.

Of course, there will be food trucks in abundance, and if you need assistance to get from the parking lot up the hill to Founders' Hall, once again volunteers will take you there in comfy golf carts. If you are an Airstreamer, your crew is welcome as well as RV campers. There are no power or sanitation facilities available on the Hobbs street space. As always, because this is Athens, AL, you can bring your lawn chair ahead of time and stake out your space on the grounds. Your chair will still be there.

The line-up of professional performances is as follows:

- Wednesday, Septem-

ber 30 at 7:30 p.m.- FREE FREE FREE Gospel concert featuring Larry Sparks

- Thursday, October 1 at 7 p.m.- Mike Compton & Andy Todd will perform a Delmore Brothers tribute

- Thursday, October 1 at 8 p.m.- Dale Ann Bradley

- Friday, October 2 at 6 p.m.- The Isaacs

- Saturday, October 3 at 7:30 p.m.- The Del McCoury Band

Ticket prices are \$20 per adult per day, with the 3-day pass is \$30. Children under 12 are free with a paying adult. Tickets can be purchased at www.athensfiddlers.org. You do NOT want to miss this most anticipated celebration!



Ending veteran suicide starts with you

courtesy BrandPoint Content

BPT - Key Takeaways

- * Veterans and service members experience particularly traumatic events that can lead to increased risk of suicide.

- * Suicide prevention begins long before a veteran or service member is in crisis. When you recognize the warning signs and act early, you can help connect them with support before a situation escalates.

- * Everyone can do their part to end veteran suicide.

For over 250 years, brave men and women have selflessly served the country to protect the freedoms we enjoy. Yet too many return carrying unseen wounds and fight their hardest battles once they return home.

The most recent Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) Warrior Survey found that more than 1 in 4 warriors experienced suicidal thoughts within the past year. And, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs, 17 veterans die by suicide each day.

Losing over 6,200 American heroes every single year - roughly one every 90 minutes - should not be the cost of serving the country. This cost of service has affected veterans for generations, and will continue to impact future generations, without action now.

"Service members are exposed to situations and environments that increase risk of suicide," said Lyndsay Tkach, mental and brain services director at WWP®. "That's not exclusive to combat experience, and it's not based on the rank worn or the deployment taken. Suicide risk doesn't discriminate. It can touch any service member, veteran, or family, often in ways that are not immediately visible."

Service can be a source of purpose, pride, and lifelong strength. But for many veterans, experiences during and after service can also contribute to challenges such as physical injury, moral injury, survivor's guilt, and other risk factors as-

sociated with suicide. As a nation, each individual has a responsibility to ensure these risk factors don't lead to suicide.

A grateful nation's collective responsibility

"The focus is often on intervention, but we're often missing a critical piece of the conversation," said Tkach. "A veteran may not reach out until a crisis is already happening. To truly make an impact, we have to meet veterans where they are, before a crisis occurs, by connecting them to resources and support that protect against suicide."

True suicide prevention begins as soon as risk is present. No one person can end veteran suicide alone, but everyone can play a role in addressing its root causes and strengthening protective factors.

On average, America loses 17 veterans a day to suicide. That is 119 lives lost a week, more than 500 a month, and over 6,200 American heroes lost every single year. Together, everyone can:

Identify risk factors and warning signs early. Understanding the difference between risk factors and warning signs is an important part of preventing veteran suicide. Risk factors are the underlying challenges that can increase vulnerability over time. Isolation, health challenges like traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder, financial strain, or difficulties adjusting after military service can all be risk factors to monitor.

On the other hand, warning

signs are often more immediate, like shifts in actions or personality. Changes in mood, behavior, or risk-taking, as well as comments about being gone or planning for the future without them, can be important warning signs.

By recognizing these signs early, understanding that they can be different for everyone, and having conversations before a crisis develops, everyone can help end veteran suicide.

Have tough conversations and provide support before the breaking point. Having open, direct conversations with each other about mental health can support the shift from reactive intervention to proactive prevention.

Veterans' family members and friends often feel unsure about how to support their loved ones during challenging times. Asking direct questions about mental health or suicidal thoughts can feel like a risk. The fear of messing up can lead to inaction.

But when someone is struggling, isolation can intensify emotional pain and reinforce feelings of hopelessness. That is why having honest, compassionate conversations before a crisis develops is so important.

Here are some tips for asking a loved one about suicidal thoughts:

- * Share your observations. Start by showing care and sharing what you've noticed. Statements like, "You've said..." or "I've noticed..." can open the door to an honest conversation.

- * Validate their experience. Let

them know their feelings are heard and understood. Simple responses such as, "That sounds overwhelming" or "That sounds really painful" can be powerful, especially coming from someone they trust.

- * Ask directly. If you're concerned about suicide, use clear and direct language. Ask questions like, "Are you thinking about suicide?" or "Are you thinking about ending your life?" Avoid vague wording and create space for an honest response.

- * Be prepared to listen.

Reaching out, checking in, and creating space for someone to share their experiences and thoughts can help restore a sense of safety and support. For individuals experiencing thoughts of suicide, meaningful connection and early support can serve as critical protective factors, helping them feel seen, supported, and less alone in their pain.

Suicide is complex, so take the responsibility off yourself to have all the answers, offer solutions, or try to be a therapist. The most important thing you can do is hold space to listen and validate their challenges.

Help build stronger support systems for veterans during their transition to civilian life. When service members leave the military, they're leaving behind more than a job. They're also leaving structure, stability, and camaraderie. Navigating the unpredictable nature of civilian life often leaves veterans isolated, feeling as if they've lost their purpose, and even who they are as a person. But, they don't have to face these challenges alone. A strong community of support can save lives. Access to trusted resources, meaningful connections, and a sense of belonging can make all the difference for veterans facing challenges.

You can play a part in creating suicide-safe communities by supporting and getting involved with organizations like WWP. The veterans nonprofit not only provides direct resources and

support for service members, veterans, and families, but also builds more supportive communities through training and education that equips individuals with the skills needed to intervene effectively and compassionately.

The workshops help participants learn how to talk to someone about suicide, the signs to watch for, and how to develop a plan to support their immediate safety. With specialized suicide prevention training, more people in veteran communities can become advocates for suicide prevention, offering life-saving support.

"By increasing the number of individuals trained to recognize warning signs and provide effective, evidence-based prevention, intervention, and postvention support, Wounded Warrior Project is working to ensure that veterans at risk of suicide have more opportunities to interact with individuals who are informed about suicide risk," said Tkach.

Shifting from reactive to proactive prevention saves lives

Ending veteran suicide is a national responsibility, and it needs to begin now. By building proactive community support at every level, everyone can help protect the men and women who protected them.

"The most effective way to end veteran suicide is to stop waiting. We need to identify risks early, have direct and open conversations about suicide, and build strong, supportive communities for veterans to come home to," said Tkach. "The goal isn't to respond when we see the crisis, but to ensure no veteran has to face that crisis alone in the first place."

If you or someone you know needs support, immediate help is available 24/7. Call the Veteran Crisis Line at 988, then press 1 or text "HELP" to 838255.

Learn more about how Wounded Warrior Project is working to end veteran suicide.

All photos courtesy of Wounded Warrior Project.



Rachael Marsh And Mainline Benefits: Making Insurance Easier To Understand

By Ali Elizabeth Turner

continued from page 1

and said they were eliminating her position. Out of nowhere, Rachael was put in the position most folks face at some point that can best be described as “When God closes a door, He opens a window,” and it’s our job to find that window and go right on through it. That’s just what she did.

Prior to the shock of having her position eliminated, Rachael had thought for years about doing insurance but wasn’t sure if she had what it takes to be a successful agent. Her brother is a raving fan of Mainline Benefits and encouraged her to look into it for a career change. She told me, “I was scared, but decided to go for it. I studied, took the test, and passed all four categories on the first try.” The four categories that need to be certified in order to be an insurance agent in any state are property and casualty, life and health. Rachael is qualified to do all four, but her passion is to help with Medicare and the needs of

seniors.

Mainline Benefits was founded in 2021, right smack in the middle of COVID by an agent by the name of Jason Hoffman. It has often been the case that some of the best inventions, services, and businesses are formed in the crucible of crisis, and Mainline is no exception. There were many things that drove Jason, who was already an experienced agent. One of them was he wanted to eliminate as much confusion as he could in a more-than-confusing time in our country as well as the insurance industry.

Remarkably, in a little more than five years, it is the 15th fastest growing company (out of 5,000) in the country, and in the insurance category, it is number two. There are a number of reasons for this, and they were some of the things that attracted Rachael once she got her license. “I wanted to find a company that was agent focused,” said Rachael. She has greatly enjoyed the company culture, the team dynamic, and the fact that they prove that people grow

better and more fully when they are a part of a team that works together. Mainline has been a perfect fit for Rachael as a mom and professional, and her favorite part is that she gets to help people in the “here and now.”

Below are some comments that Mainline makes about themselves, their vision, and the fact that they are looking not only for clients, but people like Rachael who are wanting to make a genuine difference in people’s lives.

At Main Line Benefits, our goal is to explain the options in a way that is easy to understand. We pride ourselves on doing our best to find coverage that fits our client’s needs and their budgets. That means using our entire network of over 180 providers to find the right plan at the best price.

One of the things that Mainline Benefits does for its clients as well as agents is a podcast that is called On The Line.

On The Line is a real-conversation podcast from Main Line Benefits that

explores the moments, decisions, and people behind the world of insurance and employee benefits.

The thought is that the more people have access to information that is straightforward, the better they can participate in the decision-making process of being a client or a prospective agent. They also have information articles available that cover everything from managing your mornings to getting ready for Open Enrollment.

- *Medicare: Assistance with selecting coverage options that fit specific budgets and medical requirements. Medicare Help selecting a plan that meets your needs and budget –*

- *Health Insurance: Individual, family, self-employed, and small group health policies. Health Exploring options and selecting a policy at a price you can feel good about –*

- *Supplemental Benefits: Voluntary coverage providing cash payouts during illness or injury to address gaps in primary insurance. Supplemental Cash benefits to help fill financial gaps when you’re sick or injured –*

- *Life Insurance: Simplified purchasing processes for term or permanent protection. Life Simplifying*



the buying process to make sure your family is taken care of -- Main Line Benefits|Home.

- *Additional Specialties: Long-term and disability coverage options via a provider network exceeding 180 carriers*

Rachael especially has a heart to help people navigate the unexpected, and better yet, get things in place before the unexpected comes your way, and it will. If you are in the age category that is facing Open Enrollment, it is actually just around the corner -- starts on November 1 -- it would be wise to have a guide like Rachael Marsh of Mainline Benefits to help you get into the best program for the best price. Give her a call today at 360-420-6698 or email her at rmarsh@mlbenefitsco.com.





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Captain's Log

Thankful

by Brenda Wilkerson

On a cloudy day a few weeks ago, there was a tragic house fire close enough to the school that the billowing dark smoke could be seen from the school playground and classroom windows. Eerie sirens seemed to never end as many fire departments joined together to fight this destructive monster. When the kids boarded our home-on-wheels, there was deep concern and chatter about what their eyes saw and ears heard.

As Ol' Yeller departed, this captain calmly explained that we would be passing by the neighborhood of the house

fire. I asked each one to try and imagine if this was their home and to be quiet and respectful as we passed by. I asked if anyone was a praying soul to think a thoughtful prayer for the precious family that had just lost everything. I even offered the floor if anyone wanted to pray aloud. Many agreed to pray in their hearts, but surprisingly, at least 20 hands shot up. Brother P began with his eyes clenched shut and face toward Heaven, "Heavenly Father . . ." One by one, these kids took advantage of the opportunity to freely pray and

offer warm thoughts for this family. Although we could not hear everyone's prayer offering, their brothers and sisters around them would say a hearty "Amen!" As the prayers concluded, the rest of us would respectfully repeat, "Amen." Y'all, this went on for 10 whole minutes. A respectful hush and then a low murmuring of voices finished the route. Warm tears briefly released behind my reflective glasses to symbolize the beautiful moment I just experienced. These kids, my kids, His kids are amazing souls!!
Heavenly Father, we thank

you that no one was hurt in this fire. We thank you that we can feel a piece of their pain through sympathy and empathy. We are grateful that we can freely express ourselves in the moments that call for immediate response. We love

you Lord for Your provision and the precious souls who carry us through the hard times. In JESUS' name... (and everyone said)...

~Brenda





McGhee On Management

When The Summer Of Our Life Turns To Fall

by Detri McGhee - CLU, ChFC

This summer has been excessively hot in many places this year – my hometown being one of them. But the past week, we have been blessed with a hint of cooler times to come. Rain. Cool breezes. Even a night or two with open windows.

Recently, my husband hit (another!) birthday milestone. As I reflect upon the over 2 billion 524 million seconds of life we have traveled, I am overcome with gratitude for the life God has given us. And, yet, saddened at the millions of seconds wasted that could have mattered more for eternity.

As they age, people tend to grow either bitter or better. *Grumpy Old Men* isn't just a movie, nor reserved for males. The older we get, the less we tend to care what people think, and the more we may lose our "polite-filter," if we ever had one. We care less about offending others, and some natural people-pleasers finally figured out that it doesn't always help the situation, nor gain us the relationships we were trying so hard to solidify.

Some of you know my current focus is on Criticism Management from a Judeo-Christian perspective. Mastering the tools of CM enables us to mature, expand, and refine Emotional Intelligence at meteoric speeds. Gratitude is perhaps one of the top 5 elements for expanding Emotional Intelligence.

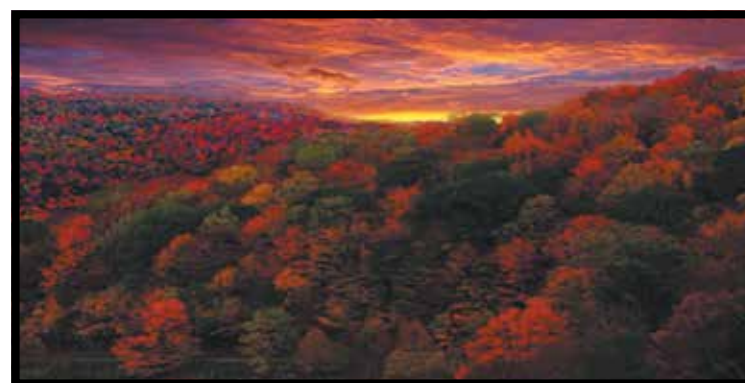
I have had a few transient ischemic attacks (TIAs), aka "temporary strokes." When these occur... especially the first one... you don't know what's going on, and you certainly don't know it will pass. The next time, perhaps it won't. It was a great wake-up call. For me, there was a sense of "I hope this isn't what my family is left with." However, there was absolutely no fear. None. A sense of possible loss, frustration, or regret for things left unsaid or undone. But no fear. Inside I knew everything that was going on, but my body would not obey me. Limbs were numb. Speech was not only garbled, I knew it was, but I couldn't make the right words come out. If around a stroke victim, assume they know everything said and done.

I know only one reason to not fear death: The certainty that the other side of this life is a better one. Guaranteed. I KNOW my Redeemer Lives. And I KNOW that He alone has saved me from the power and punishment of all my sin against our Holy, Righteous God. Now, I'm not a Bible scholar. But I have lived over seven decades, and

not once... NOT ONCE has My God failed me. I wondered where He was sometimes. More than once I thought He was leading me somewhere and I ended up on the "other side of the earth." Often His "Yes, I will do that!" took years and years to become reality. Some of His promises to me have yet to be fulfilled, but because He has proven Himself totally trustworthy for decades, I know that He will do what He said He will do.

With a Provider, Protector, Leader, Guide, Promise-Keeper, SAVIOR like that, fear dies. Emotional Intelligence, AKA Emotional Maturity grows with time and effort. Gratitude is the food that nourishes and sustains the garden of life. When ingratitude is discarded and gratitude replaces it, a productive, delicious, fruitful, life-giving, beautiful result is produced. Practicing gratitude is a powerful way to destroy depression, anger, jealousy, laziness, hate, greed, lust, and more.

Regardless of the state of your spirit, EI and CM can make this life better. But since we don't know how many thousands/millions/billions of sec-



onds we will be given, just living for this life seems very short-sighted. It is wise to secure your future while there is yet time.

Gratitude allows summer to turn to fall and then winter with no fear for what the future will bring. Gratitude opens eyes to see the immeasurable love of God as shown through Jesus Christ. Gratitude enables a body damaged with diseases of aging to still sing powerful praise for the promises yet to be fulfilled, given by an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, One-True God.

The challenge: For 1 week, replace each complaint, criticism, negative thought, word or deed with one of gratitude. OK... Start with 1 DAY! Most of us won't make it the whole day at first, but practice makes... Well, better. Peace and grace to you!

Detri would love to hear from you. Email: detrimcghee@gmail.com Facebook: Detri Atkinson McGhee Free outline for Criticism Management available at www.criticismmanagement.com

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Clean, Green And Beautiful

Love Earth

by Claire Tribble - Executive Director,
Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful

Recycling is one of the simplest ways individuals, families, schools, and communities can make a positive difference for the environment. Every day, millions of items are thrown away that could have been given a second life. Cardboard, aluminum, plastic, and paper are valuable materials that can be collected, processed, and transformed into new products instead of taking up space in landfills. Recycling conserves natural resources, saves energy, reduces pollution, and helps create cleaner, healthier communities.

Fortunately, Limestone County residents have access to a variety of recycling resources. Athens City residents have curbside recycling for many common materials, including plastic, cardboard, aluminum and steel cans, and mixed paper. Limestone County Recycling also provides receptacles for these same materials, giving residents another convenient option for responsible recycling.

Cardboard is one of the most common recyclable materials found in homes and businesses. From shipping boxes to cereal boxes and other paperboard packaging, cardboard can accumulate quickly. Recycling cardboard keeps large amounts of material out of landfills and allows its valuable fibers to be processed into new boxes and paper products. Before placing cardboard in a recycling container, be sure to break down all boxes to save space and make processing easier. Remove all plastic, Styrofoam, and other packing ma-

terials. Cardboard should also be clean and free of food and other contaminants whenever possible.

Aluminum has one of the most impressive recycling stories of any common material. Aluminum cans can be recycled repeatedly without losing their quality. Approximately 350,000 aluminum cans are produced every minute worldwide, making responsible recycling especially important. When an aluminum can is recycled, it can be processed and manufactured into a new can in a remarkably short amount of time. In fact, the entire process can take as little as six weeks for an aluminum can to be recycled and return to a store shelf. Recycling aluminum also requires significantly less energy than producing new aluminum from raw materials. Tossing a can into a recycling bin instead of the trash may seem like a small action, but when millions of people make that choice, the impact is enormous.

Plastic recycling is equally important. Many everyday products—including beverage bottles, shampoo bottles, detergent containers, and other packaging—are made from plastic. When properly sorted and recycled, certain plastics can be transformed into new containers, clothing fibers, carpeting, and other useful products. Recycling plastic reduces the demand for new raw materials and helps keep plastic out of landfills and the environment. Learning to identify recyclable plastics and following local recycling guidelines can make a meaningful difference.

Paper is another material that

can have many lives. Newspapers, magazines, office paper, junk mail, books, and other paper products can often be recycled into new paper products. Recycling paper reduces the need for virgin materials and helps conserve the resources and energy required to manufacture new paper. Keeping paper clean and free of food waste and other contaminants helps ensure that it can successfully enter the recycling process.

There are several additional recycling opportunities available to Limestone County residents. Used cooking oil and grease can be recycled through the FOG (Fats, Oils and Grease) program. Metal collection cages are located at the KALB office, Limestone County Recycling, and Athens Utilities and contain empty take-home containers. Residents can pick up a container, take it home to collect used cooking oil and grease, and return the full container to exchange it for an empty one. Tires are accepted at each Limestone County district work shed. Residents may dispose of up to four regular tires at a time. Packing materials, such as bubble wrap, Styrofoam peanuts, and packing paper, can be accepted at many shipping businesses, including locations such as Pak Mail. Residents should check with the individual business before dropping off materials. Electronics can also be recycled in Limestone County. Staples accepts many small electronics, including computers, laptops, phones, and printers. Limestone County also accepts small electronics as well as flat-screen and plasma televisions.



Glass is another important material that can be recycled again and again without losing its quality. Unfortunately, glass recycling remains a challenge for residents of Limestone County. Limestone County is working to bring glass recycling services back to the area. At this time, the only glass recycling facility serving North Alabama is Phoenix Glass Recycling in Huntsville. Expanding access to glass recycling would give residents another convenient way to keep valuable materials out of local landfills while strengthening our community's commitment to reducing waste and protecting the envi-

ronment.

Recycling is not simply about putting something into a blue bin. It is about recognizing that the materials we use every day have value beyond their first use. When we recycle cardboard, aluminum, plastic, and paper correctly, we conserve natural resources, reduce waste, save energy, and help build a more sustainable future. Every bottle, can, box, and piece of paper we recycle represents a choice. When we choose to recycle, we choose to protect our environment and our community—one item at a time.



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Slinkard On Scriptural Success

What You Do After You Fail

by D. A. Slinkard

D.A. Slinkard would love your feedback. You can contact him at da.slinkard@gmail.com

Nobody likes to fail and I mean nobody. Every one of us, we like winning – we like getting the promotion – reaching the goal – closing the deal – losing weight – building the business and seeing hard work pay off. Who doesn't love having a story with a happy ending?

What about when life brings on failure and we take the "L"? I know the majority of us would rather leave that chapter out of our lives but the problem is you cannot pursue anything worthwhile without eventually experiencing failure. At some point, we will all fail at something and it is not a matter of if, but when. There will be plans that do not work, opportunities you miss, decisions you regret, and goals you fail to reach.

The question we must answer is how we respond when failure happens and we need to realize that failure does not shape who we are – it is just an event in life. One of the biggest mistakes we make is turning something that happened into something that defines us. We need to remember there is a tremendous difference between saying, "I failed" and saying, "I am a failure."

Maybe the business didn't work. Maybe you didn't get the job. Maybe you made a terrible financial decision. Maybe you set a goal in January and abandoned

it by February. Maybe you tried something you genuinely believed would work, only to watch it fall apart. Guess what? Who cares -- because failure becomes dangerous when we allow it to become our identity.

Everyone fails, and the difference is how we respond when life does not go our way. Give up or get up – the choice is ours to make. In fact, failure can be a great teacher and has a way of teaching lessons that success sometimes cannot. When something fails, don't waste the experience. We need to learn from it and look at every experience – good or bad – as always something we can learn from.

If failure costs you money, make sure you purchase a lesson with it. If failure costs you time, make sure you gain wisdom from

it. If failure embarrasses you, let it produce humility. The only failure that is completely wasted is the failure from which we refuse to learn. Don't allow for failure to keep you from getting back up and trying one more time.

We cannot be afraid to take chances – to set even bigger goals or even trying new things. We have one shot at life and we need to be intentional with how we live our lives. Part of our problem is that many of us go through life on cruise control; we check out and then wonder what happened or how we ended up where we are at – and that's why I say we must be intentional.

If life does not go our way, there are one of two ways that we can respond. The first way is to blame someone else or even something else. How easy

is it for us to blame the economy, your boss, your employees, your parents, your spouse, your circumstances, or even bad luck? If everything is always someone else's fault, you surrender your ability to improve.

The other way to respond is to take ownership and admit when we could have handled something better. This goes back to learning from our mistakes, and it is not going to be easy at first because society is teaching us daily to pass the buck to someone or something else.

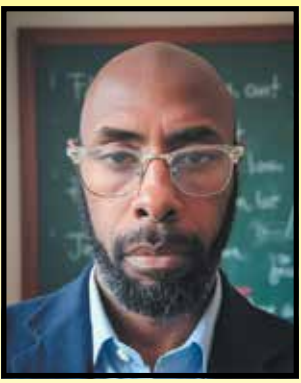
You need to learn from what you did wrong; correct what you can correct, and then just move forward. We cannot change yesterday, but we can absolutely allow yesterday to change how we approach tomorrow. We need to have the thought

process that our next decision matters more than our last failure.

Again, we cannot go backward and rewrite what happened, but we can decide what happens next. Sometimes the most important decision is deciding to get back up one more time. Start over one more time. Apologize one more time. Rebuild one more time. No matter what, though, we just need to decide to do it one more time.

Success often belongs to people who learned how to fail without allowing failure to finish them. So when you fall—and eventually we all do—don't spend the rest of your life staring at the ground. Learn the lesson; make the adjustments; and get back up and keep moving forward.





Learning As A Lifestyle

Ethical Authority: *Having Power And Using It Well*

by Eric Betts

Assistant Director, Curtis Coleman Center for Religion Leadership and Culture at Athens State University

Every institution needs authority. Businesses need managers who can make decisions, schools need administrators who can establish expectations, churches need leaders who can provide direction, and communities need people willing to accept responsibility. Authority itself is not the problem. The ethical question is what we do with it once it has been entrusted to us. A title may give us the right to make a decision, but character determines how we make it. There is an important difference between having the authority to do something and having the wisdom to know whether, when, and how that authority should be exercised.

Institutional authority becomes danger-

ous when leaders begin to view it as personal power rather than entrusted responsibility. A supervisor may have the authority to evaluate an employee, but that authority should never become a means of humiliation. An administrator may establish policies, but policy should not become an excuse for refusing to consider circumstances. A pastor may occupy an influential position, but spiritual leadership should never be used to silence legitimate questions. In every setting, authority affects real people—their livelihoods, opportunities, reputations, confidence, and sometimes the direction of their lives. That is why the greater our authority becomes, the greater our ethical

responsibility should become. Power may enlarge our reach, but it should also enlarge our sense of accountability.

There is a spiritual principle beneath this understanding of leadership: what has been placed in our hands has also been placed in our care. Authority is therefore best understood as stewardship. The ethical leader does not continually ask, “What am I allowed to do?” but rather, “What is the right thing to do with the authority I have been given?” Sometimes leadership requires firmness. Difficult decisions must be made, standards must be maintained, and accountability must be expected. Ethical leadership does not mean avoiding these responsibilities. It means ex-

ercising them without forgetting the dignity of the people affected by our decisions. Authority reveals character because having the power to impose our will gives us the opportunity to demonstrate that we do not always need to. Restraint, listening, fairness, and compassion are not signs that a leader lacks authority; often they are evidence that the leader has learned how to govern it.

The German-American theologian Paul Tillich argued that power and love should not be understood as opposites; rightly ordered power seeks the flourishing and reunion of what has become separated. His insight reminds us that ethical authority is not demonstrated simply by

what leaders have the power to require, but by whether their use of power strengthens rather than diminishes the people and communities entrusted to their care.

This also has much to do with vocational success. We may advance because of talent, education, experience, or opportunity, but remaining worthy of leadership requires something more. People remember how they were treated by those who possessed power over some part of their lives. They remember the employer who listened, the teacher who was fair, the community leader who treated everyone with respect, and the person in authority who could have made a difficult situation worse but instead chose wisdom. Positions eventually change and titles eventually belong to someone else, but the impact of how we used our authority remains. True success is not simply gaining enough authority to lead others; it is developing enough character to be trusted with the authority we have gained. When our leadership leaves people and institutions stronger rather than diminished, authority has fulfilled its highest ethical purpose.

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The Alternative Approach

Why Are We Sick

by Roy P. Williams

This article comes from an interview with Robert F. Kennedy Jr. When I came to HHS, I asked the FDA, "How many ingredients do we have in our food?" They said they didn't know. They said it could be 4,000. It could be 12,000. It's probably somewhere around 10,000.

Then he explained, "When my uncle, John F. Kennedy was president, the rate of chronic disease in this country was 6%. Today it's 60%. When my uncle was president, we spent zero on chronic disease. Today we spend trillions. That is five times our military budget. It is bankrupting us, and it is destroying us morally because we are betraying our children by letting these industries poison them. Put two and two together and you can see how the pharmaceutical and medical industry have become so rich and powerful." They designed a system to guarantee sickness.

"Today, we are having epidemics of all these chronic illnesses. Autoimmune diseases. Neurological diseases.

Allergic diseases. Obesity. When my uncle was president, 3% of Americans were obese. Today, 70% of Americans are obese or overweight. No other country has anything like this. In Japan the obesity rate is still 3%.

"We didn't suddenly become lazy and gluttonous. We are being mass poisoned by corrupt industries. In Japan, where they don't have this kind of corruption, the obesity rate is 3%. That's what it's supposed to be. Seventy-seven percent of American kids are no longer qualified for military service because of chronic-disease diagnoses.

"Epidemics are not caused by genes. Genes may provide vulnerability. You need an environmental toxin. Something is poisoning the American people. Changing food supply by switching to highly chemical-intensive processed foods is the problem."

Like every governmental agency, the FDA at one point, really became a sock puppet for the industry it was supposed to regulate. President Trump warned us when

he said that all of us are subject to those gravities of agency capture. Be conscious of that gravity because it's going to be pulling you every single day of your career. We want to break away from this so we can make our public, and especially our kids, healthy again.

"Virtually all the institutions that are supposed to stand between a rapacious industry and vulnerable children have been compromised. Studies that would explain rising chronic disease, allergies, and other illnesses aren't being done because they may offend the financial interests of powerful entities." In other words, they will not even consider looking at the root cause or the money that is behind all these disorders.

Nearly 60% of the American diet is made up of ultra-processed foods. For our kids, it can be up to 70%. Obesity now affects more than one in five American children. Millions of our children are developing disease before even entering elementary school. Most of these disorders will have a negative effect on their overall health for the rest of their lives.

Thankfully, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. is doing everything in his power to help the American public understand that the real problem hits us in three main ways. We allowed powerful organizations to bribe government officials, such as the Sen-



ate, House of Representatives, and the FDA, to ignore what was being done while they looked the other way. We do not have good science on all of these things. It is a deliberate choice not to study the things that are truly making us sick—that are not only contributing to chronic disease, but mortality from infectious disease. We need to get a handle on this.

President Trump always talks about the Deep State, and the media disparages him and says that he's paranoid. But the Deep State is real. And it's not just George Soros and Bill Gates and a bunch of nefarious individuals sitting together in a room and plotting the destruction of humanity. It's more insidious than that -- it's institutional pressures.

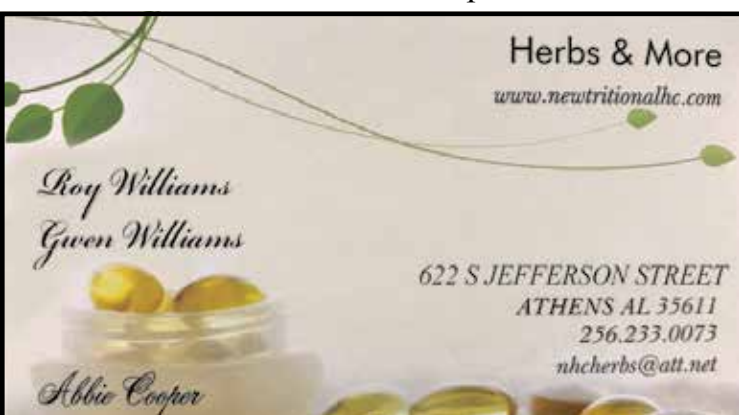
It is becoming more obvious everyday that we have become the sickest nation on earth in spite of the fact that we spend more money on the "fake health care system" than at any other time in our history. For me, the worst thing about it is that the same percentage of our

population diagnosed with heart disease, cancer, and diabetes hasn't changed. Arthritis, auto-immune disease and several other disorders are actually on the increase. Maybe that has been the plan all along. Ignore the cause and treat the symptoms.

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Your Friend in Health,
Roy P. Williams



Somatic Symptom Disorders

by Lisa Philippart,
Licensed Professional Counselor



“A symptom may go away temporarily, but will come back in some other way over and over again as long as there is conflict between the conscious and the subconscious mind.”

- The Anxiety Guy

Thank you readers for your kind words of support and encouragement regarding my articles. I wanted to be sure to remind you that my articles on various mental disorders and illnesses are for informational purposes. Please do not try to “diagnose” yourself as this can lead to all sorts of stress that you really don’t need! Just as you may look to WebMD for inquiries and research on physical ailments, my hope is to provide you with an opportunity to better understand what may be going on mentally and emotionally for you or for someone you love.

I find somatoform disorders to be difficult to understand, diagnose, and treat. In fact, I have only committed to this diagnosis once in my 20 plus year career as a Licensed Professional Counselor. The challenge with somatoform disorders is that they are often co-occurring with mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression. This means that either the somatoform disorder needs to be treated

simultaneously with the mental illness or the mental illness is the underlying cause of the somatoform disorder. Somatoform disorders can also co-occur with substance abuse, as individuals attempt to cope with a lack of explanation for their symptoms.

What are somatoform disorders? Somatoform disorders are a set of psychological conditions where a person experiences bodily symptoms that can’t be accounted for by a medical or neurological diagnosis. The symptoms can range from mild to severe and infrequent to chronic, and are out of the person’s conscious control. These types of disorders are characterized by excessive focus on physical ailments, such as pain and fatigue. Oftentimes a person with somatoform disorder will constantly obsess over their symptoms while attempting to discover an explanation for them.

Types of somatoform disorders: The various somatoform disorders are differentiated by thoughts, emotions, and actions related to the somatic symptoms. The main types of somatoform disorders are somatization disorder, conversion disorder, pain disorder, and hypochondriasis. **Somatization disorders** occur when someone continually complains of physical symptoms when there is no physical condition present to cause the symptoms. **Conversion disorders** occur when physical symptoms imitate symptoms of a neurologi-



cal issue even though there is no neurological disorder present. These symptoms may include paralysis, vision or hearing loss, or seizures. **Pain disorders** are characterized by recurring pain in one or more parts of the body with no known cause. This diagnosis is given when the pain causes considerable distress, with psychological factors playing a significant role in the onset, magnitude, and duration of the pain. **Hypochondriasis** occurs when someone believes that normal bodily signs or minor symptoms are evidence of a severe illness, even when medical tests prove otherwise. Physical symptoms may be either real or imagined. Hypochondriasis was removed from the DSM-5 (Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) and replaced/renamed as illness anxiety disorder.

Symptoms and causes of somatoform disorders. Pain is the most frequent symptom experienced in somatoform disorders, and is usually accompanied by beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to this pain. These thoughts, emotions,

and behaviors may include the following: persistent worry about possible sickness, interpretation of “normal” bodily sensations as an indicator of severe sickness, fear that symptoms are life-threatening in the absence of medical confirmation, mistrust of medical treatments, excessive visits to a doctor or hospital that don’t alleviate concerns, and excessive impairment compared with the commonly expected medical circumstance. While it is not exactly clear what causes somatoform disorders, it is believed that there are several contributing factors. Genetic features, such as hypersensitivity to pain, may be involved. The effect of family dynamics may be another influence. Increased attention to bodily symptoms when

someone has difficulty identifying, discussing, or processing emotions is often involved. And finally, a somatoform disorder may develop in a subconscious effort to attract attention because of the perceived illness.

Somatoform disorder treatment. Treatment for somatoform disorder is geared toward enhancing someone’s daily functioning by reducing physical symptoms or improving the ability to cope with them. Psychotherapy is usually an effective treatment because physical symptoms are often related to underlying psychological conditions. CBT or cognitive behavior therapy is commonly used because of its focus on helping people change their thoughts and behaviors as related to the condition or symptoms. The goal is to help you to decrease preoccupation with your illnesses and learn how to cope with the physical symptoms and other emotional and mental difficulties.

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GenZ With JP

Modern Men Must Step Into the Arena

by JP Plott, Co-host of *Rightside Radio*

"It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs and comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error or shortcoming, but who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, who spends himself in a worthy cause; who, at the best, knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and tim-

id souls who knew neither victory nor defeat." - Theodore Roosevelt.

Society needs men who dare to be great. The feminization of the modern man is responsible for a great deal of our troubles. When men choose to play it safe, out of fear of judgment or failure, the result is far worse than any sting of defeat. What follows is a society devolved into chaos and ruin, where evil can roam without fear of righteous men to stand in its way. God calls for men to be strong and fully committed to the cause of Christianizing the world. There will be those who mock, slander, and take offense to your cause, but we must remember that we have an audience of one. We don't live for man; we live for the

Lord.

A main issue I've noticed among my Gen-Z male counterparts is the overwhelming desire to play life safe. With the rampant rise of easily accessible (and unfortunately legal) THC variants and pornography right in your pocket, we're seeing a frightening increase of men who feel no need to achieve anything great. No desire to build a family or chase a career, and a dopamine reward system so incredibly fried that they're practically paralyzed. They stay on their couch and rot while playing video games or doom-scrolling, watching life pass by day by day. Couple this with antidepressants and a saturation of therapy, no wonder we have a male loneliness epidemic.

It's a scary world out there, but it's the job of men to step out into it. We're hardwired for adventure and a mission, and without one we fall steeply into despair. Society has shamed men into believing that this is "toxic masculinity." Nonsense. Masculinity is not toxic; it's required for a stable society. The attack against masculinity is real, but my message to men listening is also this: You're not a victim. Stand up, step out, and grab life by the horns. Lead a life God calls you to live.

There's also a growing feminization of men in the Church. Soft and squishy sermons call for men to tone down their feelings, and to be loving and understanding of those who are hostile to our beliefs. This is not how God calls the great men of the Bible to be. King David was called to slay Goliath and fight many wars to secure Israel, and the Apostles were called into a world that sought to butcher them because of the Gospel. But of course, the strongest example of righteous masculinity was our Lord Jesus Christ willingly stepping down from Heaven into a fallen world that would hang him from a tree. The message is simply: Godly men do not sit idly by and let the world pass us by. They get up and take action in the name of the Lord.

There's a child predator who once admitted what he looked for before deciding to lure in a child. He said if he noticed a strong and dangerous father, he stayed away. This is quite indicative of all evil in this world. Strong men who stand in the way of

Satan will not only protect themselves, but their families and communities. Fathers have a responsibility to provide and protect, and all men have a duty to their community around them to keep it safe. You must be strong and sober-minded to do so.

As Roosevelt said, no one will remember the critic. There are no statues made for those who comment insults on social media. Only those who were bold enough to dare to be great are remembered. The opinions of those who are too cowardly to act themselves are useless to consider. For men reading this who are currently paralyzed by fear to step out into life, terrified of failure or mockery. God is on your side, and you have all that you need to succeed in Jesus Christ. He lives in you, and you have nothing to fear. So stand up, take your licks, and march forward. Achieve something worth telling your grandkids about.

Justin "JP" Plott is the production manager for Rightside Media, and Producer for Rightside Radio. JP joined the Rightside team in late 2024 after working at WVNN in Huntsville, Alabama. He quickly became a top-notch, multi-media producer and a voice of Gen-Z conservatism.





Cooking with Anna (continued from page 9)

The 5 Ds That Try to Pull You Away From God

by Anna Hamilton

that demands our attention deserves our attention. We can become so busy chasing things, people, opportunities, possessions, entertainment, or even our own plans that we slowly lose sight of God. The enemy doesn't always need to make us do something terrible. Sometimes he just needs to keep us busy enough to stop listening. Ask yourself, "Is this bringing me closer to God or pulling my attention away from Him?" Because not everything that gets your attention deserves access to your heart.

Defeat whispers, "You've already failed. Why even try again?" Maybe you've made a mistake. Maybe you've fallen into the same struggle again. Maybe you've prayed for something and it didn't happen the way you hoped. But failure is an event. It is not your identity. A mistake does not disqualify you from God's grace. Peter denied Jesus, yet Jesus restored him. David made devastating mistakes, yet God still used his life. Your past may be part of your story, but it does not have to determine your future. You can repent. You can learn. You can get back up. You can begin again. Don't let the enemy convince you that because you fell, you have to stay down.

Delay whispers, "You can obey later." Later can sound harmless. I'll pray later. I'll forgive later. I'll make that change later. I'll obey when I'm ready. But delayed obedience can quietly become disobedience. When God places something on your heart, don't continually push it

down the road. If He is asking you to take the next step, take the next step. You don't have to know every step after that. You just have to be willing to obey the one He has placed in front of you. The enemy doesn't always have to destroy your purpose. Sometimes he only needs to distract you, discourage you, defeat you, or delay you long enough that you stop pursuing it.

That's why we have to stay close to God. Stay in His Word. Stay prayerful. Stay aware of the whispers that try to contradict what God has spoken. And most importantly, stay obedient.

When doubt comes, remember God's faithfulness. When discouragement comes, remember His strength. When distraction comes, remember your purpose. When defeat comes, remember His grace. When delay comes, remember that obedience matters.

The enemy may whisper, but God's voice is greater. So don't give up. Don't lose focus. Don't let a difficult season make you abandon your calling. And don't allow a whisper to become louder than the God who created you.

Stay close to God. Stay aware. Stay obedient. Because what God has placed inside of you is worth continuing to pursue. "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" (James 4:7-8).

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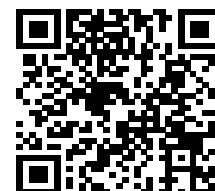
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When Was The Last Time You Were A Beginner?

by Nick Niedzwiecki - Owner, CrossFit Athens

When was the last time you were a beginner at something? Not something you were already pretty good at. Not something comfortable or familiar. I mean something you genuinely didn't know how to do.

When was the last time you had to ask questions? When was the last time you failed at something, tried again, and slowly figured it out?

For many of us, it's probably been a while.

As we get older, we have a tendency to build our lives around things we're already good at. We develop routines. We establish careers. We find hobbies we enjoy. We surround ourselves with familiar people and familiar places.

And there's nothing inherently wrong with that.

The problem comes when comfort turns into stagnation.

I believe we need to do something physically and mentally challenging every single day. That doesn't mean you need to destroy yourself in a workout or completely change your life every morning. It simply means there should be moments in your day when you have to struggle a little bit. Moments when you're uncomfortable. Moments when you have to figure something out. Moments when quitting would be easier than continuing.

We spend so much of our lives trying to eliminate difficulty. We want faster technology, easier transportation, more convenience, and fewer obstacles. But there is a point where making everything easier stops improving our lives.

Humans need challenge.

Think about the last time you learned a new skill. Maybe you tried to play an instrument, learned a new movement in the gym, started gardening, took up woodworking, ran your first 5K or tried something completely outside your comfort zone.

At first, you probably weren't very good.

That's the point.

Being a beginner forces us to be humble. It reminds us that improvement takes time. It teaches us to listen, learn, practice, and fail without immediately giving up.

Physical challenges



teach many of the same lessons.

There is tremendous value in doing something hard when nobody is forcing you to do it.

Pick up something heavy. Walk farther than you normally would. Learn how to squat properly. Try your first pull-up. Sign up for a race. Go on a hike. Take a CrossFit class even though you're nervous about walking through the door.

The specific challenge matters far less than the decision to challenge yourself.

Because the goal isn't just to become physically stronger.

It's to remain someone who is willing to grow.

I think one of the most dangerous places we can arrive in life is the point where we decide, "This is just who I am." I'm too old to learn that. I've never been athletic. I'm not good at things like that. I could never do that.

Those statements create a ceiling on the person you could become.

At CrossFit Athens, we see adults become beginners every single day. Someone learns their first squat at 60. Someone else picks up a barbell for the first time at 40. Another person

walks through the door having never exercised consistently in their life.

Being a beginner isn't something to be embarrassed about.

It means you're still growing.

So ask yourself: When was the last time you did something difficult on purpose? When was the last time you tried something you might fail at? When was the last time you were a beginner?

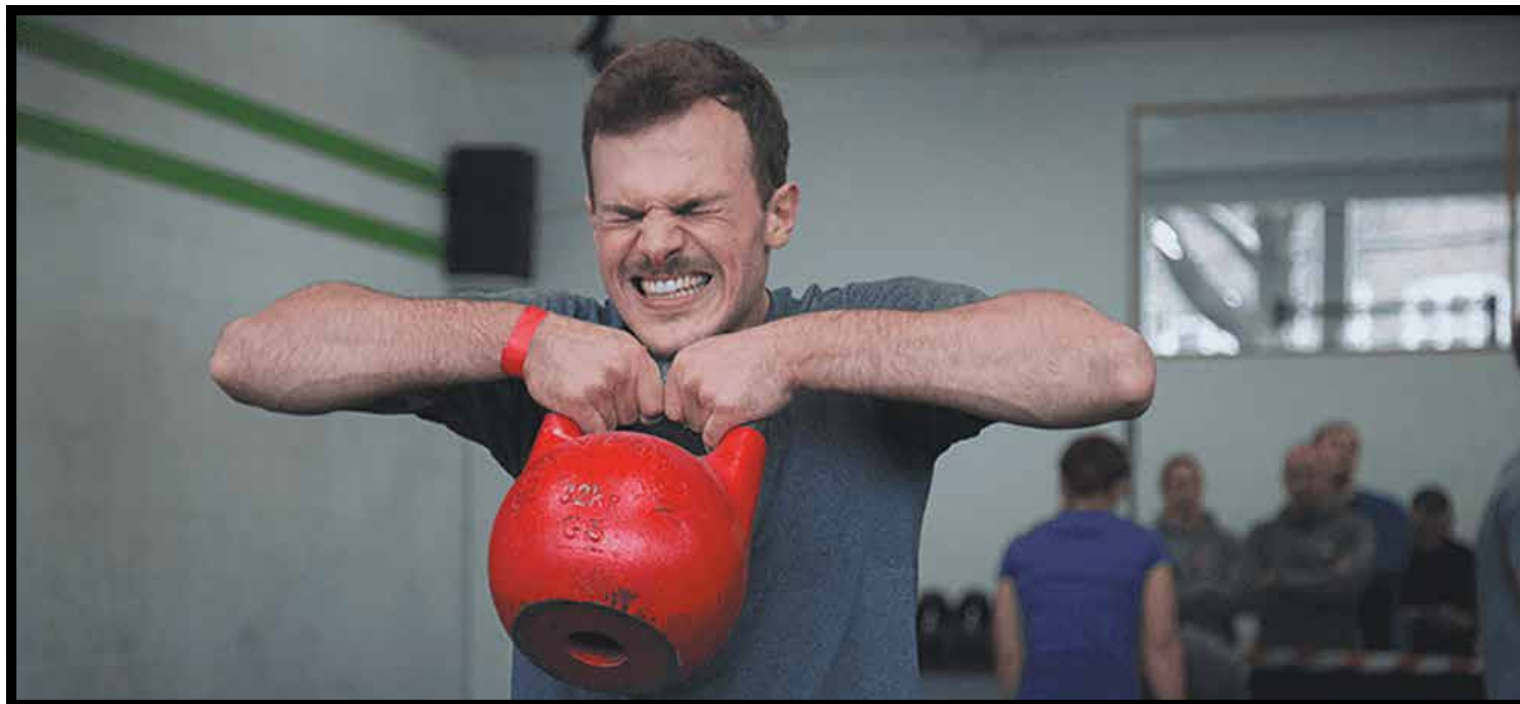
If you can't remember, maybe it's time to find something new.

Keep learning. Keep struggling. Keep challenging yourself.

Stagnation might be comfortable. But progress rarely is.

*Coach Nick
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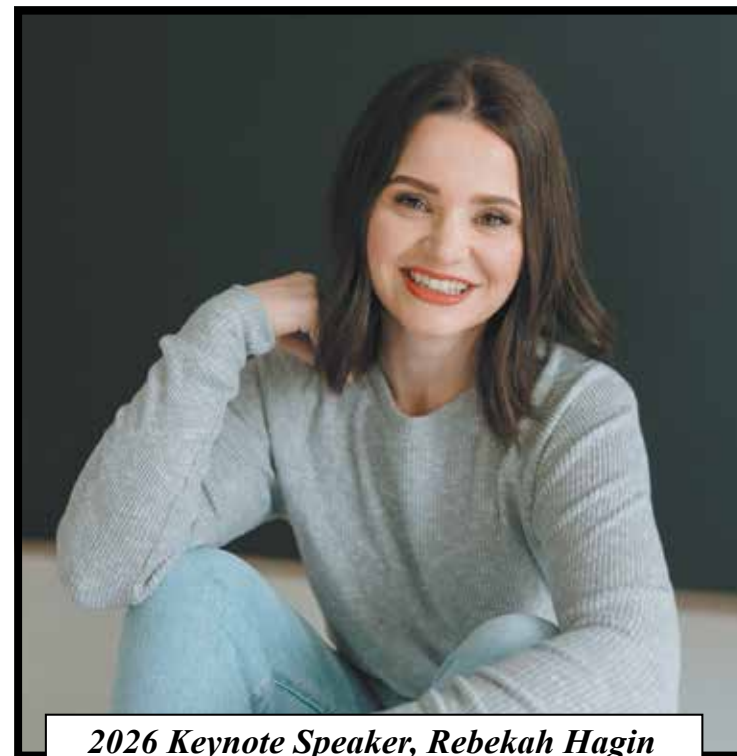


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