

October 2 - October 15, 2026

Athens Now

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Save The Date And Celebrate Twenty Years Of 'Tellin'!



By Ali Elizabeth Turner

Over twenty years ago, four Athens couples headed out for a weekend of fall fun at a Storytelling Festival in Kentucky. They were Wayne and Allison Kuykendal, Jim and Carolyn Hays, Charlie and Joan Hughes, and Ray and Nancy Spears. Storytelling stole their hearts, and they thought, "Athens could do this!" With the help of veteran 'teller Donald Davis, they set out to make the dream a reality. Twenty festivals later, including trying to do it online during COVID, The Athens Storytelling Festival has

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On November 3, Choose John Roberts For AL State Senate, District Two

By Ali Elizabeth Turner

When John Roberts ran for U.S. Congress in 2022, he and his campaign manager personally knocked on a staggering 24,000 doors in five counties, and actually talked to folks.

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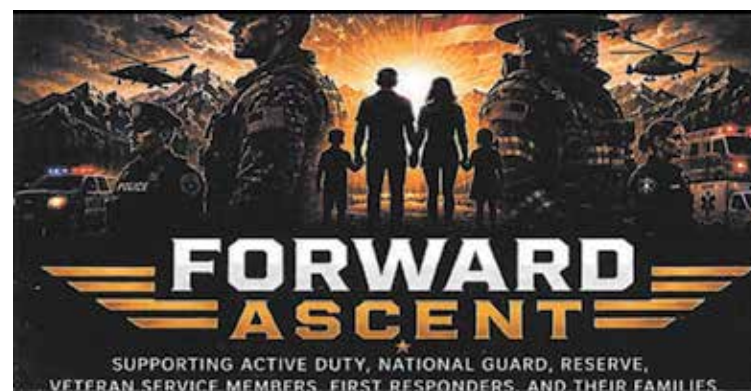
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Publisher's Point

Edie The Excellent



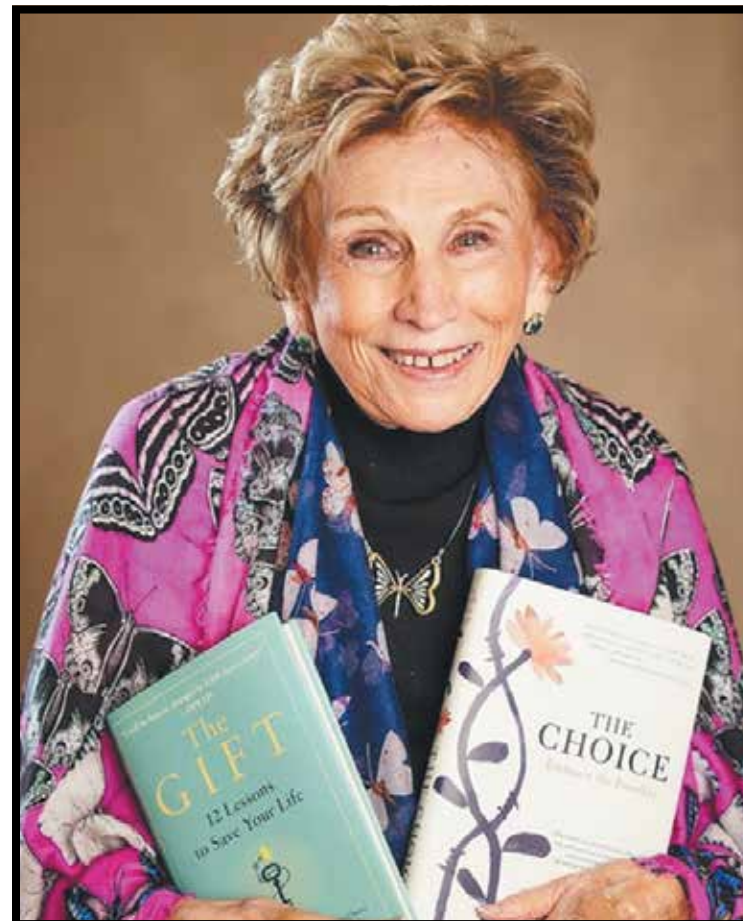
When you have lived as long as I have (which in a few weeks will be 73 years), you start to find that life, even life as a believer, is not at all what or how you expected it would be. It is moving so fast that things seem to be a blur, and so many things that you used to feel you needed in order to be happy just don't matter. But what does matter more than ever is having the sense that all your experiences, faux pas, failures, triumphs, and adventures have not been in vain, and may just end up being useful to those coming behind you.

I remember so clearly when Baby Boomers wore buttons that said, "Never trust anybody over 30," and now I have turned 30 two plus times. I have discovered that indeed it is a good idea to trust people who are significantly older than I, and I have been grieving the loss of one. Her name was Dr. Edie Eger. I never met her, but had the strangest sense of knowing her well and loving her more. She was a Holocaust survivor, a therapist, enormously funny, a former Olympic gymnast, and a ballerina.

Edie got kicked off the Hungarian Olympic Gymnastics Team because she was Jewish.

Then she and her family were sent to Auschwitz. She was literally on her way to the gas chambers in Auschwitz with her mother when Dr. Josef Mengele pulled her out of the line and commanded her to dance for him. Her mother went on to her death, and somehow Edie found the strength to compartmentalize enough to give the literal performance of a lifetime. Mengele rewarded her with a loaf of bread, and she shared it with her fellow prisoners.

One of Edie's great gifts to me was learning to use curiosity as a coping tool. In a death camp, all normal sense of agency, of having any control over one's life or circumstances, is completely stripped away. I have heard her quip that when they got up at 5 a.m. and were told they were going to "the showers," she and her fellow prisoners would say things like, "Hmmm, I vundah iff vee ahr going to da showers or iff ve ahr going to da *SHOW-uhs!* Or, "Hmmmm, I vunduh how today tuhns out?" It was actually adding the sense of curiosity to her unspeakable situation that brought help. She was also a believer and said that she met "this nice Jewish boy vehn I was in da camp. His name was Jesus." Edie



was forced to go on a death march right before liberation came in 1945. She nearly collapsed, and her fellow prisoners carried her, sparing her life.

Edie married, had two daughters, and became a world-renowned therapist, as well as bestselling author. But for me, there are three things about her that have deeply affected me. One was that she didn't get her PhD until she was 50. Another was that she seemed to "go after" the toughest cases imaginable, as far as helping people who had experienced trauma were concerned. And,

she never quit working. She was still working at the age of 98 when she passed. She used to quip that her large and loving family was her "revenge against Hitler." However, she knew the power of forgiveness like few I have ever encountered.

Edie lived a life of excellence all the way to the end, and I want to be like her when I grow up.

Ali Elizabeth Turner

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Axel At The Ready

by Ali Elizabeth Turner

For thousands of years, dogs have “served” in the military in all manner of positions: as couriers, scouts, bomb detectors, and more recently, as highly trained support animals. Within that category of service, there has been to date only one deaf dog that has been prepared for deployment, and his name is Axel. Axel is the project of Sgt. Mollie Karazim, who is part of the ministry team in the Michigan National Guard, and she is also Axel’s trainer and handler.

Axel is deaf, and yet Axel knows close to 50 hand signal commands. Because he feels things so strongly, such as fireworks, vibrations, and other sensations, the set of skills that he has developed to compensate for his inability to hear almost makes it seem to his “peeps” that he has a superpower. Axel just “knows” when a soldier is going through something, and will walk right up, put his head on their leg if they are seated, and simply stay there until the exchange of affection between himself and the soldier does its work. He is trained to handle riding in a Hum-



vee and an airplane, can handle being around explosions, and fulfilled his first formal training as a therapy dog.

Axel was a rescue, and Mollie got him as a puppy. He is now three, and while it took an extra year to give him the training, he is now “up to speed” and prepared for deployment.

Mollie’s unit is getting ready to deploy sometime in the next year, and she is so glad that Axel is going to be able to go

with them. She said:

“When you’re deployed,” she continued, “everything that you have, that sense of home, is taken away from you.

This is why I wanted him to start working with us a year before we left so that he was integrated into the unit — that he knew this was his new normal, these were his people, and this was his job, and that people also had the opportunity to get to know him, so that when we do deploy, and we’re downrange, that he is that piece of home for people.”

Axel doesn’t just lay around and munch on the canine version of MREs. (meals ready to eat) He runs along with soldiers when they doing their PT or are rucking, and the soldiers claim that his presence causes them to run faster.

“Axel is not a tactical asset; he is a force multiplier by means of mental health and soldier readiness,” said

Sgt. Karazim. “He helps soldiers who are fighting wars sometimes silent and in their own heads by offering comfort to them. By being that ice-breaker that allows the unit ministry team to be introduced and help. Dogs are absolutely incredible blessings and I’m so grateful to share him, and it makes me so proud to watch him work and put smiles on people’s faces.”

I have no idea if Axel will become a sergeant in his own right. It has happened before, and I can tell you from experience “in the Great Sandbox” that K-9s and their human counterparts both deserve our respect. Well done, Sgt. Karazim and may Axel prove to be a force multiplier on every front on which he serves.



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Angel Studios announces that Still Hope is on their Top Ten Streaming list!

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WRITTEN BY JESSICA KASSABIAN, JESSICA KASSABIAN DIRECTED BY JESSICA KASSABIAN
CINEMA 15+ PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED SOME MATERIAL MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 15
FATHOM

Calendar of Events

Limited Edition 24k Gold-Plated Christmas Ornament Sale

Celebrate Limestone County's heritage with the Historical Society's annual Christmas ornament. This year's beautiful collectible honors *America 250*, marking our nation's historic milestone, and will be available in October. Where to buy & details: Collectors, this will be our only ornament sale this year and the 250 numbered supply will sell out quickly. \$35 each. Exclusive retailer: Osborne's Jewelers, Athens. During October only. Benefits the Limestone County Historical Society.

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.

Soldier for Christ Event October 10

1:00–5:00PM. It's time to answer the call! Join us for Soldier for Christ, a powerful afternoon centered around faith, mission, and the upcoming feature film *Amazing Grace: An Unqualified Call*. Experience worship, hear the heart behind the film, hear from guest speakers, and be among the first to see our 30-minute film concept. *Amazing Grace: An Unqualified Call* will be filmed right here in Athens, Alabama, and the surrounding communities, bringing this story to life in the places we call home. Immediately following the main event, join us for the Investor Mission Table to learn what it will take to bring this film from concept to production and how you can be part of the mission. Alabama Veterans Museum. 100 Pryor Street East, Athens, AL.

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.

Gettin' Dirty At The Library October 13

11am-Noon. The topic will be seed harvesting. Presented by Brian Brown, Extension Agent. Free and open to the public. Athens-Limestone County Public Library. 603 Jefferson St., Athens, AL. mastergardeners-limestonecountyalabama.org

Swamp John's October 29

4pm–7pm. Sheriff's Rodeo Arena, Athens. The Sons of Confederate Veterans is having a Swamp John's supper to raise funds to purchase a new historical marker. Plates are \$15 and include fried fish, shrimp, or chicken, (or any combination) along with slaw, french fries, hush puppies, and tea. Carry out or eat in. Presale tickets are available. Walkups are encouraged and welcome! Cash, check, or credit cards. Call Daveen Stanford at 256-777-2199 with any questions. camp768@alscv.org for more info.

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

Make A Way's Fall Festival October 30

Make plans to join us October 30th for a Fall Festival for special needs adults. To help us plan, let us know you're coming by registering below. You do not have to register here, you can register onsite. Click the link to register: <https://bit.ly/fallregistrations>. 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM. Home of Henry and Marsha White, 2431 South Hine Street, Athens, AL.

2026 Athens-Limestone Tinsel Trail November 19

It's time to start thinking about lights, ornaments, creativity and a little holiday magic. Businesses, organizations, families and groups can decorate a tree and be part of one of Athens-Limestone County's favorite Christmas traditions. Big Spring Memorial Park. 350 Market Street E, Athens, AL.





Carissa's Corner

A Little Bit Of Kindness

by Carissa Lovvorn

When a sea of RVs, camping chairs, and tents begin flooding the Athens State University's campus, there can only be one explanation: It's time for the Tennessee Valley Fiddlers Convention!

I'm excited to have a booth again this year where I'll not only sell my books and other merchandise but also give kids an opportunity to serve others through a "Tutus on a Mission" service project. Last year, my little visitors made more than eighty "Thinking of You" cards for our local food pantry, The Community Table. This time, they'll create paper flowers that will be gathered into cheerful little bouquets and delivered to patients under the care of Hospice of Limestone County.

This nonprofit organization is near and dear to my heart. Not only do I have several friends who work and volunteer for Hospice, but they've also been there for my family through the care of my grandmother.

Hospice provides comfort and support to patients with terminal illnesses when curative treatment is no longer the focus. Their goal is to help patients remain as comfortable as possible while spending their remaining time surrounded by the people they love.

Once a patient is placed

under hospice care, the organization arranges everything from home medical equipment and supplies to medication management through their licensed physicians. A social worker meets with the family to ensure that necessary legal paperwork is in order and provides resources to help prepare them for the end-of-life transition. Registered nurses conduct check-ups throughout the week and provide 24/7 on-call support.

Hospice not only serves the patient, but also supports the entire family through respite care, counseling, social services, and grief and spiritual support. These are much-needed services for families walking through the difficult journey of caring for a loved one.

I love this quote from their website: "Hospice is not a place, but a concept of care based on the promise that when medical science can no longer add days to life, more life can be added to each day."

More life added to each day. Isn't that something we all aspire to have?

So, how can we help others experience this during their last days on this side of Heaven? There are several ways. Donations are always appreciated, whether monetary or

through equipment or property. You can serve by sharing your personal Hospice experiences with churches, clubs, or other organizations. Hospice also needs volunteers to help with special events, such as the Hospice Chili Challenge or Camp Hope, their annual bereavement day camp for children.

On a more day-to-day basis, Hospice needs volunteers with a variety

of skills and interests, from singing and videography to providing companionship, helping with administrative tasks, and assisting with bathing services.

Or, of course, you could make a few paper flowers, like the ones being lovingly created by the hands of little children in our community. Each flower carries a simple message of encouragement: "You Matter."

"Sending Hugs." "God Loves You."

A little kindness goes a long way.

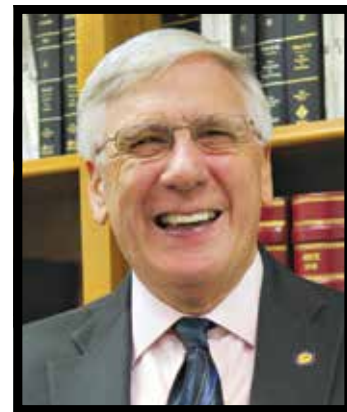
Many blessings,
Carissa Lovvorn

To learn more, please visit. <https://hospiceolc.org/> or call 256-232-5017. To learn more, please visit. <https://hospiceolc.org/> or call 256-232-5017.



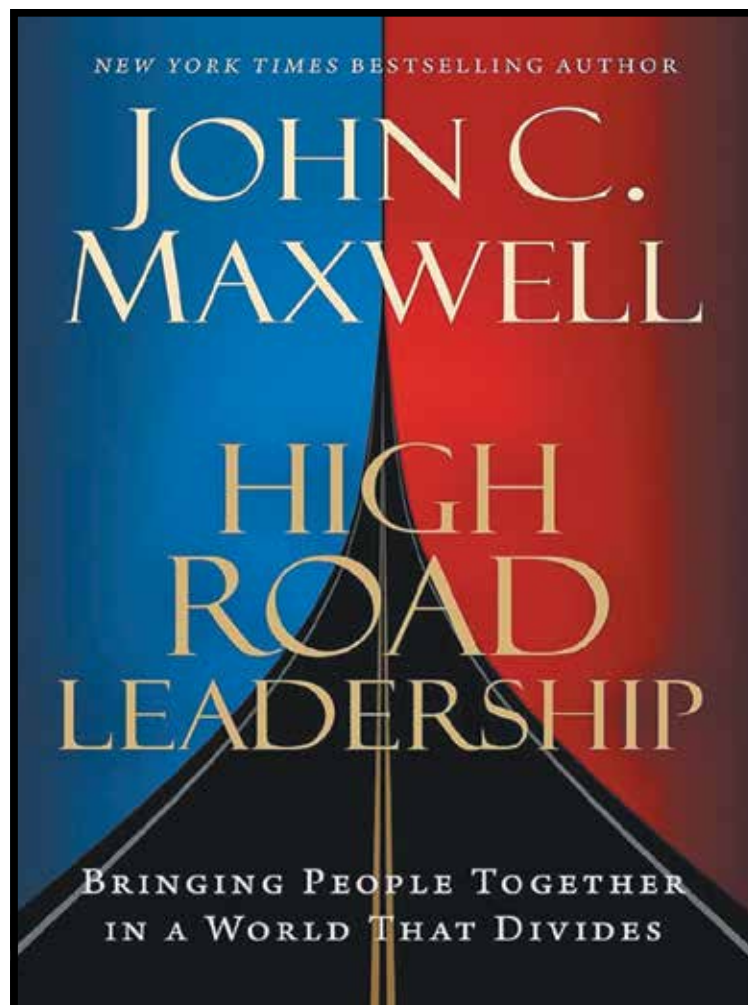
Budgets And The High Road

by Ali Elizabeth Turner



Many times over the past 15+ years we have written about the fact that Mayor Ronnie Marks is one of the few people on the planet that actually gets blessed by budgets. It is something I doubt I will ever understand, but every *Ronnie* that comes out close to October 1 has at least a portion of the column dedicated to the City of Athens budget as well as the process. On Monday night, the city council finalized the budget for the next year, and, as Mayor Ronnie said as he prepared for the meeting, "We are in very good financial shape." As far as some of the numbers are concerned, the budget for this year is 62 million dollars, and 42% of that comes from sales tax.

Mayor Ronnie mentioned further that he is "proud to work with Finance and the City Council" to bring about what he called a "conservative budget," and also noted that by law it must be balanced. He chuckled when he said that in Alabama every budget at the state and local level must be balanced, and said, "It's only those guys in D.C." who try to do otherwise. There has been a concerted effort on the part of the City, County, Chamber of Commerce, and the private



sector to shop local and keep tax dollars here, and it is working.

Further, 19 of the 62 million dollars has been allotted for public safety, and that will need to increase as our population increases. Another thing that has worked well in the last year has been to assign city council members to work in pairs with our various utilities department

heads to function and serve as liaisons, and that is going to continue on into 2027. Another thing that the mayor has to do on an annual basis is examine how different approaches to management in departments are working. "Sometimes we have to trim org charts, and I never like that," he said.

We celebrated the coming of Fiddlers' on Friday and



Storytelling soon. Such a good way to kick off fall! On Tuesday the mayor finished off the selection for students for the Mayor's Youth Commission for the 2026-2027 school year. Thursday was the groundbreaking for the new Hobby Lobby store. On a more whimsical note, Wes Isom, of Isom's Orchard, always has a scarecrow contest, and this year Holly

Hollman made a Dolly Parton-Crow scarecrow in honor of the late Dolly Parton.

We moved on to the topic of our next book. Over the years we have read several books on numbers of topics that almost always come back somehow or way to leadership. John Maxwell is the undisputed 21st century master who has not slowed down even with being in his late 70s. John continues to pour his wisdom and experience out all over the globe. His book, *High Road Leadership: Bringing People Together In A World That Divides*, is going to be our next. We had prayed this time at the beginning of our time together, and so now it was time for Ronnie to roll.

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The Lamp And The Oil

by Anna Hamilton

What people see is not what sustains you. In Matthew 25, Jesus tells the story of ten women waiting for the bridegroom. Ten women. Ten lamps. All ten lamps were burning.

From the outside, they looked exactly the same. No one standing in the crowd could tell them apart. They were all waiting. They were all carrying lamps. They all had light. They all looked prepared.

But there was one important difference. Five had brought extra oil. Five had not. And when the bridegroom was delayed, their lamps began to go out. That story carries a message for us today that goes much deeper than what people see on the outside.

The lamp is what people see. We live in a world that places enormous value on the lamp. The appearance. The presentation. The reputation. The perfectly worded Scripture post. The beautiful prayer. The Christian T-shirt. The worship video. The person who always seems to have the right thing to say.

And none of those things are necessarily bad, but here's the question: What happens when nobody is watching? What does your faith look like in the quiet? What does your prayer life look

like when there is no audience?

Do you still seek God when there is nothing to post? Do you still worship when nobody is applauding? Do you still obey when nobody will ever know whether you did? Because people can see the lamp. But God sees the oil.

God looks beyond the appearance. People see our outward lives. God sees our hearts. People see the moments when our faith shines brightly. God sees what happens in the hidden places. He sees the prayers whispered through tears. He sees the Bible you open when nobody else knows. He sees the obedience that nobody applauds. He sees the battles you fight in secret. He sees the moments when you choose Him even when it would be easier not to.

That's the oil. It's the relationship with God that exists beneath the appearance of faith. It's the time spent with Him when nobody is watching. It's the intimacy that cannot be photographed, posted, or performed.

You can't borrow someone else's oil. One of the most sobering

continued on page 22

Baked Feta Potatoes

Ingredients:

*2 large baking potatoes
1 block of feta
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 teaspoon dried thyme
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon black pepper
½ teaspoon red chili flakes
1 head of garlic, top cut off
1 lemon halved
1 tablespoon honey
¼ cup fresh basil*

Directions:

Preheat your oven to 400°F.

Wash and cube your potatoes. Add them to a saucepan and cover with water, then bring to the boil. Par-boil the potatoes for 6-8 minutes (no more than 10), then drain and allow to dry for 2-3 minutes.

Add the potatoes to your baking dish along with the thyme, oregano, salt, pepper, and 2 tablespoon olive oil, and stir them to coat them evenly.

Drizzle the garlic with a little olive oil, wrap it in foil, and add to the baking dish.



Roast the potatoes and garlic for 30 - 40 minutes until golden and crispy and almost cooked.

Remove the potatoes from the oven and take out the garlic. Add the feta to the middle of the tray (I like to dip one side in the seasonings, then flip it over). Squeeze over it half the lemon.

Put the dish back in the oven for another 15 minutes.

Once the garlic has cooled, squeeze the garlic out of its skins and mash with the flat of your knife. Set aside.

Tourism To Tourist Part 2

by Stephanie Reynolds, Athens-Limestone Tourism Association



HELLO my fabulous neighbors! I hope September was a wonderful month for you!

I wanted to give y'all an overview of what we did for our beach trip. Please take some of these ideas and make your next vacation (even if it's just a staycation) fun and exciting and memorable. I think it is important to make your staycation as deliberate and memorable as a vacation (ooo...! Do I sense a future article? Why, yes, I believe I do!)

I mentioned lagniappe in Part 1, so let's dive deep in that. Budget is a concern, of course, so I got things inexpensively. I shopped locally as much as I could and then ordered what I needed to.

Each of us got our own beach bag. Each bag had lots of pockets which I filled with: comfy shoes for a quick trip to the lobby, two sets of water shoes, a beach towel that "fits" each personality (Sort of. Mine was a bizarre "Star Spangled Tomato" thing. Not sure what that says about me, to be honest.), mini puzzles, face/skin/hair treatments to include Korean face masks, floating chairs, a gift card for snacks, cheap sunglasses, a hat, lip balm, tumblers, bright plastic flower hair clips, an inner tube, goggles, journal and pen, etc.

I cleaned my truck (the first part of the experience was a clean farm truck) and I decorated the inside with paper flowers, a Chinese lantern, and various tropical signs and cut outs.

I got cheap tin boxes and filled them with candy and gum for the car rides. THAT was awesome. It was a super inexpensive way to add some fun on the way there.

I used bins instead of suitcases. They stack, you can fit a lot, and when we got to the condo, they were easy to load onto a cart and take upstairs. I normally tend to use a suitcase, but then need several smaller bags for miscellaneous, and this worked so much better.

We had already calculated the time, but I highly suggest double checking your GPS. I am still not convinced the route we took was the quickest. We ended up getting there later than we intended and by the time we checked in,

got groceries, and came back, it was dark and we were exhausted! If we had left earlier, we could have enjoyed a more restful first evening.

I don't know if you remember, but a while back I wrote an article about how to enjoy the trip even if you are sick. Welp, you guessed it, one of us succumbed to some sort of crud—sniffly, feverish malaise. Now, "salt water, fresh air, and sunshine" is a great treatment for a cold, but her being sick did mean we couldn't go out to the one nice restaurant we had planned on as we didn't want to share germs and ruin other peoples' vacations. But my amazing daughter-in-law, who had been the one to want a nice

supper out, suggested we just dress up all pretty and eat in the condo, and that's what we did! Honestly, it was more pleasant to eat by the ocean than in a noisy, crowded restaurant.

Let's see, what other tips can I think of? Well, we had a Starbucks on the property, but they did not take the Starbucks cards I bought for the ladies because they were not an official store, just sold the coffee. I am glad I found that out before they tried to use theirs!

I liked the drivers in Florida but not the gas prices! WOW! I tried to eke my way back to Alabama for some cheaper gas.

I also loved the water. The fish were honestly so friendly! There were

schools of blue-silver striped fish that swam right around us on their way down the coast. There were little fish that hung out at our feet, following us around, to eat whatever we kicked up from the sand. There were tiny hermit crabs and even a live sand dollar! As we walked a very long way to the pier from our condo at night, we saw schools of some type of ray, silent and shadowy in the dark, which delighted us no end.

I highly recommend making one of your first stops at the Tourism Office wherever you are going. Those offices will know of deals, coupons, events, and other things to make your trip amazing.

The biggest tip for making a trip wonderful is to not expect perfection. Expect that it might rain, be cold, be sneezy. Expect forgotten swimsuits and lost shoes. Expect things to be a little more expensive or closed for repairs. If you do, you keep your mind in a spirit of adventure instead of "If it's not perfect, it's terrible." Instead of being tragic, bumps and oopses become opportunities to laugh, pivot, and make unexpected memories. Indeed, the most "perfect" trips can be the ones where nothing right happened at all, but you were with your loved ones and y'all survived and thrived together.

Don't forget the Cemetery Stroll on Sunday the 4th of October at the Athens City Cemetery and the Storytelling Festival on October 22-24!



Save The Date And Celebrate Twenty Years Of 'Tellin'!

by Ali Elizabeth Turner

continued from page 1

become an Athens favorite, and this year these four sets of pioneers will be honored for bringing such a treasured event to us year after year. Donald Davis has been here for all 20, and the 'tellers will tell you that this is their favorite festival because we have made them family.

The 'tellers ain't bush league, either. Among them are music industry award winners, Emmy award winners, children's book award winners, and more. I will tell you that I have laughed so hard at these events that I staggered down the street afterwards trying to regain my composure.

Recently, I sat down in a charming new coffee shop with Leah Oakley, who in 2024 became the president of the Athens Storytelling Festival. She happens to be a 'teller herself, having personally studied under the tutelage of Donald Davis. Leah retired a few years ago as a bookkeeper for our public schools and is one of many people who works tirelessly to give "kids of all ages" the opportunity to hear the experts ply their craft. When

we met, Leah had spent the day with kindergarteners in her Johnny Appleseed costume, complete with a pot on her head. She was tired but happy, having told the tale of Mr. Appleseed to the kiddos. One of them asked permission to tap the pot on Leah's head and was absolutely delighted. We got down to the details of this special celebration.

The festival will be held once more on the Athens State University Campus, and there are free events in addition to "School Days," the opportunity for local students (whether public, private, or homeschool) to attend special sessions designed just for them, and our local legislators have made it possible for them to do so at no charge. We are the only city in the nation that does this, and we thank our Alabama state representatives and local sponsors who make it possible for kids to hear life lessons that are laugh-out-loud funny.

The basic schedule of the week is as follows

Monday, Oct 19 at 5-7:30 p.m.

Once again Donald Davis will be presenting his most

excellent workshop for educators entitled, "Story Power: Teaching That Sticks." Dinner will be served in Sandridge Hall from 5-6 p.m. -- however, the dinner reservations are now closed. However, the workshop that will be held in McCandless Hall is free and open to the public.

Tuesday-Thursday, October 20-October 22

School Days -- Kids from throughout Limestone County will attend all three days, and I can say from experience that this is my favorite event. To watch students actually be engaged with something other than a smartphone is refreshing, and watching them laugh through listening and imagining is delightful. Donald Davis, Carol Cain, Bill Lep, Josh Goforth and Adam Booth will be the 'tellers for School Days.

Tuesday Night - 6:00 p.m.

Student 'Teller Showcase is the opportunity for the young 'tellers to trot out their talent under the big tent. Everyone is invited, and admission is free.

Thursday Night 7:00 p.m.

The Olio & Veterans Night, Featuring Carol Kane as



Rosie the Riveter

The Olio, which in the food world means a highly spiced stew, or it can also mean a miscellaneous collection of things, is the night in which all of the 'tellers give a "sampling of their wares" in preparation for the Friday and Saturday events. The winners of the student competition will also tell their stories. Veterans showing ID and one guest are admitted free.

Friday-Saturday

9 a.m.-9 p.m.

The 20th Athens Storytelling Festival is officially on!

The 20th Anniversary 'Tellers

Donald Davis

Davis began to use stories to illustrate sermons in his 25-year career as a Methodist minister. He was also asked to begin performing at festivals and in other settings until he retired from the church to tell stories full time. Donald is one of the main reasons we have a festival and that it is so loved by all.

The author of eighteen books and more than forty original recordings, Davis is the recipient of both the Circle of Excellence and the Lifetime Achievement Awards from the National Storytelling Network.

Josh Goforth

Josh is a musical prodigy as well as an outstanding 'teller. He started playing in church at the age of four, plays ten instruments, and I have seen him do impossible things with a fiddle and bow.

Bill Lepp

Bil (and yes, that IS how he

spells his name) is one of the old timers of the festival, and is a special favorite of the kids. Bil has also won several awards and travels most of the year telling stories all over our nation.

Carol Cain

Carol Cain is from a big family and a small town, which both give her plenty to talk about! For the past 30 years, she has brought "Rosie the Riveter" to life, and has performed on stage, radio, and television. Carol is also no stranger to museums, schools, churches, senior centers, and libraries throughout the Southeast.

Adam Booth

Adam specializes in Appalachian stories as well as classics that he retells. He is known for his animal sounds and has performed in places such as the Kennedy Center in NY, in Canada and Australia, as well as at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough.

December 12

Tim Lowry will once again perform Dickens' Christmas Carol

There will be two performances of Tim Lowry's presentation of the Christmas classic, one at 2 p.m. and one at 7 p.m. I have heard him manage to be all the characters, including Scrooge, and I don't know how he does it. Highly recommended and will be in McCandless Hall.

The 20th Athens Storytelling Festival is almost here, so save the date and come celebrate! Info as well as ticket purchases are at athensstorytellingfestival.com. See you there!



Tennessee Valley Spotlight

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On November 3, Choose John Roberts For AL State Senate, District Two

By Ali Elizabeth Turner

continued from page 1

He would hear over and over again, “No one has ever come to our door and asked us what we think.” Recently, John told me, “The relationships that I built and the things that I learned in that campaign, taught me a lot. People would also say, “Your time is coming, and when it does, give it another go.” So, he is. John is seeking the seat of soon-retiring Senator Tom Butler, and has the endorsement of Mac McCutcheon as well as Senator Butler.

What is different now is that he is a young dad with two boys, ages 1 and 4. We talked at length about how becoming a parent absolutely changes everything, and serving his family well is another crucial step in preparing John to serve the people of Alabama. John comes from a family that fostered many kids. He is strongly pro-life and pro-family, is for school choice, believes in the 2nd Amendment, is a successful business owner, and has a fierce desire to see North Alabama get what he calls its “fair share” on a number of fronts. He explains below:

For too long, Montgomery has treated North Alabama like its personal ATM, sending

our tax dollars down I-65 with little return. I will advocate relentlessly for our district and ensure that our money comes back home where it belongs. When North Alabama receives the resources it generates and deserves, our families prosper, businesses expand, and the entire state benefits.

He says further:

North Alabama is the economic engine of our state, and we deserve infrastructure that matches our contributions. For too long, we’ve received only pennies on the dollar from Montgomery to support the fastest-growing region in Alabama. This neglect must end. I will fight for the critical investments we need to expand highways, repair aging bridges, and deploy modern digital infrastructure. These improvements are essential to keeping our region competitive and ensuring North Alabama continues to drive our state’s economy forward.

He told me that District 2 has immense assets as well as responsibilities. North Alabama protects our state, and in many ways, the nation and the world. It’s got to have the right resources to be able to meet that responsibility.

As a Tuscaloosa grad with a

bachelor’s degree in political science as well as a master’s in public administration, John firmly believes that Alabama could be a beacon of educational excellence by raising standards. That determination to raise standards also applies to business, as well as with those in public service. “It has to do with mindset, accountability, and leadership,” he said.

Here is more of John’s story:

John Roberts serves as the Real Estate & Development Manager for Freedom Real Estate & Capital, LLC, a full-service commercial real estate development company in Huntsville. In this role, he manages projects that bring jobs and investment to North Alabama. Freedom is a 100% employee-owned ESOP and a sister company to Torch Technologies.

John’s career has been defined by a commitment to driving economic growth and workforce development in North Alabama. As the former Business Retention & Expansion Director for the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber, he managed high-impact projects that recruited thousands of jobs and built the strategic partnerships



that keep our regional economy thriving. A champion for vocational training, John co-founded the North Alabama Homebuilding Academy. This no-cost workforce development school prepares men and women for high-demand careers in the construction trades—a model recognized by Governor Kay Ivey with the 2021 AlabamaWorks! Innovator Award. John is running for the State Senate to bring fresh, businesslike thinking to a Montgomery system that’s left North Alabama behind.

John grew up in Hartselle and lives in Huntsville with his wife, Madison, and their two sons, John Jr. and Reid. They are active members of Asbury Church in Madison. John emphasized that he is not interested in going to Montgomery to have a title; he is going to serve. As a college athlete, he understands being part of a team and finding ways to work well with people who have different strengths and skillsets from his own. He possesses a desire to learn as well as a sense of curiosity and a commitment to taking responsibility. He told me that he had been taught that a person needs to “learn the difference between the signal and the noise,” and with a clear focus, he wants to truly “signal” that Alabama is open for business at a higher standard. If you live in District 2, and this is what you are looking for in a state senator, then vote for John Roberts on November 3.





Captain's Log

Fishers Of Men

by Brenda Wilkerson

"Goldfish. The rainbow kind."

This year, when the new school year calendar showed up in the usual pile of paperwork, God's still small voice whispered:

God: "Birthdays."

Me: "Huh?"

God: "Write in their birthdays."

Me: "All of them?"

God: "Buy their favorite snack and drink."

Me: "Ohhhhhh, got it!"

And so I did. That simple, cheap calendar most people lose or throw away by now became the most valuable item on the bus — including the bus.

God: "Set alarms. Don't let one slip by."

Me: "Yes, Sir."

Also me: ADHD-gifted —

I knew He knew the brain He equipped me with.

The first opportunity to celebrate a birthday came within the first two weeks. I checked my calendar and found a scribbled request I could barely decipher.

Once I finally figured out whose name it was, I struck up a conversation to confirm her favorite snack — without teasing her about her handwriting.

"Goldfish. The rainbow kind."

This girl rarely made eye contact or even a grunt as she climbed those three steps, twice a day — ten times a week, forty times a month, four hundred times a school year. When she did speak with her friends, it was usually harsh, crude, and mostly inappropriate. She'd been that way the entire school year



before — quiet, closed-off, guarded in a way that seemed too heavy for someone so young. I never scolded her, because I'd witnessed how hard her life was compared to others her age.

God reminded me not to take it personally. He also impressed something heavy on my heart: there wasn't an adult on this planet who hadn't already broken her trust.

Then came the day. Her 17th birthday. The day I set the tone.

The first gift of the school year was delivered — Goldfish, the rainbow kind.

A small thing — a snack, a gesture, a promise kept. And that's when I saw it: a sheepish grin breaking through her tough exterior. A flicker of the little seven-year-old still underneath it all. A sign of vulnerability she'd worked so hard to protect, cracking open at the simple kindness of being remembered.

I sat there in awe. God knew exactly what she needed to open that deeper connection.

To this very day, I keep a small bag of Goldfish tucked in a pocket behind my seat so she has access whenever she needs it — whether the hunger is physical or emotional. She eats Goldfish for breakfast and a few more on the ride home. Surprisingly, she always saves a little in her bag to make sure she has some the next day.

Within just two weeks, I was watching a side of her even she didn't know existed.

Now, when I drop her off, I get a warm goodbye — a goofy, squinty-eyed smile and a quick double-handed wave as she passes in front of my bus to the sidewalk.

As she skips toward her trailer, rainbow Goldfish in her tummy, my soul's eyes see it: a little girl, free and happy, pigtails bouncing, a happy heart within her circumstances.

To fully understand that very profound invitation Jesus offered to his very first disciple, is the same invitation to us all.

"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Not the rainbow kind. The eternal kind.

Because a rainbow was never just a color — it was always a promise. And every Goldfish I hand out this year isn't just a snack. It's a small, edible covenant: I see you. I remember you. You are not forgotten. The same promise God made after the flood, tucked now into a pocket behind a bus seat, waiting to catch one more child who needs to know — they matter.

Fishers of men. The eternal kind.

Lord, thank You for calling me to be Your hands and feet to these tender, wounded souls. I am humbled and available to serve as long as You have me here.

Forever Your Servant,

Captain B





McGhee On Management

Using Criticism In Your Favor

by Detri McGhee - CLU, ChFC

"Criticism management" may be a new term to you, but it addresses a multitude of age-old, universal problems. Fear of criticism gives peer pressure its power. Misuse of criticism crushes dreams and promotes lies. Inadequate criticism-management skills guarantee that the dreaded "Annual Job Performance Reviews" are virtually useless exercises consuming valuable time, energy, and emotion at best, and monsters of dreadful destruction at their worst.

Refusal to accept valid criticism stifles our growth and success. Equally as destructive is the refusal to release our minds from criticism's destructive power and hateful self-talk. Either error magnifies the negative energy required merely to cope with our life situations, much less triumph over them – and in the midst of them.

I will often ask my clients, "If you could control the results of all the criticism ever leveled against you, and virtually guarantee that even your staunchest foes could not truly harm you, how would life change?" Invariably they tell me, "Dramatically."

I have been blessed to work in the financial and insurance worlds and for church organizations and not-for-profits. I have been a trainer, and I am the author of CRITICISM

MANAGEMENT: A Speedy Growth Process. I am currently working with corporations on EI (Emotional Intelligence) Training for all levels of employees, and with individuals and small groups on more personal levels.

CRITICISM MANAGEMENT training brings wisdom, direction, tools, thoughts to ponder, and simple methods to apply to the handling of any and all criticism you will ever face.

Some questions you might consider are:

- How well do I handle criticism? Or, a better question is usually -- How well do OTHERS think I handle criticism?
- How can I get value from an undeserved, incorrect criticism?
- Should it matter WHO brings the criticism? Or HOW they deliver that criticism?
- Why would I want to listen to a mean-spirited criticism?
- What is the best response to a criticism from my boss? Or a co-worker? Or a subordinate at work? Or a family member?

Through the CRITICISM MANAGEMENT program, many issues are addressed and valuable information and techniques for growth are developed.

Warren Buffett says the most profitable investment we can make is in-



vesting in our own education and knowledge. Taylor Swift told her Swifties from the stage that they should not let other people's opinions dictate their views of themselves. Even if you are not a great fan of either, you probably agree that both have attained a high level of success in their chosen fields, and just might have some valuable opinions. Several other benefits from EI Training, specifically addressed in the CRITICISM MANAGEMENT Program are:

- Improved impact on people where you live and work
- Greater understanding and management of the emotions of yourself and others in moments of tension and conflict
- Deeper connection with your employees, co-workers, friends, and perhaps most im-

portantly, your family

- Some practical ways to handle sudden crisis events
- Greater appreciation of diversity and how to treasure and benefit from that diversity

Studies have shown that people with better developed emotional intelligence skills, as criticism management provides, have greater mental health, job performance, and leadership skills. Personal and professional life benefits.

Our website is: www.criticismmanagement.com

com where we give you a FREE complete outline of our managing criticism technique. This site is being updated, so if you should have trouble reaching us, email to: detrimcghee@gmail.com or call/text Detri directly at 870-370-0160.

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

Blue Tarp Blues

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

Secure Your Load: Help Keep Limestone County Roadsides Litter Free

A clean community starts with each of us—and one of the easiest ways to help keep Limestone County beautiful is to **Secure Your Load**.

Every day, trucks and trailers travel our roads carrying household trash, construction debris, yard waste, furniture, cardboard, and other materials. When these loads are not properly covered or secured, items can blow or fall onto the roadway. What may begin as one piece of trash can quickly become a roadside litter problem.

Secure Your Load is a simple campaign with an important message: **If you are hauling trash or debris, cover your load and make sure everything is securely fastened before you leave.**

Why Does Roadside Litter Matter?

Roadside trash is more than an eyesore. Litter can have lasting environmental, economic, and safety impacts on our community.

Trash that falls from vehicles can create dangerous driving conditions. Drivers may have to suddenly swerve or stop to avoid debris in the roadway. Large objects can cause vehicle damage or even contribute to crashes.

tribute to crashes.

Litter also affects our environment. Plastic, Styrofoam, paper, cans, and other debris can wash from roadsides into storm drains, streams, and waterways. Wildlife can become tangled in litter or mistake trash for food. Over time, some materials break down into smaller pieces and microplastics that can remain in the environment.

Roadside litter also takes away from the beauty of Limestone County. Clean roadsides contribute to a community that residents can be proud of and that visitors want to enjoy. Litter cleanup requires volunteers, organizations, and local governments to spend valuable time and resources removing trash that could have been prevented in the first place.

Preventing litter is always better—and less expensive—than cleaning it up.

KALB Has Free Tarps Available! Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful (KALB) is encouraging residents, businesses and anyone who transports trash or debris to take an extra minute to secure their loads.

Thanks to a **TVA Cares grant funded by TVA and Athens Utilities**, KALB has **tarps available at no charge** to help residents cover loads being transported.



The tarps are available at the KALB office:

Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful

125 East Street

Athens, Alabama

**Monday–Friday,
9 a.m.–4 p.m.**

Because supplies are limited, please call ahead to make sure tarps are still available before coming by.

**Call KALB at
256-233-8000.**

It Only Takes a Few Minutes

Before heading down the road, take a moment to walk around your truck or trailer. Make sure trash and debris are contained and that your tarp, straps, ropes, or other securing materials are properly fastened.

Don't assume a load is secure simply because it looks stable when you leave. Wind cre-

ated while traveling can lift lightweight materials and send them flying from a truck bed or trailer.

Whether you are taking a small load to the landfill, hauling debris from a home project, or transporting materials for your business, **cover it, secure it, and keep it from becoming someone else's roadside litter.**

Be Part of the Solution

Keeping Limestone County clean is a community effort. KALB works throughout the year with volunteers,

schools, businesses, community organizations and local governments to reduce litter and improve our environment. But litter prevention begins before trash ever reaches the roadside.

Secure Your Load. Protect our roads. Protect our environment. Keep Limestone County beautiful.

Stop by KALB for a free tarp while supplies last—and help make sure what you haul arrives where it belongs.



(256) 233-8000

KALBCares@gmail.com
www.KALBCares.com



Slinkard On Scriptural Success

Living A Life Others Follow

by D. A. Slinkard

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

It is hard to believe this year is almost over – in fact, just five more articles after this one and the year will be over. This got me to thinking about certain times, and seasons, and this led me to thinking about different words. When we hear the word “leader,” we often picture someone with a title. We think about the boss, the manager, the supervisor, the coach, the pastor, the teacher – sometimes we think about the person whose name is on the office door. However, over the years, I have learned something important and it is that you do not need a title to have influence.

I spent years in management, and one thing I learned is that a title may give you authority, but it doesn't automatically give you influence. A company can put “Manager” underneath your name and require employees to follow your instructions, but a title cannot make those employees respect you. Respect has to be earned, yet many times people try to bully their way into respect.

There is a tremendous difference between someone doing what you say because they have to and someone listening to what you say because they trust who you are. The same thing is true outside the workplace. You may never run a company. You may never supervise a single employee. However, we need to remember that somebody is watching you.

Your children are watching. Your coworkers are watching. Your friends are watching. Your neighbors are

watching. People notice how you handle pressure. They notice whether you keep your word and how you treat people who cannot do anything for you. They notice whether you work hard when the boss is watching—and when the boss is gone.

Whether we realize it or not, our lives are constantly teaching people something about us. That is why influence begins with example. It is easy to tell other people what they ought to do. It is much harder to consistently demonstrate it. Our talk talks, and our walk talks, but our walk talks louder than our talk talks.

If you want people around you to work hard, work hard. If you want people to be dependable, be dependable. If you want people to have a good attitude, have a good attitude. If you want people to admit when they are wrong, be willing to say, “I was wrong.”

If you want people to treat others with respect, let them see you treating people with respect. There is an old saying, “Your actions speak so loudly that I cannot hear what you are saying.” There is a lot of truth in that. People may forget the advice you gave them, but they will remember the example you gave them. It simply comes down to the idea that people do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.

I also believe influence is built in the little things. We sometimes imagine that making a difference requires doing something enormous. Usually it doesn't. It may be showing up when you said you would. It may be encour-

aging somebody who is having a difficult day. It may be doing a job correctly when cutting corners would be easier. It may be staying calm when everyone else is upset. It may be taking responsibility instead of making excuses. It may simply be being the person others know they can count on.

None of those things require a title. They require character, and character has a way of creating influence. Think about the people who have influenced your own life. Chances are, many of them

did not influence you because of the position they held. They influenced you because of the person they were.

There is another side of influence that we should remember: you don't get to decide whether you influence people. You only get to decide what kind of influence you will be. We are all leaving an impression. A negative attitude influences a workplace. Constant complaining influences a family. Cutting corners influences coworkers. Gossip influences friendships, and we cannot forget

the opposite is also true.

Integrity influences people. Kindness influences people. Consistency influences people. Hard work influences people. Faithfulness influences people. Sometimes one person's attitude can change the atmosphere of an entire room. So instead of asking, “What position do I have?” perhaps we should ask, “What kind of influence am I having?” We cannot forget that we are influencing those around us; either for the good or for the bad.





Learning As A Lifestyle

When Leadership Needs To Take A Breath

by Eric Betts

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

We live in a culture that often celebrates people who keep going. The successful leader handles one responsibility and moves immediately to the next. There are meetings to attend, people to help, deadlines to meet, families to care for, and communities that depend upon us. Yet Baltimore pastor and leadership scholar, Walter S. Thomas Sr., in his THREAD model, begins with a surprisingly simple practice: Take a Breath. Sometimes the wisest thing a leader can do is pause. Taking a breath does not mean abandoning responsibility; it creates enough space to remember why we accepted the responsibility in the first place. Constant motion can keep us productive while

leaving us little time to ask whether the life we are living still reflects the values we claim to hold.

Thomas follows this with another important practice: Harmonize the Different Selves. Most of us carry more than one identity into each day. We may be professionals, parents, spouses, friends, neighbors, caregivers, church members, community leaders, and people with private hopes and struggles that seldom appear on a résumé. Problems arise when these different parts of life become competitors rather than companions. Vocational success should not require succeeding in one part of life while becoming a stranger to ourselves in

another. Harmony does not mean that every responsibility receives equal time every day. It means learning to live as one whole person across the many places where life calls us to serve.

There is a spiritual dimension to this kind of wholeness. We can become so occupied with what has been entrusted to our hands that we neglect the person into whose hands it was entrusted. We cannot faithfully steward our responsibilities while continually neglecting the life through which that stewardship must occur. Taking a breath creates room for reflection: What is driving me? What have I neglected? Which part of myself has become dispro-

portionately large, and which part has nearly disappeared? Thomas's remaining THREAD practices—reinvesting in God, extending ourselves differently, accepting advice and help, and continuing to discover and develop ourselves—remind us that healthy leadership requires renewal, relationship, humility, and continued growth. The goal is not merely to recover enough energy to return to the same unhealthy patterns, but to become more whole in the way we live and lead.

Perhaps true success requires occasionally resisting the pressure to keep moving. A breath can become a moment of interpretation, allowing us to examine where

we are before deciding where we should go next. Harmonizing our different selves can then become an act of formation, bringing vocation, relationships, spirituality, and personal well-being back into conversation with one another. A life of purpose should not require losing the person who is living it. Learning as a lifestyle means learning not only how to accomplish more, but also when to pause, listen, receive help, and become whole. Sometimes moving forward begins by taking a breath.

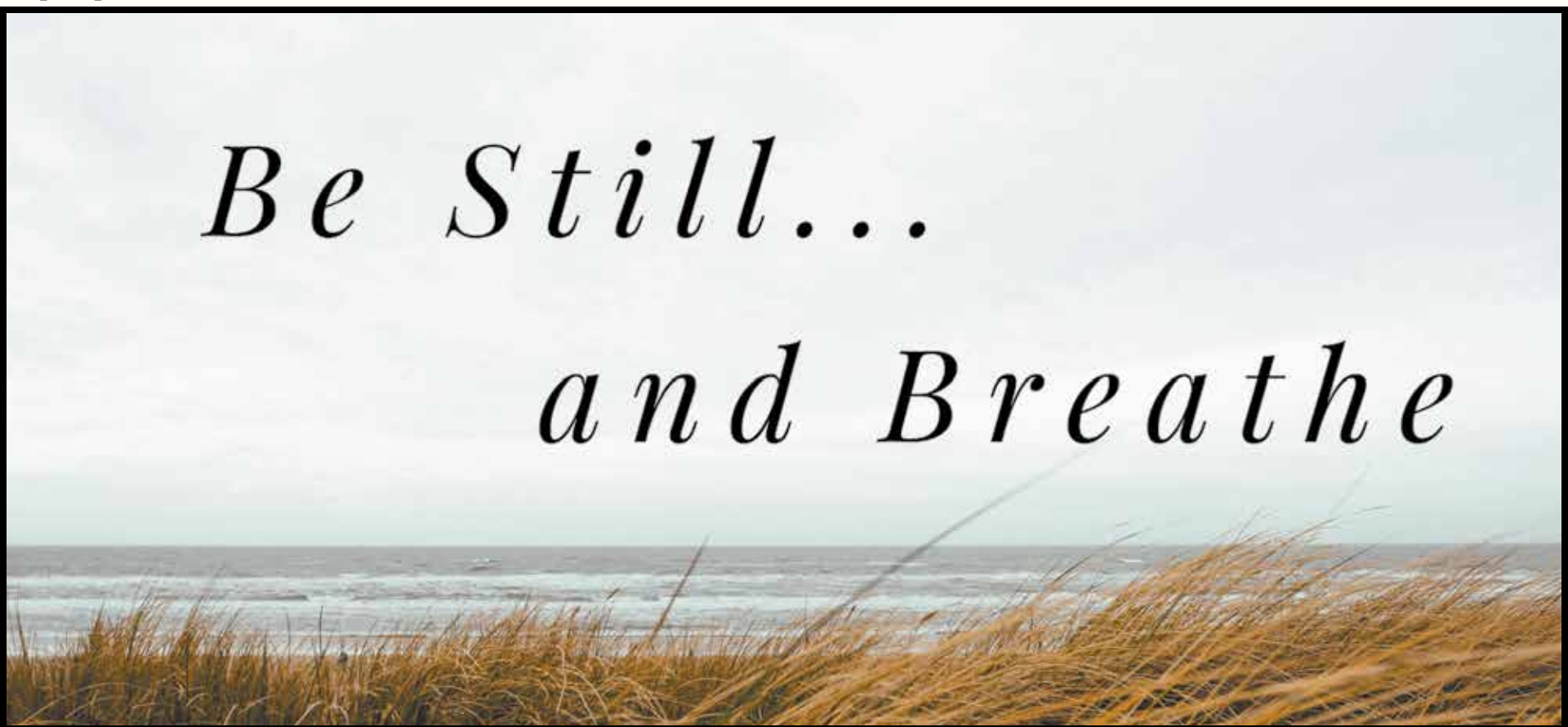
Eric M. Betts, PhD

Curtis Coleman Center
for Religion, Leadership
and Culture

Athens State University

Be Still...

and Breathe





The Alternative Approach

The Game Changer

by Roy P. Williams

When it comes to your health, most people use synthetic drugs hoping to get control. Maybe your blood sugar is moving in the wrong direction putting you in the area called pre-diabetes. After 27 years of helping people control their blood sugar naturally, the Healthy Sugar Combo, has become a **game changer** for them. All the ingredients work together to help them maintain normal blood sugar levels, in many cases, without having to be prescribed prescription drugs at all.

The Healthy Sugar Combo is a multivitamin, mineral formulated specifically for pre-diabetes and full-blown diabetes. It covers all the bases to ensure proper nutrition along with amino-acids, essential fatty acids, anti-inflammatories, antioxidants, and kidney, vision, and circulatory support. It all works together to protect against kidney failure, neuropathy, and vision problems associated with diabetes.

Within just a few weeks, many report being able to cut back on

their meds and in a few months, some are even able to come off their medication all together. In people with type II diabetes, studies have found impressive reductions in fasting glucose, after-meal glucose, and HbA1c, the measure of average blood sugar, over roughly three months. One placebo-controlled trial also found lower triglycerides and cholesterol.

Another game changer is the Healthy Heart Combo (MSM+C and Heart), which supports a healthier circulatory system. Each vitamin, mineral, nutrient and herbal ingredient has a history of cardiovascular health support. This formula is based on Dr. Matthais Rath's book, *Why Animals Don't Get Heart Attacks but People Do*. In his book, using the most advanced medical equipment available, he documented a total reversal of most cardiovascular issues.

One hundred percent of his cardiovascular patients showed impressive results including improved blood pressure, cholesterol, and heart rate and decreased

blockages in just six months. After one year he shows pictures of blockages that were reduced by 50% and in just two years, no blockages were found. Another exciting discovery during the study was overall health improvements including energy, stamina, and well-being. The Healthy Heart Combo has become a **game changer** for those with a lot of circulatory issues in the family and especially those with existing heart and circulatory conditions.

If you need a **game changer** when it comes to your joint health, let me recommend the Healthy Joint Combo (MSM+C and Joint). This combo covers all the bases when it comes to osteoarthritis. It uses the most well-known ingredients such as glucosamine and chondroitin along with vitamins, minerals, and herbal extracts that not only support healthier joints but thicker cartilage and healthier connective tissue as well. We get excited when a customer comes back with full-range of motion in their shoulders or for the first time in years can squat down and stand back up without pain.

The Healthy Joint Combo is a great choice for all athletes including runners, hikers, and bikers. Of course, everyone with osteoarthritis should be on this combo, but why wait until you have worn out



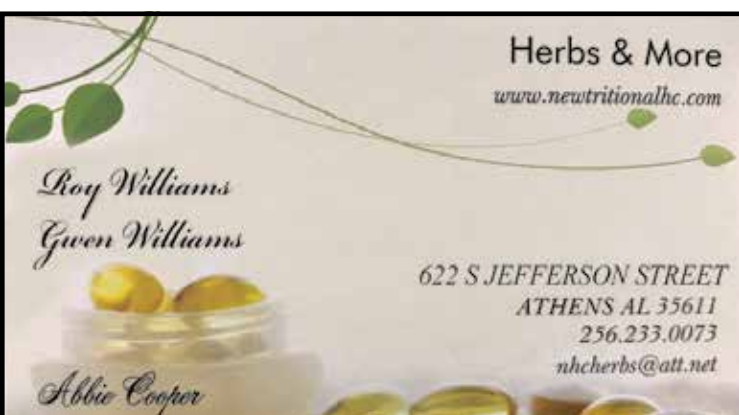
the cartilage when you may be able to avoid it in the first place. One gentleman came to us after he was bone-on-bone in one knee and almost the same in the other knee. He started using the Healthy Joint Combo and after nine months came in with the x-rays showing that he had grown one-eighth inch of cartilage in both knees. Now that is a **game changer**.

Another great choice for this time of year is the Healthy Immune Combo (MSM+C and IS-3). With flu season coming, all of us should be doing whatever we can to super-charge our immune systems. This combination has a long history of allowing people to avoid colds, flus, and infec-

tions, such as urinary tract and sinus infections. The main ingredients have been used in double-blind, controlled studies proving that they strengthen the immune response by over 65%. Now that is some serious support.

No matter what is going on with your health, come by Herbs & More in Athens, NHC Herb Shop in Killen or check out our online store at nhcherbs.com. To book an appointment so we can help you decide what products would be best for you, call us at 256-757-0660. We never charge for our time. You will be glad you did.

*Your Friend in Health,
Roy P. Williams*



A Dog Named Dexter

by Lisa Philippart,
Licensed Professional Counselor

***“As a man thinks
in his heart,
so is he.”***
- Proverbs 23:7

Over eleven years ago, a dog we named Dexter came bouncing into our lives. He was a skinny, stray, yellow, Labrador-retriever mix, with fleas and worms. And he had the happiest, most loving personality of any dog I have ever met (other than Shadow. See my article from January 4, 2019.)

In the beginning, Dexter was a wild man. His energy level was always set on high. He even ran in his sleep! We didn't think he had ever been in a house before because when we first brought him in, he leapt over our furniture like it was an obstacle course. He ran through our house knocking things over and having the best time, smiling all the while! Yes, Dexter smiles! As much as I loved Dexter already, we

knew he needed some discipline if we were ever going to have peace restored to our home. Did you know you can send your dog to Doggie Boot Camp? Yup. We dropped Dexter off with the promise that he would be “manageable” in three weeks. When we returned, we had to go through some training too, but Dex was much, much better...as long as he was on a leash. My husband and I both worked during the day, so we had to find some way for Dexter to relieve his boundless energy. We decided to take him to doggie daycare. It was there that we discovered two things: First, he could be worn out! And second, that Dexter loves people, and other dogs, not so much. He was the likeable kid in school, always getting into trouble. He was expelled...twice.

So what does my Dexter story have to do with mental health? Three months ago, Dexter was diagnosed

with mast cell cancer. It's bad. But did you know that there is a veterinary oncologist in Nashville? Dogs can receive chemo treatments, and actually tolerate it better than humans. We were told that without chemo, Dex had about three months to live. With chemo, he has about 6-9 months. We have heard several times from those who are working with and treating Dexie, the following comments: “He doesn't know he has cancer, does he?” and “He is the happiest dog on chemo that we have ever seen!” Wow! This got me to thinking about whether attitude can affect a cancer outcome. Can a positive attitude prolong a person's/dog's life? And conversely, does a negative attitude make cancer grow?

Attitude is defined as “a settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something.” This attitude is often reflected in one's be-

havior. I believe, as do many researchers, psychologists, and other mental health professionals that attitude has a unique and profound way of affecting our daily lives. For example, I realize that it is easier to adopt a positive attitude when life circumstances are generally good and problems are few. But when conditions change drastically in a negative way, it's not as easy to keep a positive outlook, especially when those changes involve an illness. A cancer diagnosis can obviously affect attitude. Having to accept a life-altering disease can cause feelings of hopelessness, which can lead to a negative point of view. But it's not necessary to allow the weight of negativity to lead you down the path of loss of control. Those feelings travel through the cycle of fear and sadness, bringing us back to that negative outlook. Mental health counselors can help those with cancer to not only recognize these emotions, and the change in relationships, but to feel more upbeat and have a better quality of life. There is no research study to support the idea that counseling interventions can reduce the risk of cancer, keep cancer from com-

ing back, or help someone with cancer to live longer. So, with that in mind, why then should someone diagnosed with cancer choose to adopt a positive attitude if it's not necessarily going to prolong life? In my own experience, I've learned that I feel better -- emotionally, mentally, and physically -- when I keep a positive attitude. By finding ways to look on the bright side, we can overcome negative circumstances. If nothing else, it can become a helpful coping mechanism.

No one has the right to expect a person/dog with cancer to have a positive outlook all the time, because fighting cancer is extremely difficult. Choosing a positive attitude can affect someone's mental and emotional well-being in a constructive way. And by choosing to think good thoughts, our behavior can follow. And with my sweet Dexter, his joy for living and happy disposition continue to propel him through this life. We are grateful for Dexter every day. I'll keep you posted on his journey in articles to follow.

Lisa Philippart is a Licensed Professional Counselor whose practice is in Madison, Alabama

*I choose to make the
rest of my life the
best of my life!*



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GenZ With JP

Doug Jones Is The Fearmonger He Keeps Warning Alabama About

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

As we inch ever closer to November's gubernatorial election, Doug Jones has made one thing clear. He stands for nothing. A campaign that consists solely of "Tuberville and data center bad" doesn't tell voters much about what you stand for.

Why is that?

Maybe it's because Doug knows his beliefs go against what most Alabamians stand for.

But the true hypocrisy of it all is this: Doug is doing exactly what he's accusing Coach of. Constant fearmongering about a communist boogeyman that will never reach Alabama, and scaring Alabamians into his vote. Yet, Doug is the true fearmonger.

Except his boogeyman is not only Coach Tuberville and Republicans, but everything Alabamians hold dear.

Doug's strategy to win the governorship is obviously to be a contrarian. He panders to the loud minority of obnoxious liberals in the state, and thinks he's killing it.

The reality is, the internet's not real life. No matter how many Facebook lives you do just playing clips of Tuberville while mocking him, you're achieving nothing when it comes to cementing an actual platform. In a deep-red state like Alabama, the cynical contrarians are bound to get clicks.

This does not mean, however, that it will translate

to votes in November. Because Doug Jones is still the same, no matter how hard he tries to fool you.

While in the Senate, Doug was the deciding vote to keep Obamacare. How many Alabamians would you bet are thrilled about that? Doug also champions abortion as "healthcare," which is a smack in the face to the state that has fought hard to protect the unborn.

Jones has also made it clear that school choice will be thrown out the window under his leadership. The right of parents to take their tax dollars and put their child in the best education possible is too far right for Doug.

He dismisses the rise of socialism in his party as a "boogeyman" that will never reach Alabama, but does he remember marching through the streets of Montgomery earlier this year with Alexandria Oc-

asio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America?

How about when she took the mic on the steps of our Capitol and said: "It is time for New York to pull up to Alabama"? Doug can use lip service to claim he doesn't agree with the radicals of his party all he wants, but he didn't skip a beat to bring them to our state capital.

This is quite indicative of what a Doug Jones governorship would look like, providing air cover for the radicals of his party to rip apart our state while he conveniently paints himself as a moderate.

"A rejoining of the old Confederacy" is what Doug Jones called Alabama for enacting its previous congressional maps after SCOTUS' landmark Callais ruling against racially-drawn congressional maps.

And yet, Tuberville is the

fearmonger?

Doug can't help but call Alabama racist, because that's how he scares voters into voting for him. If he can convince Black Alabamians that Tuberville and Republicans are coming to take away their voting rights, he can take their vote all the way to the bank. Doug is a malicious liar, and he's the one who relies on fear.

His desire is to be up for interpretation. To the radical left of our state, he's the ally that will protect them as they enact their degeneracy. To the so-called moderates, he's one of them.

While he sells himself as "one of the good Democrats" to the fence-sitters, the results speak for themselves.

Once again, Doug Jones stands for nothing. He will lie to you that he cares about data centers, protecting your voting rights from racist Republicans, and al-

lowing you to buy all the lottery tickets you want without crossing that state border.

The truth is, Doug is an enemy to what Alabamians love.

Conservatives in this state don't want Alabama to turn into New York or California. We want to keep it conservative, and Doug is an enemy to exactly that.

Next time you're scrolling on social media and see Doug on Facebook live scaring you about how evil Coach Tuberville is, or a commercial about how much he hates data centers, don't be fooled by the noise.

Just because he's being louder doesn't mean he cares about you. On the contrary, he's trying to make you forget who he actually is.

He thinks Alabamians aren't smart enough to remember and to know the truth. Prove him wrong.

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.



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Cooking with Anna (continued from page 9)

The Lamp And The Oil

by Anna Hamilton

parts of the parable is that when the foolish women realized they didn't have enough oil, they asked the others to share theirs. But they couldn't. Why? Because you cannot borrow someone else's relationship with God. Someone else's faith can't sustain you forever. Your mother's prayers cannot replace your own. Your pastor's relationship with God cannot replace yours. Your spouse's faith cannot carry yours. Your friend's Bible knowledge cannot substitute for your time in God's presence.

There comes a moment when each of us must have our own oil. We need our own relationship with Jesus. Our own prayer life. Our own time in His Word. Our own willingness to surrender.

The oil is built in the hidden places. Nobody sees oil being poured into a lamp. It happens quietly. And that's how our relationship with God is often built. Not in the spotlight. Not on a stage. Not in front of an audience. But in the quiet moments. Early mornings. Late nights. Tearful prayers. Private repentance. Choosing forgiveness. Opening Scripture when you're tired. Trusting God when you don't understand. Saying yes when obedience is difficult.

Those moments may look insignificant to everyone else. But they are filling your lamp. And one day, when the waiting gets long and the darkness comes, you'll discover that those hidden moments were preparing you all along.

Don't just look like you're ready. The ten women all looked ready. But only five were prepared for the delay. And perhaps that's one of the greatest warnings in this parable. It's possible to look prepared without actually being prepared. It's possible to look like you're on fire for God while your private relationship with Him is slowly growing cold. It's possible to know the right words without having surrendered your heart. It's possible to

impress people while having very little oil. And that's why our goal shouldn't be to look like we're carrying a full lamp. Our goal should be to actually have the oil.

Because eventually, life will bring a delay. There will be a season when the answer doesn't come quickly. A season when your prayers seem unanswered. A season when you are tired. A season when circumstances test what you really believe. And in those moments, appearance won't sustain you. Only a genuine relationship with God will.

So, how is your oil? Not your reputation. Not your social media. Not what everyone else thinks about your faith. Not how spiritual you look from the outside.

How is your heart? Are you spending time with Jesus? Are you praying when nobody is listening? Are you opening His Word when nobody is watching? Are you allowing Him to correct you? Are you obeying Him in the hidden places? Are you keeping your lamp filled?

Because the world may be impressed by the lamp, but God is concerned about the oil. The lamp may impress people. The oil will sustain you. So don't spend all your energy making your lamp look beautiful while neglecting what keeps it burning. Spend time with Jesus. Stay close to Him. Fill your heart with His Word. Keep praying. Keep seeking. Keep surrendering. Because when the waiting gets long... when the night gets dark... when nobody is watching... what you've built in the secret place will be what carries you through. And perhaps the most beautiful thing we can ever say is, "Lord, I don't just want to look like I belong to You. I want to truly know You."

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (Matthew 25:13).

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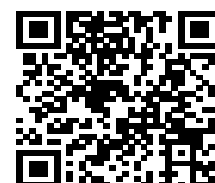
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How Can CrossFit Athens Help You?

by Nick Niedzwiecki - Owner, CrossFit Athens

One of the things I hear all the time is, "I need to get in shape before I come to CrossFit." Every time I hear it, I understand where it comes from, but it is also completely backwards. You do not need to get in shape before you come see us. Helping you get in shape is literally what we are here to do.

Maybe you want to lose 20 pounds. Maybe you want to get stronger. Maybe you are tired of getting winded doing things that used to be easy. Maybe your doctor has started talking to you about blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, or medications. Maybe you are 65 years old and your biggest goal is to keep getting up and down off the floor, carrying your own groceries, working in the yard, and staying independent as long as possible. Those goals may all sound different, but the path to getting there is actually pretty similar.

You need to move your body. You need to build and maintain muscle. You need your heart and lungs to work better. You need to eat mostly real food, and you need to do all of those things consistently.

That is really what happens inside our gym.

I think sometimes people hear the word CrossFit and immediately picture someone hanging upside down from a pull-up bar, lifting a massive amount of weight, or doing

something they have absolutely no interest in attempting. I get it. Social media has done a pretty good job of showing the most extreme version of what we do. What it usually does not show is the 60-year-old learning how to squat to a box, the person who has never exercised before riding a bike for thirty seconds at a time, or someone learning how to safely pick something up off the ground without their back hurting.

Those things are just as much a part of what we do.

You may come in and squat to a box. You may carry a kettlebell across

the room. You may push a sled, ride a bike, row, walk, step up onto something, or learn how to lift a weight safely. None of that sounds especially crazy. In fact, most of it looks a lot like things you need to be able to do in normal life.

Then, over time, things start changing. The stairs do not bother you as much. You can carry all the groceries in one trip. Getting off the floor becomes easier. You have more energy after work. You start sleeping better. You feel more confident in what your body can do. Maybe the scale changes too, but more importantly, your

life starts getting easier because your body is becoming more capable.

That is the part I wish more people understood.

The goal is not to turn everyone into a competitive athlete. The goal is to meet you where you are and help you become healthier, stronger, fitter, and more capable than you are today. The person next to you may be training for a competition, while you may be training so you can play with your grandkids without needing to sit down every five minutes. Both belong in the same room.

So if you have been say-

ing, "I am too old," "I am too out of shape," "I have bad knees," "I have never lifted weights," or "I could never do that," I want you to understand something: you are probably exactly the person we built this place for.

You may think you need a gym.

What you really need is a place that can help you build a body that lets you live the life you want to live.

*Coach Nick
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