Buckley Country Day School

8th Grade Summer Reading
2012

Selections from

This I Believe and This I Believe II

Ed. Jay Allison and Dan Gediman
To Margot Trevor Wheelock, who was responsible
for This I Believe
Beliefs are choices. No one has authority over your personal beliefs. Your beliefs are in jeopardy only when you don’t know what they are.

Understanding your own beliefs, and those of others, comes through focused thought and discussion. Most public dialogue is now propelled by media outlets owned by a dwindling number of multinational corporations. A healthy democracy needs ways to bypass gatekeepers so we can communicate with one another directly, and perhaps even find common ground. This I Believe is an exercise in philosophical self-examination in a public context. It rises from the grass roots, where people can begin to listen to each other, one at a time.

My own This I Believe essay begins, “I believe in listening . . .” This is no surprise, coming from one who works in radio, and public radio at that. At the station in my hometown, it’s our motto, and the first word ever spoken on the air when we signed on. Listen. If there is a testament to a belief in listening, it will be found in these essays.

Take a moment, then, to consider the beliefs that guide the lives of others, beliefs that may confirm your own, or challenge them, or even open your mind to something new.

When you are done, think about this: What would you say?

Be Cool to the Pizza Dude

SARAH ADAMS

If I have one operating philosophy about life, it is this: “Be cool to the pizza delivery dude; it’s good luck.” Four principles guide the pizza dude philosophy.

Principle 1: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in humility and forgiveness. I let him cut me off in traffic, let him safely hit the exit ramp from the left lane, let him forget to use his blinker without extending any of my digits out the window or toward my horn because there should be one moment in my harried life when a car may encroach or cut off or pass and I let it go. Sometimes when I have become so certain of my ownership of my lane, dar-
ing anyone to challenge me, the pizza dude speeds by in his rusted Chevette. His pizza light atop his car glowing like a beacon reminds me to check myself as I flow through the world. After all, the dude is delivering pizza to young and old, families and singletons, gays and straights, blacks, whites, and browns, rich and poor, and vegetarians and meat lovers alike. As he journeys, I give safe passage, practice restraint, show courtesy, and contain my anger.

Principle 2: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in empathy. Let’s face it: We’ve all taken jobs just to have a job because some money is better than none. I’ve held an assortment of these jobs and was grateful for the paycheck that meant I didn’t have to share my Cheerios with my cats. In the big pizza wheel of life, sometimes you’re the hot bubbly cheese and sometimes you’re the burnt crust. It’s good to remember the fickle spinning of that wheel.

Principle 3: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in honor, and it reminds me to honor honest work. Let me tell you something about these dudes: They never took over a company and, as CEO, artificially inflated the value of the stock and cashed out their own shares, bringing the company to the brink of bankruptcy, resulting in twenty thousand people losing their jobs while the CEO builds a home the size of a luxury hotel. Rather, the dudes sleep the sleep of the just.

Principle 4: Coolness to the pizza delivery dude is a practice in equality. My measurement as a human being, my worth, is the pride I take in performing my job—any job—and the respect with which I treat others. I am the equal of the world not because of the car I drive, the size of the TV I own, the weight I can bench-press, or the calculus equations I can solve. I am the equal to all I meet because of the kindness in my heart. And it all starts here—with the pizza delivery dude.

Tip him well, friends and brethren, for that which you bestow freely and willingly will bring you all the happy luck that a grateful universe knows how to return.

Sarah Adams has held many jobs in her life, including telemarketer, factory worker, hotel clerk, and flower shop cashier, but she has never delivered pizzas. Raised in Wisconsin, Adams is now an English professor at Olympic College in Washington.
Leaving Identity Issues to Other Folks

PHYLLIS ALLEN

Standing in the rain waiting to go up the steps to the balcony of the Grand Theater, I gripped Mama's hand and watched the little blond kids enter the lobby downstairs. It was the fifties, I was "colored," and this is what I believed: My place was in the balcony of the downtown theater, the back of the bus, and the back steps of the White Dove Barbecue Emporium. When I asked Mama why this was so, she smiled and said, "Baby, people do what they do. What you got to do is be the best that you can be."

We got our first television in the sixties, and it brought into my living room the German shepherds, snapping at a young girl's heels. It showed children just like me going to school passing through throngs of screaming, angry folks, chanting words I wasn't allowed to say. I could no longer be "colored." We were Negroes now, marching in the streets for our freedom—at least, that's what the preacher said. I believed that even though I was scared, I had to be brave and stand up for my rights.

In the seventies: Beat-up jeans, hair like a nappy halo, and my clenched fist raised, I stood on the downtown street shouting. Angry young black men in sleek black leather jackets and berets had sent out a call from the distant shores of Oakland, California. No more nonviolence or standing on the front lines quietly while we were being beaten. Simple courtesies like "please" and "thank you" were over. It was official; Huey, H. Rap, and Eldridge said so. I believed in being black and angry.

By the eighties, fertility gods lined the walls and crammed the display cases of all my friends' houses. People who'd never been closer to Africa than a Tarzan movie were speaking broken Swahili. The eighties made us hyphenated: "African-American." Swaddled in elaborately woven costumes of flowing design, bright colors, and rich gold, I was pseudo-African, who'd never seen Africa. "It's your heritage," is what everybody said. Now, I believed in the elusive promise of the Motherland.
In the nineties, I was a woman whose skin happened to be brown, chasing the American dream. Everybody said that the dream culminated in stuff. I believed in spending days shopping. Debt? I didn't care about no stinkin' debt. It was the nineties. My 401(k) was in the mid-six figures, and I believed in American Express. Then came the crash, and American Express didn't believe in me nearly as much as I believed in it.

Now, it's a brand-new millennium, and the bling-bling, video generation ain't about me. Everything changed when I turned fifty. Along with the wrinkles, softened muscles, and weak eyesight came the confidence that allows me to stick to a very small list of beliefs. I'll leave those identity issues to other folks. I believe that I'm free to be whoever I choose to be. I believe in being a good friend, lover, and parent so that I can have good friends, lovers, and children. I believe in being a woman—the best that I can be, like my mama said.

Phyllis Allen has sold Yellow Pages advertising for fifteen years. She spends about half her working hours in her car covering territory around Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas. She composed her essay in her car and practiced reading it aloud in the phone company's utility closet. When she retires, she hopes to pursue her first passion, writing.
life. I have not changed; I am still the same girl I was fifty years ago, and the same young woman I was in the seventies. I still lust for life, I am still ferociously independent, I still crave justice, and I fall madly in love easily.

Paralyzed and silent in her bed, my daughter Paula taught me a lesson that is now my mantra: You only have what you give. It's by spending yourself that you become rich.

Paula led a life of service. She worked as a volunteer helping women and children, eight hours a day, six days a week. She never had any money, but she needed very little. When she died she had nothing and she needed nothing. During her illness I had to let go of everything: her laughter, her voice, her grace, her beauty, her company, and, finally, her spirit. When she died I thought I had lost everything. But then I realized I still had the love I had given her. I don't even know if she was able to receive that love. She could not respond in any way; her eyes were somber pools that reflected no light. But I was full of love, and that love keeps growing and multiplying and giving fruit.

The pain of losing my child was a cleansing experience. I had to throw overboard all excess baggage and keep only what is essential. Because of Paula, I don't cling to anything anymore. Now I like to give much more than to receive. I am happier when I love than when I am loved. I adore my husband, my son, my grandchildren, my mother, my dog, and frankly I don't know if they even like me. But who cares? Loving them is my joy.

Give, give, give—what is the point of having experience, knowledge, or talent if I don't give it away? Of having stories if I don't tell them to others? Of having wealth if I don't share it? I don't intend to be cremated with any of it! It is in giving that I connect with others, with the world, and with the divine.

It is in giving that I feel the spirit of my daughter inside me, like a soft presence.

Novelist Isabel Allende was born in Peru and raised in Chile. When her uncle, Chilean president Salvador Allende, was assassinated in 1973, she fled with her husband and children to Venezuela. Allende has written more than a dozen novels, including The House of the Spirits and a memoir, My Invented Country.
Remembering All the Boys

Elvia Bautista

I believe that everyone deserves flowers on their grave.

When I go to the cemetery to visit my brother, it makes me sad to see graves—just the cold stones—and no flowers on them.

They look lonely, like nobody loves them. I believe this is the worst thing in the world—that loneliness. No one to visit you and brush off the dust from your name and cover you with color. A grave without any flowers looks like the person has been forgotten. And then what was the point of even living—to be forgotten?

Almost every day my brother’s grave has something new on it: flowers from me, or candles from the Dollar Store, or an image of the Virgin María, or shot glasses. There’s even some little Homies, these little toys that look like gangsters.

Once my brother’s homies even put a bunch of marijuana on there for him—I think my mother took it away. I think she also took away the blue rag someone put there for him one day.

Sometimes, when I bring flowers, I fix the flowers on the graves around my brother’s grave. Some of the headstones have birthdates near my brother’s; they are young, too. But many of them, if they have any little toys or things on them, those are red.

All around my brother are boys who grew up to like red, making them the enemies of my brother. My brother was sixteen when he was shot by someone who liked red, who killed him because he liked blue. And when I go to the cemetery, I put flowers on the graves of the boys who liked red, too.

Sometimes I go to the cemetery with one of my best friends, who had a crush on a boy who liked red who was killed at eighteen by someone who liked blue. And we will go together and bring a big bunch of flowers, enough for both of these boys whose families are actually even from the same state in Mexico.

There is no one but me and a few of my friends who go
to both graves. Some people think it's a bad idea. Some people think it's heroic.

I think they're both being silly. I don't go to try to disrespect some special rules or stop any kind of war. I go because I believe that no matter where you came from or what you believed in, when you die, you want flowers on your grave and people who visit you and remember you that way.

I'm not any kind of traitor or any kind of hero. I am the sister of Rogelio Bautista, and I say his name so you will hear it and be one more person who remembers him. I want everyone to remember all the boys, red and blue, in my cemetery. When we remember, we put flowers on their graves.

ELVIA BAUTISTA, twenty-two, lives in Santa Rosa, California, where she works as a caregiver for the elderly and mentally handicapped. Bautista stayed after her brother's murder even though the rest of her family moved away. A high school dropout, Bautista now speaks to young people about the dangers of gang life.

I believe in people. I feel, love, need, and respect people above all else, including the arts, natural scenery, organized piety, or nationalistic superstructures. One human figure on the slope of a mountain can make the whole mountain disappear for me. One person fighting for the truth can disqualify for me the platitudes of centuries. And one human being who meets with injustice can render invalid the entire system which has dispersed it.

I believe that man's noblest endowment is his capacity to change. Armed with reason, he can see two sides and choose: He can be divinely wrong, I believe in man's right to
There Is No Job More Important than Parenting

Benjamin Carson

The simplest way to say it is this: I believe in my mother. My belief began when I was just a kid. I dreamed of becoming a doctor.

My mother was a domestic. Through her work, she observed that successful people spent a lot more time reading than they did watching television. She announced that my brother and I could only watch two to three preselected TV programs during the week. With our free time, we had to read two books each from the Detroit Public Library and submit to her written book reports. She would mark them up with check marks and highlights. Years later we realized her marks were a ruse. My mother was illiterate; she had only received a third-grade education.

Although we had no money, between the covers of those books I could go anywhere, do anything, and be anybody.

When I entered high school I was an A-student, but not for long. I wanted the fancy clothes. I wanted to hang out with the guys. I went from being an A-student to a B-student to a C-student, but I didn’t care. I was getting the high fives and the low fives and the pats on the back. I was cool.

One night my mother came home from working her multiple jobs, and I complained about not having enough Italian knit shirts. She said, “Okay, I’ll give you all the money I make this week scrubbing floors and cleaning bathrooms, and you can buy the family food and pay the bills. With everything left over, you can have all the Italian knit shirts you want.”

I was very pleased with that arrangement, but once I got through allocating money, there was nothing left. I realized my mother was a financial genius to be able to keep a roof over our heads and any kind of food on the table, much less buy clothes.

I also realized that immediate gratification wasn’t going to get me anywhere. Success required intellectual preparation.

I went back to my studies and became an A-student again, and eventually I fulfilled my dream and I became a doctor.
Over the years my mother's steadfast faith in God has inspired me, particularly when I had to perform extremely difficult surgical procedures or when I found myself faced with my own medical scare.

A few years ago I discovered I had a very aggressive form of prostate cancer; I was told it might have spread to my spine. My mother was steadfast in her faith in God. She never worried. She said that God was not through with me yet; there was no way that this was going to be a major problem. The abnormality in my spine turned out to be benign; I was able to have surgery and am cured.

My story is really my mother's story—a woman with little formal education or worldly goods who used her position as a parent to change the lives of many people around the globe. There is no job more important than parenting. This I believe.

Dr. Benjamin Carson is director of pediatric neurosurgery at the Johns Hopkins Children's Center. His expertise includes separating conjoined twins and doing brain surgery to control seizures. A scholarship fund Carson founded has helped some 1,700 students through college. His mother is retired and lives with Carson and his family.

A Journey toward Acceptance and Love

Greg Chapman

What do I believe? That the stories I tell myself shape my truth, my soul, and my life. I was raised to be a good Baptist and to be a patriotic American. I was raised to believe Catholics were idol-worshippers, liberals were communists, and that black and white never mixed. God filled the background, ready to condemn me into Hell. God saw everything bad about me, knew every wayward thought. I was born with original sin—I had no chance. At the same time, being a white American provided me a sense of privilege, of being one of the "better" people.
One night recently, I was driving down a two-lane highway at about sixty miles an hour. A car approached from the opposite direction, at about the same speed. As we passed each other, I caught the other driver's eye for only a second. I wondered whether he might be thinking, as I was, how dependent we were on each other at that moment. I was relying on him not to fall asleep, not to be distracted by a cell phone conversation, not to cross over into my lane and bring my life suddenly to an end. And though we had never spoken a word to one another, he relied on me in just the same way.

Multiplied a million times over, I believe that is the way the world works. At some level, we all depend upon one another. Sometimes that dependence requires us simply to refrain from doing something, like crossing over the double yellow line. And sometimes it requires us to act cooperatively, with allies or even with strangers.

Back in 1980, I was negotiating for the release of the fifty-two Americans held hostage in Iran. The Iranians refused to meet with me face-to-face, insisting instead that we send messages back and forth through the government of Algeria. Although I had never before worked with the Algerian foreign minister, I had to rely on him to receive and transmit, with absolute accuracy, both the words and nuances of my messages. With his indispensable help, all fifty-two Americans came home safely.

As technology shrinks our world, the need increases for cooperative action among nations. In 2003, doctors in five nations were quickly mobilized to identify the SARS virus, an action that saved thousands of lives. The threat of international terrorism has shown itself to be a similar problem, one requiring coordinated action by police and intelligence forces across the world. We must recognize that our fates are not ours alone to control.

In my own life, I've put great stock in personal responsibility. But, as the years have passed, I've also come to
believe that there are moments when one must rely upon the 
good faith and judgment of others. So, while each of us 
faces—at one time or another—the prospect of driving 
alone down a dark road, what we must learn with experience 
is that the approaching light may not be a threat, but a 
shared moment of trust.

Warren Christopher was U.S. secretary of state from 1993 to 
1997. As President Carter's deputy secretary of state, he helped normalize 
relations with China, win ratification of the Panama Canal treaties, and 
gain release of the American hostages in Iran. A native of North Dakota, 
Christopher now lives near Los Angeles.

The Hardest Work You Will Ever Do

Mary Cook

The day my fiancé fell to his death, it started to snow, 
just like any November day, just like the bottom hadn’t 
fallen out of my world when he tumbled off the roof. His 
body, when I found it, was lightly covered with snow. It 
snowed almost every day for the next four months, while I 
sat on the couch and watched it pile up.

One morning, I shuffled downstairs and was startled to 
see a snow plow clearing my driveway and the bent back of a 
woman shoveling my walk. I dropped to my knees, crawled 
through the living room and back upstairs so those good 
Samaritans would not see me. I was mortified. My first
An Ideal of Service to Our Fellow Man

Albert Einstein, as featured in the 1950s series

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious—the knowledge of the existence of something unfathomable to us, the manifestation of the most profound reason coupled with the most brilliant beauty. I cannot imagine a god who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation, or who has a will of the kind we experience in ourselves. I am satisfied with the mystery of life's eternity and with the awareness of—and glimpse into—the marvelous construction of the existing world together with the steadfast determination to comprehend a portion, be it ever so tiny, of the reason that manifests itself in nature. This is the basis of cosmic religiosity, and it appears to me that the most important function of art and science is to awaken this feeling among the receptive and keep it alive.

I sense that it is not the State that has intrinsic value in the machinery of humankind, but rather the creative, feeling individual, the personality alone that creates the noble and sublime.

Man's ethical behavior should be effectively grounded on compassion, nurture, and social bonds. What is moral is not of the divine, but rather a purely human matter, albeit the most important of all human matters. In the course of history, the ideals pertaining to human beings' behavior toward each other and pertaining to the preferred organization of their communities have been espoused and taught by enlightened individuals. These ideals and convictions—results of historical experience, empathy, and the need for beauty and harmony—have usually been willingly recognized by human beings, at least in theory.

The highest principles for our aspirations and judgments are given to us westerners in the Jewish-Christian religious tradition. It is a very high goal: free and responsible development of the individual, so that he may place his powers freely and gladly in the service of all mankind.
The pursuit of recognition for its own sake, an almost fanatical love of justice, and the quest for personal independence form the traditional themes of the Jewish people, of which I am a member.

But if one holds these high principles clearly before one's eyes and compares them with the life and spirit of our times, then it is glaringly apparent that mankind finds itself at present in grave danger. I see the nature of the current crises in the juxtaposition of the individual to society. The individual feels more than ever dependent on society, but he feels this dependence not in the positive sense, cradled, connected as part of an organic whole; he sees it as a threat to his natural rights, and even his economic existence. His position in society, then, is such that that which drives his ego is encouraged and developed, and that which would drive him toward other men—a weak impulse to begin with—is left to atrophy.

It is my belief that there is only one way to eliminate these evils, namely, the establishment of a planned economy coupled with an education geared toward social goals. Alongside the development of individual abilities, the education of the individual aspires to revive an ideal that is geared toward the service of our fellow man, and that needs to take the place of the glorification of power and outer success.
breaks the silence, and by doing so breaks her isolation, begins to melt her shame and guilt, making her experience real, lifting her pain.

I believe one person's declaration sparks another and then another. Helen Caldicott naming the consequences of an escalating nuclear arms race gave rise to an antinuclear movement. The brave soldier who came forward and named the abuses at Abu Ghraib Prison was responsible for a sweeping investigation.

Naming things, breaking through taboo and denial is the most dangerous, terrifying, and crucial work. This has to happen in spite of political climates or coercions, in spite of careers being won or lost, in spite of the fear of being criticized, outcast, or disliked. I believe freedom begins with naming things. Humanity is preserved by it.

Eve Ensler is a writer and activist living in New York. Her play The Vagina Monologues has been translated into thirty-five languages and was performed more than two thousand times in 2004 alone. Ensler is founder of V-Day, an organization supporting efforts to end violence against women and girls worldwide.

A Goal of Service to Humankind

ANTHONY FAUCI

I believe I have a personal responsibility to make a positive impact on society. I've tried to accomplish this goal by choosing a life of public service. I am a physician and a scientist confronting the challenge of infectious diseases. I consider my job a gift. It allows me to try and help alleviate the suffering of humankind.

I have three guiding principles that anchor my life, and I think about them every day.

First, I have an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. Knowledge goes hand-in-hand with truth—something I learned with a bit of tough love from my Jesuit education,
first at Regis High School in New York City and then at Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts. I consider myself a perpetual student. You seek and learn every day: from an experiment in the lab, from reading a scientific journal, from taking care of a patient. Because of this, I rarely get bored.

Second, I believe in striving for excellence. I sweat the big and the small stuff! I do not apologize for this. One of the by-products of being a perfectionist and constantly trying to improve myself are sobering feelings of low-grade anxiety and a nagging sense of inadequacy. But this is not anxiety without a purpose. No, this anxiety keeps me humble. It creates a healthy tension that serves as the catalyst that drives me to fulfill my limited potential.

This has made me a better physician and scientist. Without this tension, I wouldn't be as focused.

I have accepted that I will never know or understand as much as I want. This is what keeps the quest for knowledge exciting! And it is one of the reasons I would do my job even if I did not get paid to come to work every day.

Third, I believe that as a physician my goal is to serve humankind.

I have spent all of my professional life in public service, most of it involved in research, care of patients, and public health policy concerning the HIV-AIDS epidemic. When I chose to concentrate on AIDS in the 1980s, many of my colleagues thought I was misguided to be focusing all of my attention on what was then considered “just a gay man’s disease.” But I felt that this was my destiny and was perfectly matched to my training. I knew deep down that this was going to become a public health catastrophe. I am committed to confronting the enormity of this global public health catastrophe and its potential for even greater devastation.

Failure to contain it cannot be an option. I believe that to be even marginally successful in working to contain this terrible disease, I must be guided by these principles. I must continually thirst for knowledge, accept nothing short of excellence, and know that the good of the global society is more important and larger than I am.

As a boy, Dr. Anthony Fauci delivered prescriptions by bicycle for his father's drugstore. Currently director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, his research focuses on HIV/AIDS, asthma, allergies, and other ailments. He advises the government on the global AIDS crisis and threats related to bioterrorism.
I’ve always been an optimist, and I suppose that is rooted in my belief that the power of creativity and intelligence can make the world a better place.

For as long as I can remember, I’ve loved learning new things and solving problems. So when I sat down at a computer for the first time in seventh grade, I was hooked. It was a clunky old Teletype machine, and it could barely do anything compared to the computers we have today. But it changed my life.

When my friend Paul Allen and I started Microsoft
thirty years ago, we had a vision of "a computer on every desk and in every home," which probably sounded a little too optimistic at a time when most computers were the size of refrigerators. But we believed that personal computers would change the world. And they have.

And after thirty years, I'm still as inspired by computers as I was back in seventh grade.

I believe that computers are the most incredible tool we can use to feed our curiosity and inventiveness—to help us solve problems that even the smartest people couldn't solve on their own.

Computers have transformed how we learn, giving kids everywhere a window into all of the world's knowledge. They're helping us build communities around the things we care about, and to stay close to the people who are important to us, no matter where they are.

Like my friend Warren Buffett, I feel particularly lucky to do something every day that I love to do. He calls it "tap-dancing to work." My job at Microsoft is as challenging as ever, but what makes me "tap-dance to work" is when we show people something new, like a computer that can recognize your handwriting or your speech, or one that can store a lifetime's worth of photos, and they say, "I didn't know you could do that with a PC!"

But for all the cool things that a person can do with a PC, there are lots of other ways we can put our creativity and intelligence to work to improve our world. There are still far too many people in the world whose most basic needs go unmet. Every year, for example, millions of people die from diseases that are easy to prevent or treat in the developed world. Here in the United States, only one in three high school students graduates ready to go to college or hold down a good job.

I believe that my own good fortune brings with it a responsibility to give back to the world. My wife, Melinda, and I have committed to improving health and education in a way that can help as many people as possible.

As a father, I believe that the death of a child in Africa is no less poignant or tragic than the death of a child anywhere else. And that it doesn't take much to make an immense difference in these children's lives.

I'm still very much an optimist, and I believe that progress on even the world's toughest problems is possible—and it's happening every day. We're seeing new drugs for deadly diseases, new diagnostic tools, and new attention paid to the health problems in the developing world.

I'm excited by the possibilities I see for medicine, for education, and, of course, for technology. And I believe that
through our natural inventiveness, creativity, and willingness to solve tough problems, we’re going to make some amazing achievements in all these areas in my lifetime.

**Bill Gates** is chairman of Microsoft. He and his wife founded the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which funds global health, education, and public library projects.

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**The People Who Love You:**

*When No One Else Will*

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**Cecile Gilmer**

I believe that families are not only blood relatives but sometimes just people that show up and love you when no one else will.

In May 1974, I lived in a Howard Johnson’s motel off of Interstate 10 in Houston. My dad and I shared a room with two double beds and a bathroom way too small for a modest fifteen-year-old girl and her father. Dad’s second marriage was in trouble, and my stepmother had kicked us both out of the house the previous week. Dad had no idea what to do with me. And that’s when my other family showed up.
The Willingness to Work for Solutions

Newt Gingrich

I believe that the world is inherently a very dangerous place and that things that are now very good can go bad very quickly.

I stood recently at Checkpoint Charlie and I saw where the Berlin Wall had once been, where millions had lived in slavery only twenty years ago, and I realized that it could happen again. I've stood at Auschwitz, where millions were massacred. Then I read about Darfur, where hundreds of thousands are dying in the Sudan.

I watch the bombings in Baghdad and I know they could be happening in Atlanta or in Washington. I look at civilizations that have collapsed: Rome, Greece, China, the Aztecs, the Mayas. And then I look around at our pretensions and our beliefs—that we are somehow permanent—and I am reminded that it is the quality of leaders, the courage of a people, the ability to solve problems that enables us to continue for one more year, and then one more year, until our children and our grandchildren have had this freedom, this safety, this health, and this prosperity.

I learned this belief from my stepfather, a career soldier who served America in the second World War, in Korea, and in Vietnam. When I was a child, we lived in France—a France that was still suffering from World War II bomb damage; a France that still had amputees from the first World War and special seats on the subway for those who had been wounded in the first and second World Wars; a France that was fighting a war in Algiers; a France that had too percent inflation.

We went to the battlefield of Verdun, the greatest battle of the first World War. We stayed with a friend of my father's who had been drafted, sent to the Philippines, served in the Bataan Death March, and spoke of three and a half years in a Japanese prison camp.

And suddenly, as a young man, I realized this is all real: The gap between our civilization, our prosperity, our freedoms, and all of those things is the quality of our leaders.
the courage of our people, the willingness to face facts, and
the willingness to work for solutions—solutions to energy,
solutions to the environment, solutions to the economy,
solutions to education, and solutions to national security.
We have real challenges; we have a wonderful country. We
need to keep it, and to keep it we're going to have to learn
these kinds of lessons.
That's what I believe.

Former Georgian congressman Newt Gingrich was speaker of the U.S.
House of Representatives from 1995 to 1999. His 1994 agenda, known
as the “Contract with America,” helped Republicans achieve their first
House majority in forty years. When recording his essay, Gingrich dis-
carded what he'd written and spoke this piece extemporaneously.

On June 22, 1970, I had just been mustered out of the
Army after completing my one-year tour of duty in Vietnam.
I was a twenty-three-year-old Army veteran on a plane from
Oakland, California, returning home to Dallas, Texas.

I had been warned about the hostility many of our fellow
countrymen felt toward returning Nam Vets at that time.
There were no hometown parades for us when we came home
from that unpopular war. Like tens of thousands of others,
I was just trying to get home without incident.

I sat, in uniform, in a window seat, chain smoking and
avoiding eye contact with my fellow passengers. No one was
I believe that we learn by practice. Whether it means to learn to dance by practicing dancing or to learn to live by practicing living, the principles are the same. In each it is the performance of a dedicated precise set of acts, physical or intellectual, from which comes shape of achievement, a sense of one's being, a satisfaction of spirit. One becomes in some area an athlete of God.

Practice means to perform, over and over again in the face of all obstacles, some act of vision, of faith, of desire. Practice is a means of inviting the perfection desired.

I think the reason dance has held such an ageless magic for the world is that it has been the symbol of the performance of living. Many times I hear the phrase “the dance of life.” It is close to me for a very simple and understandable reason. The instrument through which the dance speaks is also the instrument through which life is lived: the human body. It is the instrument by which all the primaries of experience are made manifest. It holds in its memory all matters of life and death and love.

Dancing appears glamorous, easy, delightful. But the path to the paradise of that achievement is not easier than any other. There is fatigue so great that the body cries, even in its sleep. There are times of complete frustration; there are daily small deaths. Then I need all the comfort that practice has stored in my memory, and a tenacity of faith. But it must be the kind of faith that Abraham had, wherein he “staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief.”

It takes about ten years to make a mature dancer. The training is twofold. There is the study and practice of the craft in order to strengthen the muscular structure of the body. The body is shaped, disciplined, honored, and, in time, trusted. The movement becomes clean, precise, eloquent, truthful. Movement never lies. It is a barometer telling the state of the soul’s weather to all who can read it. This might be called the law of the dancer’s life—the law which governs its outer aspects.
Then there is the cultivation of the being. It is through this that the legends of the soul's journey are retold with all their gaiety and their tragedy and the bitterness and sweetness of living. It is at this point that the sweep of life catches up the mere personality of the performer, and while the individual (the undivided one) becomes greater, the personal becomes less personal. And there is grace. I mean the grace resulting from faith: faith in life, in love, in people, and in the act of dancing. All this is necessary to any performance in life which is magnetic, powerful, rich in meaning.

In a dancer there is a reverence for such forgotten things as the miracle of the small beautiful bones and their delicate strength. In a thinker there is a reverence for the beauty of the alert and directed and lucid mind. In all of us who perform there is an awareness of the smile which is part of the equipment, or gift, of the acrobat. We have all walked the high wire of circumstance at times. We recognize the gravity pull of the earth as he does. The smile is there because he is practicing living at that instant of danger. He does not choose to fall.

In seven decades as a dancer and choreographer, Martha Graham created 181 ballets. A founder of modern dance, she is known for her collaborations with other leading artists, including composer Aaron Copland. Graham's company trained dance greats such as Alvin Ailey and Twyla Tharp.

Seeing in Beautiful, Precise Pictures

TEMPLE GRANDIN

Because I have autism, I live by concrete rules instead of abstract beliefs. And because I have autism, I think in pictures and sounds.

Here's how my brain works: It's like the search engine Google for images. If you say the word "love" to me, I'll surf the Internet inside my brain. Then, a series of images pops into my head. What I'll see is a picture of a mother horse with a foal; or I think of "Herbie, the Love Bug"; scenes from the movie Love Story; or the Beatles song "Love, love, all you need is love..."

When I was a child, my parents taught me the difference
This I Believe

between good and bad behavior by showing me specific examples. My mother told me that you don't hit other kids because you would not like it if they hit you. That makes sense. But, if my mother told me to be "nice" to someone—it was too vague for me to comprehend. But if she said that being nice meant delivering daffodils to a next-door neighbor, that I could understand.

I believe that doing practical things can make the world a better place. When I was in my twenties, I thought a lot about the meaning of life. At the time, I was getting started in my career designing more humane facilities for animals at ranches and slaughterhouses. Many people would think that to even work at a slaughterhouse would be inhumane, but they forget that every human and animal eventually dies. In my mind, I had a picture of a way to make that dying as peaceful as possible.

Back in the 1970s, I went to fifty different feedlots and ranches in Arizona and Texas and helped them work cattle. I cataloged the parts of each facility that worked effectively. I took the best loading ramps, sorting pens, single-file chutes, crowd pens, and other components and assembled them into an ideal new system. I get great satisfaction when a rancher tells me that my corral design helps cattle move through it quietly and easily. When cattle stay calm, it means they are not scared. And that makes me feel I've accomplished something important.

Some people might think if I could snap my fingers I'd choose to be "normal." But, I wouldn't want to give up my ability to see in beautiful, precise pictures. I believe in them.

Temple Grandin is an associate professor of animal science at Colorado State University. She has designed one-third of all livestock handling facilities in the United States with the goal of decreasing the fear and pain animals experience in the slaughter process. Grandin is the author of Thinking in Pictures and Animals in Translation: Using the Mysteries of Autism to Decode Animal Behavior.
cancer in a local hospice. She, too, was not awake and presumably unaware of others' presence with her. The atmosphere was by no means solemn. Her family had come to terms with her passing and were playing guitars and singing. They allowed her to be present with them as though she were still fully alive.

With therapy clients, I am still pulled by the need to do more than be, yet repeatedly struck by the healing power of connection created by being fully there in the quiet understanding of another. I believe in the power of presence, and it is not only something we give to others. It always changes me—and always for the better.

Debbie Hall has been a psychologist in the Pediatrics Department of San Diego's Naval Medical Center for twelve years. She also volunteers for the Disaster Mental Health Team of her local Red Cross. A lifelong Californian, Hall lives in Escondido with five cats and a fifteen-year-old golden retriever.

I consider myself a feminist, and I feel like a moron admitting it, but it's true: I believe in Barbie.

For me, as a kid, Barbie was about cool clothes, a cool job, cool friends, and cool accessories—the airplane, the apartment building, and the camper. I learned to sew so I could make outfits for Barbie and her friends, who took turns being the airplane pilot, the doctor, the fashion designer. Barbie was never about Ken. He was always a little dusty and in the corner. My Barbie didn't enter beauty contests, get married, or have children. She went to Paris and New York for fancy dinners and meetings.
Years later, I became a fashion designer. I lived in Paris and New York and went to fashion shows and fancy dinners. It was all about the outfits and I began to wonder: Am I just a grown-up Barbie? I am a strong, intelligent woman. My idols are supposed to be Georgia O'Keeffe or Gloria Steinem or Madeleine Albright. Am I in danger of becoming a puff piece like Barbie?

When I achieved my Barbie-style life, I wasn't so sure I wanted it. My husband is a prosecutor. He can change a person's life forever in just one day. I come home from work and say, "I sold a great green dress today and you should have seen the shoes!"

Today, I'm sort of the anti-fashion designer fashion designer. I don't particularly like shopping, and if someone says fashion is silly, I'm the first to agree. It's just clothes. But if the sleeve is cut just right, it makes a difference. It makes a difference in how you present yourself. So many people have body issues. I hope I can help people like themselves more.

Clothes are personal. And they're part of your identity. A few weeks ago, I got a call from a customer. She told me, now that she has my clothes to put on in the morning, she's never felt so confident in her life. They may just be clothes, but they help her to be who she wants to be and to believe in herself.

The blonde-haired, blue-eyed Malibu Barbie I loved looked nothing like my red-haired, freckled self. But that didn't stop me from thinking I was just like Barbie—cool and independent and smart. It's only as an adult that I realize that my belief in Barbie is really a belief in my own imagination, in whoever I imagined I could be, and whatever I imagined I could do. I believe in imagining a life, and then trying to live it.

JANE HAMIL

Jane Hamill grew up designing and sewing clothes for family members in her hometown of Chicago. She studied fashion in New York and Paris before opening her own boutique at age twenty-five. Hamill is on the advisory board of Columbia College in Chicago and is a member of the Apparel Industry Board.
I believe in the power of the unknown. I believe that a sense of the unknown propels us in all of our creative activities, from science to art.

When I was a child, after bedtime I would often get out of my bed in my pajamas, go to the window, and stare at the stars. I had so many questions. How far away were those tiny points of light? Did space go on forever and ever, or was there some end to space, some giant edge. And if so, what lay beyond the edge?

Another of my childhood questions: Did time go on forever? I looked at pictures of my parents and grandparents...
Scientists are happy, of course, when they find answers to questions. But scientists are also happy when they become stuck, when they discover interesting questions that they can’t answer. Because that is when their imaginations and creativity are set on fire. That is when the greatest progress occurs.

One of the Holy Grails in physics is to find the so-called Theory of Everything, the final theory that will encompass all the fundamental laws of nature. I, for one, hope that we never find that final theory. I hope that there are always things that we don’t know—about the physical world as well as about ourselves. I believe in the creative power of the unknown. I believe in the exhilaration of standing at the boundary between the known and the unknown. I believe in the unanswered questions of children.

Alan Lightman is an astrophysicist and novelist teaching at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is the author of Einstein’s Dreams and A Sense of the Mysterious: Science and the Human Spirit. Lightman and his wife, Jean, started the Harpswell Foundation to help disadvantaged students in Cambodia obtain an education.
The Virtues of the Quiet Hero

John McCain

I believe in honor, faith, and service—to one's country and to mankind. It's a lesson I learned from my family, from the men with whom I served in Vietnam, and from my fellow Americans.

Take William B. Ravnel. He was in Patton's tank corps that went across Europe. I knew him, though, as an English teacher and football coach in my school. He could make Shakespeare come alive, and he had incredible leadership talents that made me idolize him. What he taught me more than anything else was to strictly adhere to our school's honor code. If we stuck to those standards of integrity and honor, then we could be proud of ourselves. We could serve causes greater than our own self-interest.

Years later, I saw an example of honor in the most surprising of places. As a scared American prisoner of war in Vietnam, I was tied in torture ropes by my tormentors and left alone in an empty room to suffer through the night. Later in the evening, a guard I had never spoken to entered the room and silently loosened the ropes to relieve my suffering. Just before morning, that same guard came back and retightened the ropes before his less humanitarian comrades returned. He never said a word to me. Some months later on a Christmas morning, as I stood alone in the prison courtyard, that same guard walked up to me and stood next to me for a few moments. Then, with his sandal, the guard drew a cross in the dirt. We stood wordlessly there for a minute or two, venerating the cross, until the guard rubbed it out and walked away.

To me, that was faith: a faith that unites and never divides, a faith that bridges unbridgeable gaps in humanity. It is the faith that we are all equal and endowed by our Creator with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is a faith I would die to defend.

My determination to act with honor and integrity impels me to work in service to my country. I have believed that the means to real happiness and the true worth of a
I believe in the absolute and unlimited liberty of reading. I believe in wandering through the stacks and picking out the first thing that strikes me. I believe in choosing books based on the dust jacket. I believe in reading books because others dislike them or find them dangerous. I believe in choosing the hardest book imaginable. I believe in reading up on what others have to say about this difficult book, and then making up my own mind.

Part of this has to do with Mr. Buxton, who taught me Shakespeare in tenth grade. We were reading Macbeth. Mr. Buxton, who probably had better things to do, nonetheless...