

# Theta Alpha Journal



November 2017

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Theta Alpha  
"Daughters of the Academy"



Named From the Greek:  
Θυγατερες Ακαδημιας  
*Thugateres Akadémias*

Founded in 1904 by graduates of the Academy of the New Church, Theta Alpha exists to provide a forum for women for the advancement and support of New Church education in its many forms, and to support each other in our personal spiritual growth. Membership is open to interested women aged eighteen and older.

*Non Nobis Solum* ~ Not for Ourselves Alone

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## President's Message – Fall 2017

*Melodie Greer*

It's hard to believe that it has been three-plus years already, and my tenure as president is coming to a close. The last three years have seen the beginnings of new life for Theta Alpha International, and with Janet Krettek at the helm, I have no doubt we will continue to renew this vital organization. I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for all that Janet has done for us. She is a whirlwind of energy and enthusiasm, and with the support of the Executive Committee, she has moved us forward and worked diligently to bring TAI to a new generation. It is not easy bridging the span of years represented by our membership, and Janet does this with great sensitivity, while continuing to help us fully embrace the digital age.

A very popular aspect of our renewal is the reinstatement of the *Theta Alpha Journal*. Thanks to the hard work of Helen Kennedy, Erin Larson, Linda Odhner and Diane Geanuleaus, we have enjoyed renewed connections with old friends, as well as making connections with new ones. Keep those submissions coming.

I would also like to acknowledge the quiet, behind the scenes, and vital work done by Patrick Mayer (husband of Gillian Simons Mayer) as our treasurer for the last three years. Thanks to his expertise, we switched banks, improved our accounting system, and have kept on top of finances with timely, useful treasurer's reports. And, since Patrick does not attend our executive committee meetings, a big thank you is owed to Gillian for being such a cheerful and helpful go-between.

And speaking of finances, we continue to have room for improvement in the dues/contributions arena. This past

spring, we sent out approximately 1400 *Journals*, while receiving dues and/or contributions from less than 300 members. As a reminder, our membership (and fiscal) year runs from July 1 to June 30. Dues can be paid online, via PayPal, by going to <http://bit.ly/taijournal>. Or you can send a check made out to Theta Alpha International to P.O. Box 154, Bryn Athyn, PA, 19009. (There should be a tear-out page elsewhere in this *Journal*.)

In closing, I would like to remind us that we ARE our mission, and our mission is timeless. This is not going to change. However, the mechanics of how we fulfill our mission HAVE to change if we want our organization to be embraced by new generations of women and continue to thrive. Your Executive Committee has worked hard to keep the mission alive, and I wish to recognize and express my gratitude for their willingness to give of their time and energy to keep Theta Alpha International moving forward.

Sincerely,  
Melodie Greer  
President

## Membership Dues

Please remember that your membership dues support all of Theta Alpha International's programs, including this *Journal*!

Dues are \$15 (US)

For new and renewing members, please either remit payment to:

Theta Alpha International  
P.O. Box 154  
Bryn Athyn, PA 19009

**OR**

Pay online at:

<http://bit.ly/taijournal>

*You can join any time!*

*If you are renewing, dues are "due" by July 1st each year.*



**This is a tear-out page to send in with your dues; just fill in the information on the back and send in with your dues, or sign up online.**

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\_\_\_\_\_

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## Excerpts from “A Definition of Education” by George de Charms

Angela Rose

*This summer I began the work of editing transcriptions of college lectures given in 1942 by Bishop George de Charms titled “The Philosophy of New Church Education.” Copies of the 1979 reproduction of these lectures can be borrowed from the Swedenborg Library. Audio recordings of the same lectures given in 1962 are available on [newchurcaudio.org](http://newchurcaudio.org). In the excerpt below I supplemented the 1942 lecture with quotes from the 1962 recording (shown in italics). I hope this project, made possible by the E. Bruce Glenn Fund, will stimulate the ongoing conversation on New Church education.*

What does the Lord expect of us when He puts children into our hands and gives us the responsibility of them? Children derive from parents and teachers, and from all their contacts with adults, three things that cannot be derived from any other source.

### **Three things children need from adults**

The first thing is the spheres of their lives—that is, the spiritual associations that adults have around them that affect children. Children have not yet chosen or been able to choose their spiritual environment. They live in the sphere of the adults around them and are continually affected by that sphere. This influence of the spheres of adults is perhaps the most powerful agent of education there is. Within the influence of this sphere, delights are implanted and ideals are established. These fundamental attitudes of mind and life are formulated and inaugurated in the minds of children far more in the spheres of our life than by anything we consciously teach them. Children feel much more than they can articulate, and what they feel is simply the sphere of our life. That is the

first thing that can only be given by adults.

The second thing is the guidance of rational judgment. Children have no rational judgment of their own. They have not the knowledge, the experience on which to base it. They must rely on the guidance of adults. The adults who have charge of them must make wise decisions for them and children not only need that, they crave it. They become utterly lost if they do not have an adult to whom they can go to relieve them of the necessity of making decisions that are beyond them. *One of the great mistakes of modern educational philosophy is that children should be asked to form rational judgments for themselves. Children need guidance from adults whom they trust. That's where their security lies* (de Charms, 1962). The decisions we make for our children may exercise profound influence over all their thinking and feeling later on. Our judgment as to what children may or may not do, where they may or may not go, what they may or may not see determines the environment that is going to form the child's mind. That is the second thing that only adults can do.

The third thing that only adults can do is to provide for children the knowledge and experience of the past. Placing before the minds of children a rich background of knowledge opens the gates of opportunity. It gives an introduction that may stir interest. There is something that the child has been born to love. What it is we don't know. It is different with every child. But so long as that spark of interest has been lit, then there is a difference. Then the child begins to learn something. Then you have an education that leads to individual investigation, study and experience. All our efforts to educate children can do nothing more than open an opportunity. Our challenge is to give that opportunity to every child, no matter what their form of mind or gifts or talents. We must try to arouse whatever interest is there, so they will begin to learn from their own initiative.

By these three things—the spheres of our life, the guidance of rational judgment, and the knowledge and experience of the past—adults cannot help exercising a profound influence upon children either for good or bad. Therefore, we are faced with the inevitable question: how shall we do it so it may be good and not bad?

### **Free development under the Lord's guidance**

It is just as important to know the right thing to teach at the proper age of a child, as it is to know what kind of food to give babies so they can live and grow strong. It is just as important that the mind has the right kind of food as it is that the body does. By emphasizing one kind of environment and minimizing another we dispose the mind in one direction or another direction, and that is the sum total of what has been given into our hands to do.

*We define education as the rational control and direction of a child's environment so that the child's mind may be disposed to the reception of Divine Love and Divine Wisdom from the Lord. And this definition applies especially to parents in the home, to the church as a community of homes all seeking to create a similar effective environment for childhood, and to professional educators as well (de Charms, 1962).*

How any individual child will react to the environment we provide, we can't foresee. That is a matter that only the Lord knows. And here is one of the most important things for us to realize. The greatest errors in all human efforts in education are when we try to take over and do what belongs to the Lord, for then we try to force the life of another into some mold that we have imagined. Then we do tremendous injury to the child. Some fond mother makes up her mind that she wants her boy to grow up to be so and so, without any

regard for the fact that he has an individual mind created by the Lord for a use in the other world.

Our whole objective is to cooperate with what the Lord is doing for children, to recognize that their highest welfare lies in a free development under the Lord's guidance, not under ours. How different an ideal of education that is from the kind that tries to envision what our children are going to be ahead of time.

It has been supposed that in the New Church we have a New Church education for the primary purpose of increasing the membership of our church. That has been supposed to be the Catholic reason for having Catholic schools also. It is not the goal or purpose of our education to increase the membership of our church. The goal or purpose of our education is to develop a mode of schooling that will cooperate with Divine Providence so that He may lead them, and it will not take away their freedom of spiritual life by determining their life for them ahead of time. True New Church education has the greatest possible regard for the spiritual free development of children in the next generation.

De Charms, G. (1942). *The Philosophy of New Church Education*. Unpublished manuscript.

De Charms, G. (Presenter). (1962, December 20). *Definition and aims of education* [Audio file]. Retrieved from <http://newchurchaudio.org/event.php?event=23123>

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*How do we experience the Word working in our daily lives? The following two poems endeavor to share some of those experiences, and are paired with stories and ideas in the Word from which they grew. They are selections from a book Laurel is working on, Praying For Rain. (Used by permission, copyright 2012 Laurel O. Powell)*

## **Newborn**

*Laurel Odhner Powell  
(For Ariel)*

These are the guardians of the Way:  
They sleep, and dream their dreams of milk and  
angels  
And with their sleep they wrap the world,  
Fight off hate and the hells.  
The grimaces of battle cross their faces—  
Frowns, and brief celestial smiles:  
They leave no trace.  
But by the battles waged over  
These smallest sleeping ones,  
The world is saved,  
And paths to heaven opened.

1983

*Some spirits...came to me with the intent to suffocate me...but I was delivered by the Lord. A little child was then sent by the Lord, at whose presence they were so tortured that they could scarcely breathe, in which state they were kept even until driven to supplications, and thus were thrust down into hell (Arcana Coelestia 3895).*

## Ladies of the Moon

*Laurel Odhner Powell*

Good evening, ladies of the Moon.  
I come out beneath dark blue sky  
To shake crumbs from our supper cloth,  
In clothesline yard by kitchen door.  
How bright your rising shines on me!  
You stand in land of silver dust,  
And send warm light of sun at noon  
To kiss my face in dewy dark.

What work do your hands do up there?  
Do you hoe the silver dust?  
Weave the moonbeams? Wash the stars?  
Shake crumbs from your tablecloths?  
Hang out laundry? Gaze at Earth,  
Wishing we could touch and share  
Humble duties, thoughts, and prayer  
Across this gulf of dark and night?

Dec 20, 2009

*That there are inhabitants on our Moon is known to spirits and angels... Those who have not seen and spoken with the spirits therefrom, still do not doubt but that there are also men upon them, because...where there is an earth, there are men. For man is the end for the sake of which an earth exists, and nothing was made by the Most High Creator without an end.*

*One carried another on his back, and the two approached me in this way...they were dwarfs... spirits of the Moon in the Greatest Man have reference to the ensiform or xiphoid cartilage, to which the ribs are attached in front... (Earths in the Universe 1111-112).*

## Whole Learning, Deep Understanding

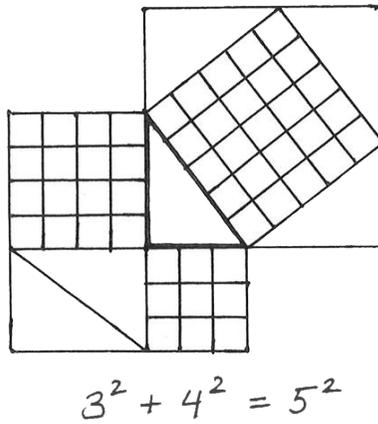
*Linda Simonetti Odhner*

We encounter many right angles in daily life: books and papers are almost always rectangular, and right angles often predominate in buildings, furniture, and street grids. We might profitably ponder why this is the case. Years ago I exchanged letters with an adult who knew that a triangle with sides measuring three, four, and five units long is a right triangle, according to the Pythagorean theorem. But his grasp of what makes a right angle “right” seemed shaky.

Saying (correctly) that “a right angle is a ninety-degree angle” doesn’t explain why ninety degrees is more special than eighty or a hundred, though it helps to know that a full circle is customarily divided into 360 degrees. I like to think of a right angle as half of a straight angle, or the kind of angle squares are made of. In the material realm of Earth’s gravity, a right angle is the angle between what hangs from above, like a plumb line, and what is supported from below, like a liquid surface at rest—the angle between vertical and horizontal.

Drawing with a compass naturally divides the circle into thirds and sixths, and easily generates equilateral triangles and regular hexagons; forming right angles and squares with a compass and straightedge is slightly more cumbersome. In contrast, it is easy to construct right angles by folding sheets of paper, yet just a tad awkward to fold paper for cutting out a proper six-sided snowflake. Euclid’s definition may not explicitly tell you this, but the right angle formed by folding paper is just as mathematically rigorous as the one made with a compass and straightedge.

The Pythagorean theorem is justifiably famous. It’s a sweet, lovely thing—all the more so with full appreciation of the “rightness” of a right triangle.



### Deep Understanding: What It Isn't

John Holt recalls from his prep school days, "A friend was studying for a chemistry test. He was trying to memorize which of a list of salts were soluble in water. Going through the list, he said that calcium carbonate was soluble. I asked him to name some common materials made of calcium carbonate. He named limestone, granite, and marble. I asked, 'Do you often see these things dissolving in the rain?' He had never thought of that. Between what he was studying for chemistry and the real world, the world of his senses and common sense, there was no connection" (*How Children Fail*, 1982, p. 143).

Howard Gardner, in his book *The Unschooled Mind* (1991), reflects on his daughter's dismay at not understanding her college physics class, and the way schools often equate test-taking and problem-solving success with understanding. "No one ever asks the further question, 'But do you *really* understand?' because that would violate an unwritten agreement: A certain kind of performance shall be accepted as adequate for this particular instructional context. The gap between what passes for understanding and genuine understanding remains great; it is noticed only sometimes...

and even then, what to do about it remains far from clear” (p. 6). Many years later, this is still often true.

### **The staying power of the “Unschooling Mind.”**

Gardner explains that children typically develop a highly functional model of the world and how it works by about age five, along with oral fluency in their native language. Much of subsequent learning involves refining and correcting that model. He further informs us that many aspects of the unschooled mind prove resistant to change. Teaching physics, for example, is not a matter of writing on the student mind as on a blank slate, but rather helping students to revise what’s already there. Researchers have documented students’ tendency to forget the Newtonian principles they have supposedly learned and drift back into the intuitive physics of childhood. They can solve problems correctly in a format familiar to them from the class, but often fail to extrapolate or adapt their learning to different situations.

**A falsely inflated sense of mastery.** Someone might take a course or read a book about quantum mechanics, or some other domain of advanced knowledge, and claim expertise on that basis, even if the class is introductory or the book is written for a lay audience. Part of the problem may lie with the class or the book itself. Certain books that I’ve read, especially of the debunking sort, invite the reader to revel in instantly seeing through the so-called mass delusions of mainstream scholarship. I hardly need to add that the training we get in school may not prepare us very well to resist this kind of blandishment, or to sort out which debunkers to take seriously. We’d be better off finishing a book of popular science feeling more confused than when we started, but with a spark of genuine interest.

### **Whole Learning**

I have never thought of learning in a strictly utilitarian

way. Nor do I object in principle to purely academic study, except when too much of it is forced on children at too young an age (or any age, honestly). The suggestion that learning is irrelevant to students unless it addresses some concrete, immediate need seems overly narrow; but learning needs some kind of meaningful context to bring it to life. In contrast with the “decontextualized knowledge” (Gardner’s phrase) of most school testing, I see whole learning as connected to life in three main ways.

**Work learning** ranges from the manual, reading, and math skills needed to follow recipes and construct things by hand, to more advanced tools for navigating the world, relating to people, managing resources, and earning a livelihood. Watching and helping people make, grow, and repair things is a great way to learn about living. The lives of American pioneers, lovingly described by Laura Ingalls Wilder in the “Little House” books, showed wide-ranging knowledge of how to live off the land.

**Play learning** is the fun stuff. The ancient Greeks considered learning a leisure activity. Games, puzzles, and sports, make-believe and fantasy play, mystery novels, humor and entertainment all are forms of recreational learning; simple exposure to the richness of what’s out there in the universe can relax, refresh, and rejuvenate the mind. Learning needn’t always be a serious business, and done in a playful spirit, it may lead to original discovery.

**Soul learning** reminds us that we are more than merely natural beings. Religious teaching and spiritual practice, and creating and participating in all the arts, can take us out of our limited selves and help us connect deeply with nature, with others and with God. (More about soul learning will appear in a future article in this series, “The Awesome Presence of Spirit.”)

Work, play, and soul often go together, especially for the very young learner, but not all three have to be present at once; any two out of three will support passionate, eager, committed learning. Zero out of three, though, just doesn't cut it. The Disney nature films I remember so fondly from elementary school entertained, awed, and informed at the same time. But sucking the life out of the stuff of soul learning with a dry, dead treatment of it negates its value, and a piece of knowledge taught in order to be used ten years later might be outdated or long forgotten by then. In the meantime students can hone the valuable skill of learning things as needed.

### **Why Deep Understanding is Worth Pursuing**

When we take a part of reality deeply into our minds, immerse ourselves in it, digest it, assimilate it, and make it part of us, it transforms our vision of everything. A seed dropped into the rich soil of experience may sprout into a revelation that multiplies thirty, sixty, a hundredfold. New mental vistas open up; new thought spaces unfold (see my previous article, "Thought Spaces and Early Learning" in the Nov. 2016 *Journal*). The universe turns out to be bigger and more marvelous than we ever imagined.

This kind of experience offers satisfaction and fulfillment, both in itself and as a stepping-stone to a heavenly life. And when we have tasted the real thing, we are less likely to be taken in by cheap substitutes. We start to find meaning and see connections between apparently unrelated subjects. Deep understanding of basic principles doesn't blow away at the lightest puff of breeze or wither away with age. When we can reason from basic principles to more advanced knowledge, we get a better sense of which facts are most fundamental and most lasting.

If children are allowed to follow their particular interests freely, as far as their curiosity will take them, and

spend less time on other studies, a flat, two-dimensional view of learning might suggest that they will become too one-sided. But one subject often leads to another in unpredictable paths, and depth balances breadth in learning. Specialized study pays off in multiple ways, sharpening awareness of the unplumbed darkness underlying the visible surface of all knowledge, hinting at how much is still unknown. Deep ignorance—call it informed ignorance—goes hand in hand with deep understanding.

Mastering one subject to even a moderate degree can remind us of our ignorance in other areas. Much mischief may be done by those who mistake their own, or someone else's, superficial knowledge for the deep, genuine article. A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, they say. In *Anna and the Black Knight* Fynn's mother tells him, "You've got to learn more to protect your self from what you already know." In the Internet age, when torrents of information are available with a few clicks of a mouse, more than ever we need tools for making sense of information and assessing its reliability.

## **Cultivating Deep Understanding**

Deep understanding is at least partly a matter of aptitude. Some people home in on it by instinct, and refuse to settle for less than the real thing. Physicist Richard Feynman burned with curiosity about how the world works. As a youngster in the 1930s he fixed his neighbors' radios and made his own that pulled in signals from all over the country. Anna of *Mister God, This Is Anna* was an infant savant in philosophy. (See the discussion of infant and child savants in my previous article, cited above.) She saw patterns of meaning everywhere she looked. Anna was lucky enough to have Fynn as her companion, who loved math and science and took her to Woolworth's to buy ten mirrors to carry on their exploration of life. She would often begin with some aspect of the natural world, manipulate it, drink deeply of it,

and then link it with the life of the spirit.

But anyone who desires deep understanding can actively cultivate it. There are different kinds of depth, and not all of them require special talents or years and years of dedicated study, if we practice on simple things first. A teacher may lack deep understanding of a subject being studied, but a willingness to work for it with the class may do more good than leading students to believe that they've been taught all there is to know. Understanding can't simply be transplanted from mind to mind like factual knowledge. Teaching is a first-rate opportunity to test and refine our own understanding: a simple question without a ready answer becomes an invitation to observe, reflect, and bone up.

**Starting with basic principles.** More time spent thinking about right angles before moving on to the Pythagorean theorem will likely prove its worth in the long run. The simplest building blocks of learning can be combined in an amazing variety of ways. By way of example, I love tiling toys with flat shapes that fit together into different patterns, and I collect them avidly. I once received two different sets of tiles as birthday gifts, one with intricate snowflake shapes and the other with three kinds of rhombus. The snowflakes were fun, but I could do far more different things with the simple rhombic tiles, and have spent many happy and illuminating hours with them. (I invite the reader to Google Image "rhombic tiling.")

But by basic principles I don't necessarily mean breaking things down to the tiniest possible bits. Schooling may over-stress analysis rather than seeing things as wholes. (The "New Math" of 50 years ago had children begin with set theory, but that didn't last long.) Learning often moves naturally from wholes to parts, as when infants listen to speech and start to talk. The science of chemistry didn't start with atoms and molecules, nor did biology begin with the

discovery of DNA. Human learning begins at a medium-sized human scale, not too big, not too small.

Simplifications help to introduce new ideas, but pretending that complexity doesn't exist denies children's experience of it. This is the real "dumbing down." I was told that I couldn't subtract a larger number from a smaller one when I already knew about negative numbers. (I also knew who really filled my Christmas stocking.) Children aren't bothered by being confused until they are trained to be; they pick out what conveys meaning to them from everything that pours in through their senses.

Some classes now have the students listen to the lecture at home and work problems at school, instead of the reverse. Students gain confidence in their own ability to figure things out by trying different things until they find what works, and watching their classmates do the same. The classroom becomes a workshop for problem-solving skills, not primarily a quest for Right Answers.

**The role of systems in learning.** Academic learning can give welcome shape to our knowledge by providing systematic frameworks and shared vocabulary. A system, like a lens, brings experience into sharper focus. But no matter how much we polish and adjust our academic lenses, they won't help us if we can't see anything recognizable through them. The invention of microscopes and telescopes some 300 years ago led to dazzling scientific progress, but it took time for researchers to interpret and understand what they viewed through these magical devices. Linnaeus (animal and plant taxonomy) and Cuvier (comparative anatomy) created systems of classification that turned the study of nature into the science of biology, by organizing mountains of data. In our systematic teaching we can appeal to experience, the way John Holt did while helping his friend study chemistry. And we can find out what kinds of systems students have created on their own

for organizing knowledge. Humans show a natural bent for sorting, classifying, and pattern-finding; that's why we have systems in the first place.

In our spiritual lives we sometimes mistake the map for the journey, and in the halls of learning it is easy to mistake knowledge of the system for knowledge of the thing it describes. Grammar, for example, is inherent in language, not independent of it. As a writing coach, I advise my students to read their compositions aloud to themselves, or to another person, to hear if their work sounds right. Sometimes an ear for language catches things the eye overlooks. A deep understanding of English grammar depends on immersion in the English language, and hearing stories read aloud familiarizes us with the rhythms of written English.

The narrative form can function as a system for learning. Turn something into a story, and it makes emotional as well as cognitive sense; the sequence of events makes an impression on the memory. This applies particularly to the tapestry of interwoven stories which make up the study of human history.

Systems themselves can be beautiful and delightful. Math is pure system, as crystals and jewels are pure transparency, refraction, and reflection. A particular series of elegant diagrams in my college freshman biology textbook makes me happy every time I think of it (as does the memory of the teacher who taught the course). Those diagrams gave me treasured insight into botanical genetics. But I don't fancy myself a botanist on that account, when I still have a hard time identifying poison ivy.

**Discussing sources of knowledge.** Working on a fifth-grade science project about prehistoric life, I knew that paleontologists had discovered plants and animals from the past by digging up and studying fossils. But I never wondered

where the geologic time scale had come from. It was just there on the page of the World Book, in a nice tidy chart. Much later I learned about rock strata, catastrophic events, mass extinctions, and why the Cambrian period came first on the chart. Later still I saw beyond the vertebrate bias of my early teaching to a truer grasp of the diversity of living creatures. Those horseshoe crabs my classmates and I lugged around on the Jersey shore 50 years ago aren't actually crustaceans at all, and they've been around for millions of years.

Also in fifth grade, I read in our science textbook that plate tectonics was one of two competing theories about how the continents reached their present forms, and that plate tectonics had been the less accepted theory but was gaining support as new evidence came to light (this was in the 1960s). I was much struck by this and I remember it to this day, now that plate tectonics is well established.

### **Food for Thought**

If a monkey is handed its food peeled and ready to eat, its body may be nourished, but the experience is less than fully satisfying. Zookeepers are now aware that their captive monkeys are far more content when they can forage for their food, and so the keepers create enclosures similar to wild habitats and hide food in them for the monkeys to find.

Our own approach to eating can be skewed when our experience of food is cut off from its source—not to say that no one should ever eat a Pop-Tart or a frozen pizza. Still, someone who has never picked a bucket of wild berries, or plucked a sprig of parsley or a tomato fresh from the garden, never shopped at a farmer's market or cooked a meal from fresh, whole ingredients, misses an important dimension of food's sustaining quality. (City dwellers who enjoy eating French fries may have no idea that potato plants have leaves

and flowers.) Even when we don't go all the way to the source for every meal, knowing where food comes from and how it's prepared helps us to savor what we eat, and give thanks for a meal that a friend or family member has cooked with love and care.

Likewise, we don't have to discover everything we learn from scratch, but it helps to know that facts don't "come from" the encyclopedia, any more than food "comes from" the supermarket. The periodic table of elements and the geologic time scale didn't magically appear in the textbook, any more than chickens come into being already shrink-wrapped in the meat department. When we keep this in mind, each new thing we learn can take its rightful place in a living ecology of human thought.

*Linda Simonetti Odhner is a lifelong student of geometry and various other things. This is actually the second part of what was originally planned as "The Awkward Reach for Academic Standards," and part three is in the works. This whole series on education keeps getting longer and she might still be working on it ten years from now.*

#### Recommended Reading:

Fynn, *Anna and Mister God* (includes *Mister God*, *This is Anna*, *Anna's Book*, and *Anna and the Black Knight* (2004). (Vernon Sproxton in the introduction asserts his belief that Anna is an actual person.)

Howard Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach* (1991).

Richard Feynman as told to Ralph Leighton, *Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman: Adventures of a Curious Character* (1984).

*Linda Odhner can be contacted at [lsiodhner@verizon.net](mailto:lsiodhner@verizon.net). She is showing some of her geometric models at the Charter Day Reunion Show at the Fine Arts Building in Bryn Athyn Oct 19 - Nov 17 2017.*

## How My Grandfather Read a Book

*Laurel Odhner Powell*

These boxes of books are the dregs, I guess you could say, of my grandfather's library. My brothers went through my parents' shelves and sorted into these boxes the books they figured no one would ever want, and loaded them into my van to be recycled or donated to the local library's sale. I let them sit in the van for weeks, not ready to let them go. Then, one gloomy afternoon, pressed by the need to use the truck for some other purpose than book storage, I went out and looked through the boxes. With the doors wide open to the summer rain, I sat in the van for hours, paging through all the books. It was the first time I had taken, since Mom died a year ago, to just be alone among the remnants of my parents' estate and meditatively...consider...beginning...to allow myself to grieve.

The libraries in my family run broad and deep. Even this half-dozen boxes of rejected remnants runs the gamut from coffee-table albums, through children's classics and science texts to philosophy and studies of the Bible.

Here were some of the favorite tales of my childhood, worn to shreds by my constant rereading; my children got newer copies of them—I didn't know these ones were still around. Some are what I think of as random books—mediocre school texts, tattered paperbacks picked up at yard sales, shiny pop-psych self-help theories that ran like fads through the family...but at least half of those discarded books have the HLOdhner bookplate, and the marks of Granddaddy's vigorous intellect inscribed all over their pages.

When Granddaddy read a book, he didn't just read a book. He debated with it, examined and corrected and improved it, compared it with other books, and mined it for gold. Hardly a volume of these books that were his is without passages underlined, margins scrawled with "Nota Bene!",

exclamations of agreement or outrage, cross-references, or alternate explanations. And understand, these boxes I'm looking at are just a drop in the ocean of books that filled Hugo's study at Glenhurst, and the "little study" in the next room, the deep, tall shelves in the upstairs hall, and the shelves and shelves and shelves that lined his office. He didn't keep these books for show, or to maybe read someday. He devoured them, chewed them up, digested what they had to offer, and compared them, always and rigorously, to what the Heavenly Doctrines teach. He was looking, in everything he read (except maybe the murder mysteries), for nourishment, for sustenance, for knowledge that confirmed and illustrated the Word of God.

I hope to go through these books again more carefully, and copy out some of the notes he wrote in them, and some examples of what he'd underline. When I've done that, I guess I'll let them go. I am not the scholar my Granddaddy was. I won't likely ever read more than a few pages of these tomes of Biblical commentary, the history of philosophy, physics and psychology. I have only read a few of the many books and doctrinal studies Granddaddy wrote himself.

But I want to offer up a prayer of thanksgiving for the world I was given, in which these studies have already been done. Like a baby bird, I have been fed this knowledge predigested from the moment I hatched. The work I should be doing, and have not been, is of a subsequent kind, built on Granddaddy's, more about applying and sharing than discovering and formulating.

Maybe seeing how voraciously Granddaddy attacked his work will spur me on to dig into my own.

*Laurel is Laurel Odhner Powell, her parents are Oliver (Randolph) Odhner and Rachel (David) Odhner, and her granddaddy is Hugo Ljungberg Odhner. Laurel can be contacted at [lpowell@odhner.net](mailto:lpowell@odhner.net)*

*In this issue we are focusing on creative writing, and the following articles are a sampling of the gifts of imagination possessed by members of our readership. We encourage others to consider submitting an excerpt from their short story or novel to our Journal to be published in a future issue. The following "A Letter of Confidence" is not a story per se, but Estelle takes us into the mind of a creative writer, showing us a few of its twists and turns.*

## **A Letter of Confidence**

*Estelle Rogers*

It was a brooding, dark-clouded autumn evening. I was sure that the sky above was on the verge of crying its miseries away. I, too, could feel what they felt. I was trying to rain myself. To write is to rain: there is a heavy matter which cannot be condensed any longer, so it is precipitated in an outright, abounding, prolific way. Like the rain quenches the earth's thirst and washes away bad things, it quenches my thirst to express meaningful things, and to order my thoughts and feelings. I was concerned. I had not let out a single dribble, contributing to one of my 'meaningful' stories, for months. I waited, in my seemingly continuous pale grey cloud temper. I did not feel much of anything, but a sort of vague depression. If I were to write, I thought petulantly, *There is no one to write to but myself... Writing a story to myself is egotistical, self-centred, and falsely promoting. What is the point of writing stories if they are of use to no one?* But imagination—weather—is a tenacious thing. Eventually, it will perform one of its ways.

Its first attempt took place on that autumn evening. The chilled wind made me shudder slightly, similarly to the reaction which writing gives me. It had drizzled a little; electric light twinkled on the dark road like magic. (Everyone knows that magic looks like clusters of stars, but more lively.)

My imagination knows me well: it knows my loves, worries, and regrets... I think that it understood what I needed to begin with. To be a writer, I believe that one needs bravery and courage to be oneself to find their true purpose or intent.

That evening I was Gwendolen. I was her quite suddenly, and there was no questioning whether I was actually me. Her thoughts raced through her mind with her rapid heartbeat; they terrified me and caused me to run for my life. Perhaps the strangest thing about this experience my imagination imposed upon me was that I could see her face: the exact tweak of her nose, her piercing green eyes, and her pale skin which looked like it had never been touched by the light of day. I knew that she was a witch. I knew that there was a fleeting shadow demon close behind....

One Friday evening, I reluctantly sat at my desk to write. My desk was before a window; instead of writing, I stared dejectedly out of it. I got the writing quivers. My imagination turned what I saw through the window into what it wanted to show me; it wanted to remind me to perceive everything through a window which makes my thoughts imagination-influenced. I could see in the distance a tower-like structure in the night, with stars around it. It was a church partially obscured by trees, really, so that it only appeared to be a tower, but my imagination said, in its quiet silvery voice, "No, it's not a church. It's The Tower, which stands upon a mountain with the stars surrounding it, and the witch marches around it to the rhythm of a song inside of her head." For a few months after this sighting of Gwendolen's setting, I wondered what Gwendolen did at her tower on a mountain. It seemed that nothing ever happened to her there, and that she was rather lonely. She did not even know herself why she was there. And what caused her to run away from a shadow? I thought of the small release of rain—with relief but desperation.

One day it occurred to me, as I was trying to force my fingers to type words, that I had not deciphered what the music inside of her head sounded like, exactly. I knew that it was rather quiet and lilting—almost like a lullaby, and that it had a very firm rhythm to make her march. Mum had recently played some of Nik Kershaw’s music. I had heard his piece ‘The Riddle’ before, but I had never read the lyrics and I did not know what they could have meant. After giving it long and deep contemplation, I believed that I had recognised ‘The Riddle’ as a story. I began to imagine how I might tell Nik Kershaw of this idea. Somehow, Nik Kershaw’s song, ‘The Riddle,’ fit into my story like a perfect puzzle piece: everything made sense. My imagination said that the song inside of Gwendolen’s head was ‘The Riddle,’ and that the words were about the story. That spring I sent Nik Kershaw a letter by email to tell him about my possible discovery. He replied in his letter, “You are right, of course,” and asked me to send him the story once I had finished it. My imagination had successfully carried out another of its ‘ways’: it had made me imagine someone to write to. I completed the story and sent it to him at the beginning of the summer.

I like to write fictitious things to make the truths which I have discovered in my life more applicable and obtainable to others. It is sort of like a mask is put on the truth in the story, and any may choose whether to take it off or to leave it on and simply experience the story. They might have some sense of emotional release as I myself did while writing the story. When it seems like my fingers won’t move to type, and my pen is always dry of ink—when it seems that there is no point, and that writing stories is of no consequence—when I do not seem to be able to imagine or to ‘see’ anything anymore, and when I feel I am falling asleep—if I give my stories determination, patience, and care, my imagination will always get me through my struggles to write.

*Estelle is sixteen years old, and she attends the PA Cyber Charter School. Estelle loves to write whatever she imagines, read any fantasy book, draw, play the piano, and figure skate at the 'Flyer's Skate Zone.' If you would like to contact her and say 'hello,' her email address is 'llbelletse@gmail.com'. If you would like to read her stories, they may be found at 'adreamofwriting.wordpress.com'.*



## Call for Art Submissions!



As you can see from the beautiful cover art, and illustrations ranging from zentangles to line drawings, we are hoping that the *Journal* can present some of the visual art that Swedenborgians around the world are creating.

Please send us images you would like to share with *Journal* readers and feel free to write a few sentences about what you send in!

## The Candle Flame

*Estelle Rogers*  
(In memory of Mrs. Tivis)

A light in my life extinguished  
With anguish and dread, I think of the memory of you,  
diminished

A flicker—"I am here," you say  
You flutter, laughing, "Nothing has taken me away."  
I look deep inside to the light and smile  
And speak with you for a while.

"I miss you," I cry, "Please come back"  
"Without you, it can never be the same—"my thoughts  
become without light: black  
Now everything has changed, darkened, faded  
"How could this have happened? Could it not have been  
evaded?"

A flicker—"I am here," you say  
You flutter, laughing, "Nothing has taken me away  
And with a cold ending breath, blew  
Trust, take my light far: I am alive inside of you."



JOIN THE CONVERSATION!  
We would love to publish selected responses  
to articles, poems and stories in the Journal.

*Tell us what you think!*



*LIFELINE is the story of Eli Ross, an all-star lacrosse player whose seemingly perfect life comes crashing down when he overdoses at a party. In rehab, he meets Libby, the sharp-edged artist, whose freshly tattooed scars mirror the emotional scars Eli tries his best to ignore. Eli soon learns that if he's to have any chance at a future, he'll first have to confront his past. Inspired by a family member's battle with addiction, LIFELINE is about the abiding love of family and the fierce persistence of hope.*

*The following excerpt takes place during art therapy at Lakeshore Recovery Center as, faced with his upcoming discharge, the main character grapples with his personal concept of a Higher Power.*

## **Lifeline**

*Abbey Nash*

I sit cross-legged on the floor in front of my Higher Power canvas and page lazily through my pile of magazines. The art teacher had them ready for me when I got to class, along with a pair of scissors and a bottle of glue. "Collage is a wonderfully intuitive art form," she'd said, handing over the stack of supplies. "Sometimes you don't even know what you're looking for until you find it."

I sip coffee from my lukewarm cup and eye my canvas skeptically. The picture of the kayaker stares back at me. It's hung there in isolation for the last week. The impossibility of the kayaker's task first drew me to the image—the cliff of sheer rock rising up right in front of him. But it's the water that I notice now, the crystal-clear expanse surrounding the kayaker, holding him up.

I remember something I learned forever ago in Earth Science. Water erodes rock. That mountain face might

look impassable, but there are cracks in its seemingly solid surface—narrow spaces where water can get in. Water is powerful. With enough time, water can take down a mountain.

I turn back to the magazine in my lap and examine the pages with sharpened focus. The guys in group talk about their Higher Powers like they're always available—as handy and accessible as a pack of Kleenex or a tube of chap stick, right there in your pocket whenever you need them. Not me. I don't believe in some ethereal superpower that can swoop in and rescue me when I'm in trouble. But I believe in my friends. I believe in Red, in the unimaginable courage he has to face down his demons even as he grieves the death of his girlfriend. I believe in Libby, in the quiet strength she finds in her paintings and in her journal, despite her screwed-up family. And I believe in Mo, in falling down and getting back up, over and over again.

I take apart the magazine with frenzied scissors. Within the blaring headlines, I find the words I need. I cut letters from lies, piecing new words together. Page after page, I fill with jagged cracks, until the words spill out like light into darkness, pathways through the mountain.

STRENGTH  
COURAGE  
HOPE  
FORGIVENESS

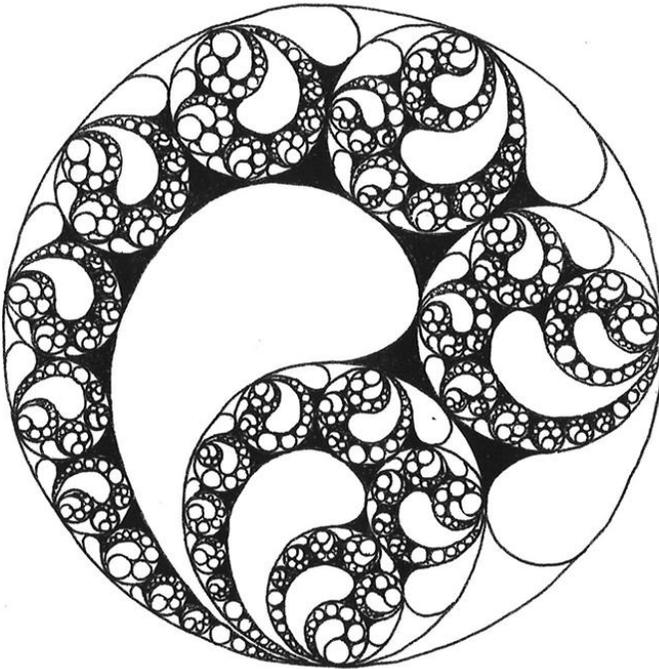
With dots of glue and fragments of tape, I tell the kayaker the real story. There are cracks in the mountain, I tell him. There are places where you can get through. You may not see them yet. You may not see them for a while.

I fill the sky with words that guide his way like stars.

*Abbey Nash graduated from ANC in 2000 and Bryn Athyn College in 2005. She lives with her husband and two daughters in Bryn Athyn where she works at the College as the Head of Academic Advising Staff and as an adjunct instructor in the English department. She is also an active member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators. Her forthcoming young adult novel LIFELINE is scheduled for release by Tiny Fox Press ([tinyfoxpress.com](http://tinyfoxpress.com)) in April 2018.*

*Abbey can be contacted at [abbeynash81@yahoo.com](mailto:abbeynash81@yahoo.com)*

*The author writes: Also, this excerpt has been edited for language. Due to mature subject matter and language, LIFELINE is appropriate for older teens and adults.*



## False Face

*Brielle Williams*

We all hide behind fake faces,  
Deceptive designs  
Designed to hide the reek of rotting lies  
Seeping through cracks in the  
Facade.  
Blank white, like a held breath  
Hoping anew, with naïveté lacking innocence.  
Damaged faith causes tender tears;  
No telling what shadowy trails the mind treks.

Masks fend off howls of hate,  
Cloaking hot and chaotic insecurity.  
Masks donned at the start of day and  
Replaced with new the next.  
Never a minute to taste the strawberry sweetness that  
Life truly is.  
I rely on this method of self confidence,  
False bravado.  
Words pierce soft bodies as—  
You know that saying?  
“Sticks and stone may break my bones but  
Words will never hurt me.”  
Well, words pierce soft bodies as sticks & stones break bones.  
Can’t show them how hollow words leave me.

I learned this trick at a young age to  
Deal with amassing bullies.  
I had one for each day of the week,  
Each personalized and identical to me.  
Minus me, my shy blush & general personality.

They would point and laugh at the round spectacles adorning  
My face.

The ratty & scratchy sweaters worn every day.  
Cruel sharp words could not penetrate the Mask.  
The giant, impermeable, smooth & plastic odorous surface,  
But masks make me numb.  
Like the novocaine you get at the dentist  
When your teeth are particularly sensitive.  
I forgot how it felt to feel ...  
Anything.

When I peered through the slits,  
I didn't recognize the world around me.  
Soft blue sky, teasing wind, eggshell emotions and smiling  
faces all  
Seemed foreign to me.  
In hiding my fear I isolate myself, my  
Whole being cut off from the joy of  
Living.  
Removing the mask took time and effort.  
It was like it had been glued to my wooden face.  
Painfully slow I peeled away the edges,  
Pieces of skin came off as well,  
But I got to live again.

When the process ended,  
I reveled in the pain of freedom.  
Salty air & tears mixed a concoction of burning on my  
Raw skin,  
But warm sunlight dried the pain.  
I could see,  
I was free.

*Brielle was a senior at the Academy when she wrote this last year.*

# The Wigmaker

(a novel of Tudor Ireland)

Lara Muth

*Queen Elizabeth's wigmaker, Udolfo, must scour the kingdom for truly royal tresses to deck Her Majesty at court. Sent into Ireland as a spy, he meets a captivating redhead. Her hair is of the finest quality – as an artist he must possess it, and as a man he must have her. But Saoirse Usher refuses to sell. Her hair is another man's treasure and she will not part with it. The wigmaker stalks her using bargains and threats. As the Earl of Essex's Irish campaign collapses in the summer of 1599, the wigmaker blackmails Saoirse for her lover's life. The climax is a tangled tragedy of jealous rage and suicidal remorse.*

## Twelfth Night, 1599

The tune came to a close. One man stepped forward with confidence. He was slim as a whip and tall in a white doublet and silk hose. He was the only man wearing white, this wild child, England's *enfant terrible*, The Right Honourable Robert, Second Earl of Essex, scion of the Devereux.

Still considered young, he was in his early thirties, well-made with a shapely leg, the mature bloom of English chivalry. The courtesy of the Earl of Essex was legend, his bold exploits well-known from the battlefield to the bedchamber while his melancholic moods made him seem a romantic figure. Boasting more royal blood than the Queen Herself, he was a suitable consort and She always kept him close.

The hall waited, holding their collective breath, watching as Udolfo watched them. Would the Earl of Essex speak, make some announcement, an apology or perhaps an appeal for favour? But he only made his obeisance and begged the Queen to the next dance.

"You like to watch," came a confidential murmur over Udolfo's left shoulder. He knew the voice of Robert Cecil, like

the smooth sigh of a long blade eased from its sheath.

“Mr. Secretary,” Udolfo bowed, “I thought you had retired for the evening.”

They stood together in the shadows, two creatures admiring their monarch. If Robert Devereux was the flower of the nobility, Robert Cecil was the nightshade of Elizabeth’s private garden. A man not made for dancing, he had a crooked back that no one mentioned to his face. He was pale with puffy eyes and white, ink-stained hands. He compensated for his short stature with upswept hair that gave him a permanently startled appearance, though there were few men in England harder to surprise.

Her Majesty rose to Her feet. She had not yet accepted Essex’s offer of a dance. She took each individual step down from the dais with deliberate condescension. It looked like accident, but Udolfo knew the charged moment had been carefully choreographed.

They gazed into each other’s eyes, Essex and Elizabeth. He held out his hand—she demurred to accept. Then he knelt and She melted. A whisper swept through the hall. Udolfo was not fooled; this was the game every courtier could play and Essex was better at it than anyone.

“His lordship is back in favour,” said Udolfo, suffering a jealous pang.

“The night is young,” observed Cecil. “Let him enjoy himself. Tomorrow His Excellency leaves for Ireland.”

“It is decided then?”

“Essex has promised to bring the Arch-Rebel Tyrone to heel – *Aut cum scuto, aut in scuto...*”

Udolfo let the Latin pass him by and the Secretary did not offer to translate.

“You’ve longed for leave to travel, have you not?” asked Cecil. “For your trade?”

“I? To Ireland?” Udolfo scoffed. “Mr. Secretary, I do not think the good Earl would choose me for his retinue.”

“Not all choices are his to make. He will be the first Lord Lieutenant in Ireland for 35 years. The Queen feels his

attendants should reflect his standing.”

“What should I say to him?”

“He will need a barber – and I will need a pair of eyes in Dublin,” said Cecil.

Udolfo swallowed hard.

“Mr. Secretary, you must have a great many spies—”

“All it takes is one—in the right place. You like to watch; I like that about you.”

Udolfo chewed his lip. Cecil was the Queen’s closest advisor. He was a man who got more done by one night’s candle than most men in a week of daylight. Powerful, yet he was not a peer. On the other hand, the Earl of Essex was descended from kings, volatile, a popular hero, quick into favour and quick out of it—and quick with a sword—better a friend than an enemy, but best avoided altogether.

“Your answer?” asked Cecil.

“I’ll need money. . . for expenses,” Udolfo stammered.

“Have you ever been curtailed?” Cecil arched his eyebrow with the question. “England might starve, might groan under threat of foreign war, lost ventures, famine and disease. Parliament might withhold new tapestries, gowns and coaches, but has there ever been constraint placed upon your art?”

“I’d have to leave Her Majesty—” Udolfo panicked. The thought had just occurred to him.

“But think what you might bring Her,” said Cecil.

“Raleigh gives Her pearls. How much more—,” he chose the word he wanted, “. . . intimate. . . might your offering be?”

Udolfo’s panting breath became shallow as visions filled his mind of Ireland: the source and headwater of rivers of red hair.

“I knew Her Majesty could count on you,” said Cecil.

“Let him dance his way into Her favour. You and I know what it is to be indispensable.”

*Lara lives in London and works in charity finance. She earned her masters at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and has*

*directed Shakespeare projects for HM Tower of London and Hampton Court Palace. She has returned to her writing roots as a novelist and is already planning her second novel in this series.*

*Lara can be contacted at [frisland@hotmail.com](mailto:frisland@hotmail.com) or followed on Twitter @lyramariner.*

## **Under More Celestial Influences**

*Helen Kennedy*

*Under More Celestial Influences is the continuation of series of Grandmothers and Grandfathers stories. In the previous book a woman in her forties, May, was unexpectedly taken into the spiritual world. It chronicled her journey in finding her spiritual home and the work she would be doing. In this book her strong emotions compel her into a deeper area of that world and the necessity of examining her intentions and motivations with more clarity. The following excerpt centers on May meeting her distant grandfather, Matheny, who is an angel worker in the hells. On earth during the late 1100s, he lived as a nobleman in eastern France, and died as a result of a seizure caused by his intense anger. Entering a world that was familiar, yet different, before long he came in contact with people who treated him well at first, but soon turned on him with an anger that matched his own.*

Matheny: At first I was transfixed by this anger that matched mine but was so much more in power. But soon I jerked loose from the transfixion and fled erratically from the beings and their fury, going any which way that I could, running and running and running. Eventually I came to a large and strange opening in the ground. I wandered through

this mystery which brought with it a very strange mental journey, and when I came out of the last passageway and crevice, a very long time later, the hatred in my soul was spent, and anger no longer made my heart its dwelling place. Instead, I accepted the loving grasp of the Lord as he wrapped me in his passionate embrace. And I consider the days I spent not in his embrace as a lost and terrible part of my life. There are no words to say about the wasted life I led and the misery I caused other people, especially my son.

May: Is he there with you?

Matheny: I dreaded him coming into this world because he, himself, was filled with anger and ambition, the same which I had passed on to him. But I found him when he was lost in his own way in the enigma, and he since has moved on. I was so grateful that my son and I could be saved, too, that I have been a worker in the enigma ever since, helping any soul who was as angry or lost as my son or I, if his desire is sincere. There is a different passageway out for each person, so there is no one way for everyone whose distorted passions place him there.

May: How do you know their way out then?

Matheny: I'm ignorant of the way any one should go. My work is to help each person become open to the softness trying to reach him, or her.

May: Oh, I wish you would tell me more about this.

Matheny: If you want. The people who come here to this part of the spiritual world are like animals, granddaughter, and their animal nature is not beautiful. The creatures will fiercely attack one another, or if they do cooperate for any length of time, it is entirely to serve their self-will. Competition reigns supreme; competition to be leaders, competition for followers, or competition for supplies. It is like the creatures on earth, only worse. Those animals on earth are following their instincts.

May: But the Lord did go on and create humans out of the apes and their animal nature.

Matheny: The merciful Lord Jesus did. There are

some of those earliest pre-humans who work with us, for who understands better than them the gift of budding human qualities.

May: Oh?

Matheny: They are quite fascinating to be with, to look at their mostly animal bodies, then look deeply into their eyes and recognize a love for their fellow beings. Their compassion has brought me to tears at times. They are sad for those caught in the shifting passions, for the animal mind is continually creating an ever-shifting maze of emotions with no ability to reason what is best and what is not.

May: You mean no ability to think things through?

Matheny: Not any kind of thinking, but the thinking that raises the mind above the natural passions and self-serving thoughts that come from them. These pre-humans were the first to experience the sensations of love radiating from the Divine towards them and are happy they contributed to the beginnings of the human race. They urge those suffering in the caves to accept the humanity being offered.

May: So these pre-humans are in the caves . . . .

Matheny: When a lost soul comes across one, he thinks it is only another animal inhabitant of the caves. But the pre-humans strong animal instincts can fight against the person's in a way that is not understandable to me. It stubbornly insists the other person can start to become human, too. And people respond to the kind of overpowering instinct the pre-humans have. They capture the person's will somehow and make the person aware that overcoming the animal nature is possible. They have a strong mental determination to reach the person. It is amazing to witness.

*Helen Kennedy is a creative writer and also editor of Theta Alpha Journal.*

## The Shoes

*Caira Bongers*

During the 2017 annual clergy meetings held in Bryn Athyn, a church member who feels called by the Lord to serve in ministry walked up to the closed doors of the meetings, slipped off her shoes, and quietly walked away. The shoes manifested her intended presence, and marked her absence. She mentioned that she had done this simple ritual to a few friends, who either in solidarity or with the same calling, decided to follow suit. Soon after it became a social media event, and by the end of the week, many women (along with a few supportive men) had walked to the doors, slipped off their shoes, and left them there. More than 100 pairs of shoes were displayed just outside the doors of the clergy meetings at the Academy dining hall. Additional photos of shoes were posted to social media of out of town supporters of the movement to include women in the priesthood of the General Church.

Fox News aired a brief piece during the evening news on this demonstration, including interviews with both Chelsea Rose Odhner and Rev. Peter Buss Jr. The reporter, inspired by this subtle activism, left shoes at two other Philadelphia-area churches that prohibit female preachers.

I can't speak for all women who participated, but I can speak for myself. The intention behind the demonstration was not to disparage the current members of the clergy. I appreciate much of the work that the men of our clergy are doing. I also believe that the work that they do can be substantively enriched by the physical presence of theologically trained women. Our collective understanding of doctrine would be made more comprehensive with a more diverse group actively participating in the conversation.

To be clear: this is about “and” and not “or.” It is not

a competition as to who would be a better priest. It is about women joining alongside the men, having been theologically trained, to work symbiotically. (The unofficial logo of the movement is the ampersand, to emphasize the goal of cooperative usefulness.)

Some men and women may argue that this is already happening. Women are writing for New Church Journey, women are assisting on pastor's council, women are co-teaching religion classes, and women are offering lay readings at church. But the educational opportunities to fill these rolls as proficiently as possible is limited. Consequently, the paychecks (if any) that come with these jobs are limited, as the resume is necessarily limited by the educational policies.

Personally, I have attended more than one sermon where the message made clear to me that the clergyman did not have a good grasp on the nature of the spiritual issues I confront. The women are not spiritually starving, but many find themselves undernourished. And while the men may not recognize this, the men will benefit from women's wisdom as women do benefit from men, both inside and outside the home.

I have not seen an official response to the shoe demonstration from the clergy yet. However, one minister was quoted as having said regarding the demonstration, "The message strikes me as brilliant, non-attacking, and effective. Masterfully done."

*Caira can be contacted at [caira.bongers@brynathyn.edu](mailto:caira.bongers@brynathyn.edu)*

## Laws of Life Essay Contest

All High School Sophomore (or 15-16 year old) Swedenborgian girls world-wide are eligible to entire this contest. This essay is an opportunity to write about what YOU think is important in life. This is your chance to be heard—to write from the heart about one, or more, of your personal laws of life. Essays are to be in English (Google Translate can be used for this purpose). No name or identification can be on the paper itself to allow impartial judging, but please include your name and address in the envelope or email.

Winners receive a certificate and a check:

1<sup>st</sup> Place: \$100 USD, 2<sup>nd</sup> Place: \$75 USD, 3<sup>rd</sup> Place: \$50 USD.

Essays are printed in the *Journal* with writers' permission and as room permits.

### **The essay guidelines are:**

“The Laws of Life” are a set of rules, ideals or principles by which one should live:

- What do you value most in life?
- What is important to you?
- What ideals do you hold deep in your heart?

Think about the people and experiences that have helped you form these laws...

### **Pick a topic to write about:**

- a personal experience/lesson learned that affects how you live/view your life now
- a quote or an aphorism that inspires or guides you

You can use an analogy, a quotation, a story, or a parable. (No personal or romantic relationships!!)

### **Submissions are to be sent to:**

Theta Alpha International, PO Box 511, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009, USA

**Or email to:** ANCdaughters@gmail.com

**Entries must be received by March 1, 2018**

## 2017 Laws of Life Winners

Camryn Buss	1st
Anji Cooper	2nd
Becca Liu	3rd
Leah Antwi	Honorable mention
Hannah King	Honorable mention
Jordan Kinsey	International winner



## ***Scholarships Available!***

### **Theta Alpha International Education Scholarship**

**Two** education scholarships will be offered for the 2017-2018 school year. This annual award is for the purpose of supporting women attending the Bryn Athyn College of the New Church who desire to become New Church teachers and declare education as a major or minor (or Interdisciplinary Degree). The annual scholarship award amount is \$2,100 (\$700 paid directly to the college at the beginning of each trimester), for up to 2 recipients. One award is for an incoming freshman, and one award is for a current Bryn Athyn College of the New Church education student. These funds may be used toward tuition, fees, and/or books.

### **Theta Alpha International Scholarship**

**Three** scholarships are available to women students of Bryn Athyn College of the New Church who have a 3.0 GPA or higher and are studying Religion (major, minor, ID) or MARS program or are international students. There are (2) \$2,000 and (1) \$1,000 scholarships awarded to eligible recipients who exemplify the teachings of the New Church. These are annual merit-based scholarships that can be used for tuition, college fees, books or supplies.

Applications are due **February 1, 2018**. To apply: email [anccdaughters@gmail.com](mailto:anccdaughters@gmail.com) or call Sarah Wong at BAC 267-502-6085 or see BAC website.

### **2017-2018 Scholarship Winners**

For the religious studies: Leanna Smith, Denali Heinrichs  
For education studies: Rachel Elphick, Denali Heinrichs

## Threads That Bond

*Midje Kerr*

The arrival of the November 2016 Theta Alpha Journal brightened my day, especially reading Helen Kennedy's interviews with some talented ladies and their rich history in the use of and experience with textiles. Their stories inspired me to share some of my own fascination in and use of fiber in creating wall art.

Sewing has been a part of my creative life since early childhood. My mother taught me the basics, but I learned more with the help of books, magazines, and television how-to shows. Many different creative hobbies filled my free time, including stained glass, miniature houses, painting, and woodworking—I recently began making my own frames. Sewing by hand and machine had taken precedence because of its usefulness in making clothing, purses, curtains, and gifts. I've had the pleasure of designing and hand-embroidering chancel cloths for Ivyland New Church, and hand-stitching the General Church clergy stoles.

After retiring I moved out west to be near my daughter, Kerri Brooks, who lives in beautiful Northern Utah. Quilting is quite popular here, so I joined a guild and learned much from a few gifted and inspirational traditional quilters. After a while, though, I felt the need to explore new techniques, to move away from the repetitious and exact cutting of small pieces of fabric and stitching them back together again. I decided to experiment using a wider variety of textiles, design, construction and stitching methods, and soon discovered art quilting.

Art quilts, sometimes called wall art, are made from any type of textile, cut and/or formed into a variety of shapes, which are fused onto a background and/or stitched using a

variety of techniques, and can be embellished with just about anything. They can be inspired by anything from photographic realism to the utterly abstract. They can be any size from “postcard” up to whatever can be handled by the artist and/or the sewing machine.

Working with textile is a liberating and uplifting means to express beauty in versatile, innovative, and fulfilling ways. The infinite variety of colors, shapes, textures and light found in nature inspires me. Birds and flowers are wonderful sources of ideas and can be found right in your own backyard.

Translating what is seen in real life or in a photo into a workable pattern can be quite the challenge. Sometimes it flows, other times it can be an uphill battle. Difficulties most often occur when I’m trying too hard to make an exact replica of or over-thinking a subject. Only the Lord can make perfection. The real goal is to merely convey my impression of the subject. Some art quilt projects take up all my time and attention, and are difficult to put down in order to tend to daily life—laundry, meals, sleep, etc. These projects often become my best work. Then there are also projects that, at some point, don’t seem to be going where I’d hoped. They are set aside until a new goal is visualized or I realize it wasn’t a very good idea in the first place, and I scrap it.

Last winter, I took on a heartwarming sewing project to design and make fleece “3-in-1” scarves, which cover the head and neck, and have pockets for hands. These were donated to a local rescue mission. I was delighted when the quilt guild I belong to chose to adopt this project as their charity for 2017. So far we have made and delivered 223 scarves.

I’ve made lots of mistakes, but now see them as necessary tools by which to learn, to seek and implement new and better ways—and not just regarding my sewing or

creative challenges. Life itself is often battered by the stream of providence, which includes both calm and turbulent times. These challenges can bruise or even break, but never destroy, unless we choose to allow whatever evil and falsities the hells have to offer to enter our souls. This is our choice, not someone else's. The Lord is forever knocking at our soul's "door" asking to be let in. This is true even down to the minutest instances in our lives.

Working with textile is a kind of glue that binds us all together. Can you think of any situation in daily life where fabrics are not involved? It reminds me of how the Lord is ever present with us, protecting us from harmful elements, like fabric protecting our bodies from natural elements. In the case of fabrics, as well as in other instances, he is also giving us things useful and pleasing to our sight and touch.

*Midje can be contacted at [midjer@hotmail.com](mailto:midjer@hotmail.com)*

## Call for Articles!



We need and want to hear from everyone throughout the world in the pages of our long-lived and well-loved *Journal*. We will settle for less than every reader writing an article, but still be cognizant of the fact that everyone has something absorbing, interesting, thoughtful or humorous to share. Contact information is in the beginning of the *Journal*.

*In the May issue of the Journal we gave credit to Vera Glenn and Carol Henderson for the entertaining fashion show during the Charter Day Luncheon. Unfortunately Carol's text was omitted. Since many of our readers relate to the Girls School rules for fashion during the 1950s and '60s, we've included Carol's text and photos in this issue.*

## **Theta Alpha Luncheon October 14, 2016 Fashions from the 1950s and 1960s**

*Carol Henderson*

Fundamental to the philosophy of the Girls School has always been modesty and femininity – decorum. We have 3 models wearing clothing from the 1950s and 60s to illustrate this. Portia Wille O'Brien is wearing a cheerleading outfit from the late 1950s. Back in the day, girls weren't allowed to play in competitive sports because it was considered unfeminine. It was common for the girls to spend their afternoons, sitting on the grassy bank, watching the boys practice their sports. The girls in the class of 1955 rebelled and made up outfits from red and white clothes they owned.

Enter the Girls School Faculty: jumps were to be modest – only one arm could be raised overhead and arching your back was forbidden. Skirts had to be below the knee and huge letter sweaters borrowed from the boys assured that no bodily curves were revealed.

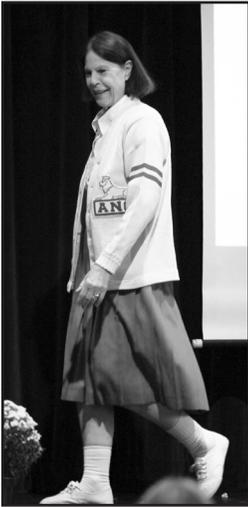
Dances were another story: After a girl accepted an invitation, her date contacted his male friends to complete a "dance card" that designated who would be her dance partner for each of the 8 or 10 dances that evening. This was to ensure that everyone got to dance and that steady couples didn't spend too much time together on the dance floor!

Margaret Gladish, class of 1961, is modeling a prom

dress. Since bare shoulders were not allowed to be seen, someone (usually our mothers) fashioned a tulle or taffeta cover-up and tried to make it look like it matched the dress!

Girls today are used to wearing uniforms, but the only identical-wear we had was the hated blue gym suit, modeled by Carol Henderson, class of 1960.

*Carol can be contacted at [bchenderson66@gmail.com](mailto:bchenderson66@gmail.com)*



## **Lighthouse Ladies/ Theta Alpha Society/ Women's Guild, Buccleuch, South Africa**

Well, we are still here! In an age in which the validity of Women's Guilds is being closely questioned and examined we have reaffirmed our identity to focus on the dynamic word SUPPORT.

In a recent meeting, we pledged ourselves to rekindle the inspiring words of Theta Alpha's Statement:

"We will support the needs of women throughout their life by providing ongoing support for education in the light of the Writings. We hope to nourish feminine perceptions and wisdom.

"To continue as a strong organization we must have the support of New Church women of all ages and from all backgrounds. A variety of views and abilities will enrich us and give us the ability to understand and respond to the needs of the future."

Wise words. We will continue to support the many uses of the Sunday School, led by Louisa Allais and Marianne Blunden, to provide multiple presents for the children at the June 19th function and to support the needy by collecting food for the Village Safe Haven Orphanage, organized by Riva Nortje, and the Alexandra Feeding Scheme. In the past the Guild had done the catering for all weddings, funerals, June 19th functions and the like. Although our catering use has diminished, we will continue to contribute to calls for catering assistance. In addition, Christina Moyo and Heather Allais hold much anticipated jumble sales every month to fund our uses and provide sought after clothes for the poor of the district. They need more members to support these useful forays into the community. Heather does magnificent banners to draw attention to the church and its work.

But mostly, we will focus on the needs outlined in Matthew 25 and their relevance to our society:

Hungry needs: usefulness and service

Thirsty needs: learning and growth

Stranger needs: community and connection

Sick needs: healing and recovery

Prisoner needs: release, freedom and self-determination

To that end we have discussed *How to be a New Church Woman in the 21st Century*, led by Marianne Blunden, "The New Christian Woman Programme" presented by Heather Allais, and "The Inspiration of Women" focusing on networking. Our following meetings are going to discuss "How to Attain Happiness," and will home in on the specific needs of women in our society. One of our members is a policewoman who counsels rape victims and she will share some of her insights and compassion with us. Many of the suggestions came from the members and on 8 October we plan to have a re-launch to draw attention to our new focus. We are heartened by the old saying that "the only certainty is change."

Respectfully submitted by Verna Brown (née Brown) Kathleen Wallis (née Cairns) and Helen Harding (née Brown). We send greetings to Theta Alpha members world-wide and encourage them, in Churchill's famous words, to 'keep on keeping on.'

*Verna can be contacted at [kvbrown@mweb.co.za](mailto:kvbrown@mweb.co.za)*

## **Washington New Church Theta Alpha Guild**

In the past year, our chapter held four meetings, in September, November, January and April, with an average attendance of ten ladies.

Our officers remain the same as the previous year, with Becca Synnestvedt Smith as President, Wystan Gladish Simons as Vice President, Kathy Cooper Johns as Treasurer, and Mary Sandstrom Cooper as Secretary.

Among the uses and events we supported were: our annual Fall Bake Sale and Raffle; several Christmas season events, including a Social and Sing, with a talk by Rev. Brian Smith; making and selling candle-and-greens Centerpieces, and decorating the School and Church; in February we made and sent out “we care” cards to a number of young people in our area, and we put on a Valentine’s Day Luncheon for the School staff; a School Open House was held in March; our annual TAG Banquet took place in the spring, with Lincoln Smith as speaker, on the topic of his Forest Garden Project; a very successful yard sale was held at the Church in May, and also a School BBQ; in June we supported some end-of-schoolyear events, with refreshments; and, finally we assembled and wrapped the New Church Day gifts for the children, these gifts being mostly handmade by various members of the Congregation.

These, and many other uses, keep the ladies of our organization busy through the year.

Respectfully submitted,  
Mary Cooper, secretary

*Mary can be contacted at [cooperpatents@verizon.net](mailto:cooperpatents@verizon.net)*

## **Carmel New Church Theta Alpha Guild**

The ladies of the Carmel New Church Theta Alpha Guild continued to meet monthly during the school year. Our president, Jan Hill, continued to guide us thoughtfully and effectively. Each month we held a worship service,

followed by a business meeting and then an activity or event. We continue to alternate potluck supper or dessert at each meeting.

We held our first meeting of the year in September where we planned for the year including where meetings would be held and by whom, what uses TAG would be performing, and how we might fundraise.

In October, we skipped our typical meeting and had a social event of bowling. We also held a rummage sale where we raised funds for TAG uses. Around this time, we tried, on a trial basis, a new fundraising program through donating clothes to a thrift shop that pays charities by the pound—this was very successful for us.

In November we enjoyed a presentation on the Philippines by a friend of the church, Judith Gonzales. Judith spent most of her life in the Philippines and recently went back for a visit.

During the month of December we held our annual Christmas party which is always a hit with tasty treats, fun games, a gift swap and carolling.

Keeping with tradition, January was movie night. We ordered pizza and watched “Miracles from Heaven.”

In February, society member Sue Maciaczyk gave a presentation on how the Children’s Aid Society functions in our community. She has been employed by this organization for many years.

In March, we enjoyed a presentation about a trip to Kenya by a friend of the church, Joyce Pedde, who recently went there for a service trip.

April was a busy month. At our regular meeting, society member Liz Heinrichs gave an overview on the upcoming Gathering Leaves women's event to be held in September as well as an introduction to quilting. We also held an Easter Bake sale and clothing drive as fundraisers. To coincide with the bake sale several of the ladies made panoramic eggs.

In May we held our annual end of year barbecue. We also held a society shower for two young ladies of Caryndale who are heading off to Bryn Athyn College in the fall – Denali Heinrichs and Alley Tait.

A farewell tea was held in June for Morven Bellinger who is moving with her family to Northern Ontario.

Respectfully submitted,  
Cailin Hill  
Secretary

*Cailin can be contacted at [cailin.hill@gmail.com](mailto:cailin.hill@gmail.com)*



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# Averting the Flame Wars

*Melanie & Sylvia Odhner*

Averting the Flame Wars is a blog written primarily by Melanie Odhner, and co-written and illustrated by Sylvia Odhner. It has serious ideas interspersed with fun comics about how to communicate effectively and argue respectfully, especially online. We think constructive discourse is a skill you can study, and it doesn't come naturally to everyone, so we want to use this blog to teach people what we know about it.

We've included an excerpt from one of our posts, The Evil Twin Rule, at the bottom and facing pages. In this post, the yellow character's brain talks to him, and refers to him as "the boss," as a way of saying "master of his own internal organs." You can read the rest of our blog at [avertingtheflamewars.tumblr.com](http://avertingtheflamewars.tumblr.com).

*Sylvia and Melanie can be contacted at the email address for their blog: [avertingtheflamewars@gmail.com](mailto:avertingtheflamewars@gmail.com)*

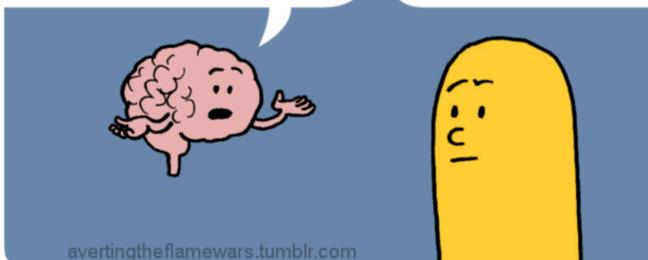
## **Excerpt from The Evil Twin Rule**

When we're reading something communicated by text, there's no tone of voice or real-life facial expression to tell us exactly what the other person means.

Our brains are very silly in how they deal with this lack of information. Instead of doing this:

Stacy wrote "gotta go," and I have very little information about what her intentions were in writing that. There's a slight possibility that something you said bothered her, but you can ask her about it later.

More likely something pressing came up for her, unrelated to you.



...our brains tend to do this:

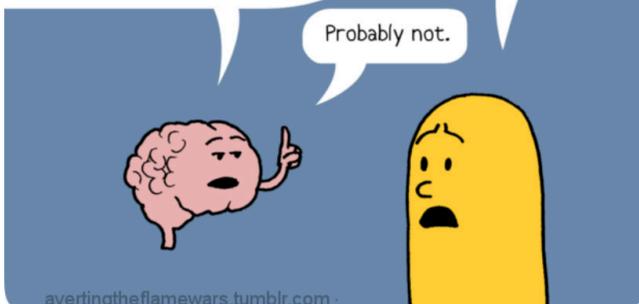
*Ohmygod ohmygod*, I'm missing a *vital piece of information* about what's going on in this social interaction. I can't let the boss know I'm this clueless! Be cool, be cool, just *think of something*.



Stacy wrote "gotta go," and I know *exactly* what that means. Clearly she's super offended by something you said, and doesn't want to talk to you anymore.

Oh no! Will Stacy and I ever be able to repair our friendship?

Probably not.





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