

Self-Empowerment

Spring 2012

The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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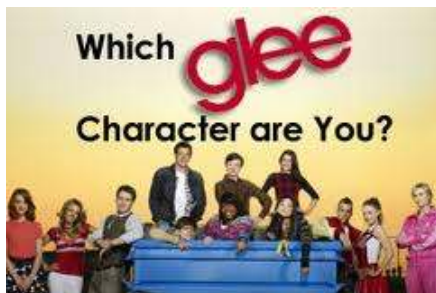
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GLEEKS ABOUND

Admittedly, growing up with a love of show tunes may have been a contributing factor in my attraction to the TV hit show Glee, but the show's staying power is much more than a Broadway Baby's loyalty. Since its premiere in 2009, this musical comedy-drama TV show has become a pop culture phenomenon.

Glee follows several story lines about members of a high school's Glee Club called New Directions. The weekly stories are about many topics including choir competitions, relationships, sex, drugs, teen angst, disabilities, diversity, and self-worth.

It has been documented that the show has inspired many kids to act, sing, dance, and participate in church choirs and school glee clubs, many more than usual. In fact, a phenomenon known as "The Glee Effect" has led to blurring the line between kids who play sports and those who sing by helping erode stereotypes and getting kids thinking about trying something new. Teachers are amazed to see school athletes in the choir.



However, the biggest gift of Glee is their treatment of story themes of diversity, individual uniqueness, and respect for individual rights. The characters have inspired many people who previously thought of themselves as freaks, geeks, outcasts, and misfits. This show has been a healing balm for many thousands of young people with body image woes, academic insecurities, and health issues. The story lines lead to great motivational and inspirational outcomes.

The shows are full of music, pathos, and humor. There is an amazing balance of zany humor in contrast with very serious themes, like bullying and teen pregnancy.

The evil character of Coach Sue Sylvester, played

by Jane Lynch, is a great example of the human ego at work. Constantly judging, criticizing, and plotting, the vengeful cheerleading coach tries desperately to win at all costs. However, the crack in her emotional armor showed up with the passing of her much loved Down-syndrome disabled sister. Even this meanest of meanies showed a soft, compassionate, loving side – reminding us that nobody is pure evil. You might just have to dig a little deeper to find where love shines through. Can we remember to laugh at the insane lengths that such an ego-driven character will go to in an attempt to "win"? Can we see that the characters of Glee are us at our best and at our worst?

White House, Oprah, and the Big Screen

Members of the Glee cast were honored in April 2010 when they were invited by Michelle Obama to sing at the White House during the annual Easter Egg Roll. Afterwards the cast rolled on over to Chicago to be on the Oprah show. (Some of the clips of the Oprah show are still available for viewing on the internet.) After their dynamite performance of their signature song "Don't Stop Believin'", the cast participated in a question and answer session with Oprah's audience. A high school student in the audience shared that she was in the hospital for issues with her cystic fibrosis for most of the first season of Glee, but was able to watch the shows online, grateful for the ongoing inspiration. There were not many dry eyes as she shared her story. Other members of the audience, one after another, shared their stories of gratitude and asked questions of the talented cast members.

In May 2010 the Glee cast performed for a sold-out North American tour. The reception they received was comparable to Beatlemania. The enthusiasm of Glee fans was over-the-top! There was such a clamoring of fans wanting the Glee concert to come to their cities that the idea to create a concert movie was born. "Glee: The 3D Concert Movie" was filmed on June 16-17, 2011 at the Izod Center in East Rutherford, New Jersey, and released on August 6th. The movie received mixed to positive reviews, but hardcore "GLEEKs" loved it. Now available on DVD, I got my copy in time for the holiday season. There are 20-some musical production numbers interspersed with several personal accounts of

individuals whose lives were impacted by the show's inspirational themes.

The sick, the friendless, and the needy have powerful friends in Glee's writers. They have taken the challenge of empowering the overweight, the nerdy, the homeless, and the wheelchair-bound. Compassion and humor link arms to embrace the disenfranchised, offering us a mental and emotional shakeup toward healing and wholeness.

I hope this issue's balance of humor and compassion can tickle and warm your heart as we move into the season of Spring!

Peace and Blessings.

Your fellow traveler and Gleek,

Rev. Jill

Charter for Compassion

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the centre of our world and put another there, and to honor the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others – even our enemies – is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

We therefore call upon all men and women ~ to restore compassion to the centre of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate ~ to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures ~ to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity ~ to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings – even those regarded as enemies.

We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world.

Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

The Charter for Compassion is the result of Karen Armstrong's 2008 TED Prize and made possible by the generous support of the Fetzer Institute. It was unveiled to the world on November 12, 2009. Learn more at www.CharterForCompassion.org

LAUGHTER FOR THE DAYS AHEAD

By Barbara Johnson

Human beings thrive on laughter. Since most of us can't afford vacations in Hawaii, we have to learn to make our own fun! The best way to do that is to keep your state of mind green and golden: find, recycle, or produce joy wherever and however you can. A good humorist is a work of heart! The Hasidic Jews believe that the best way to worship God is by being happy. They even incorporate dance and celebration into their spiritual walk.

Humor is the chocolate chips in the ice cream of life. Remember the old-time "Good Humor Man" who drove his ice cream truck down every street in the neighborhood, chiming a jingle on those hot summer days? All the kids came running as soon as they heard the sound. But good humor doesn't drive down many streets anymore. You have to go out and get it yourself.

Fortunately, it's not that hard to find.

Excerpt from *Laughter for a Woman's Soul: Revive Your Spirit with Women of Faith*. ©2001 Zondervan

Social Skills

Excerpt from her book: *Seriously...I'm Kidding*
by Ellen Degeneres

There has never been a time when people could communicate and express themselves as instantly and as much as they can now. It's hard to believe, but there was a time when communicating meant we had to WRITE LETTERS! (If you're reading this book to your kids as a bedtime story, and I highly suggest you do, now might be a good time to teach them about handwritten letters,

record players, VCRs, and the first season of *The Hills*.)

Nobody writes letters anymore, which means nobody has pen pals. I remember when I was probably about ten years old I had a pen pal, and writing letters back and forth with him was one of my favorite things to do. His name was Steve and he lived in one of those huge mansions that's so big it has a name. It was called the Louisiana State Penitentiary, and he told me it was even bigger than the mayor's mansion. We'd send letters back and forth and he'd ask me to send him my favorite books and small pieces of metal or wood that were lying around and all the money I could find in my house. And I'd gather them all up and put cute little stickers of cats on the packages and send them away. It was so fun. Eventually we stopped writing because I moved to another city and he moved out to live on his own. He called it "solitary confinement." I was always so impressed by his vocabulary.

I've always like writing. I like the feeling of having a nice pen in my hand. It feels like I'm creating something when I put pen to paper, even if it is just a doodle of a flower or a note that says, "If you ever park in my spot again I will have your ass towed." It's a nice feeling.

When you physically write something down you're forced to take time to actually think about what you're writing. We don't really do that anymore. Now we just press buttons. We can delete things and change things at our leisure. We're so spoiled. Think about what cavemen had to go through when they wanted to write something down. They had to chisel it into stone. It probably took hours just to write "Dear Krog. Going out for bread. Be back in twenty. Glok." If they made a mistake they'd have to go out and find another flat stone and start all over. Who knows if they ever even made it out for bread. I do know they used to club each other over the head a lot, so I'm not saying we should do everything like the cavemen. I'm just saying nobody writes letters anymore.

Now everything is electronic and instantaneous. We email, we text, we Facebook, we Twitter, Skype, instant message, iChat, blog, dance interpretively on YouTube. Every person who has a passing thought, opinion, question, or answer can express it immediately on his or her computer, phone, laptop, tablet, or other portable electronic device that will be invented and revolutionize communication in the short window of time between my writing this book and it being published.

Way, way back in the day, like in the 1990s, if you wanted to tell everyone you ate waffles for breakfast, you couldn't just go on the Internet and tweet it out.

There was only one way to do it. You had to go outside and scream at the top of your lungs, "I ate waffles for breakfast!" That's why so many people ended up in institutions. They seemed crazy, but when you think about it, they were just ahead of their time.

Right this second, someone is probably reading this book and thinking, "I'm thirsty for tequila." I'm guessing that's what they're thinking because that's what I'm thinking as I write it. So that reader is going to take to their Twitter account and tweet, "Reading Ellen's hilarious new book. Thirsty for tequila." And if that makes people want to buy the book, I think that's great.

What's not so great is that all this technology is destroying our social skills. Not only have we given up on writing letters to each other, we barely even talk to each other. People have become so accustomed to texting that they're actually startled when the phone rings. It's like we suddenly all have Batphones. If it rings, there must be danger.

Now we answer, "What happened? Is someone tied up in the old sawmill?"

"No, it's Becky. I just called to say hi."

"Well, you scared me half to death. You can't just pick up the phone and try to talk to me like that. Don't the tips of your fingers work?"

It's even more awkward when we're face to face with people. It used to be exciting to make plans with friends because you could sit and catch up and talk about what's been going on in your lives. Now when you see someone there's nothing left to say. You've already seen the pictures from their trip to Rio on Facebook. You've read their tweets about the latest diet they're on. And they already texted you about the pregnancy scare. So you end up just sitting and staring at each other until you both start texting other people.

Whatever we do say has to be short because our attention spans are now about nine seconds long. We talk in short bursts. We can only read up to 140 characters at any given time before we're on to the next thing. We don't even have the patience to wait for Minute Rice. We've moved on to instant rice. Because really, who has time to wait a full sixty seconds for rice? I'll tell you who. Nobody.

We have TiVo because we don't have the time or patience to sit through commercials. And we have on demand because we don't just want movies and TV shows available to us at any given moment, we downright demand it.

Just to give you a little example of how patient people used to be, did you know that the opening credit sequence to *Mister Ed* back in the early sixties was a solid minute long? (I'll give you thirty seconds to pull it

up on your phone so you can see it for yourself.) People had no choice but to sit through the whole thing, and they loved it. They paid attention to it. “A horse is a horse, of course of course. And no one can talk to a horse of course. That is of course unless the horse is the famous Mister Ed!” And it keeps going, for almost a minute more. Now the opening theme song to a TV show is a guitar sting. “Ba-bow!” And we’re inside someone’s kitchen.

Now granted there wasn’t anything else for people to watch on TV at that time so they didn’t have much of a choice. It was either sit through the theme song or play with a yo-yo.

I bet a lot more people read back then. I have to say it’s impressive that you’re taking the time right now to read this book. It’s so rare for people to actually set aside time to curl up with a book and read. By the way, I don’t know why you have to curl up to read a book, but that’s what people say. You can’t just say you’re going to read a book because then someone will ask, “Well how are you gonna read it? What position will you be in?”

“I’m gonna curl up.”

“Oh, good. So you’re not gonna stand?”

“No, no. I’m gonna curl up.”

“Okay, good. Hey, you’re not gonna lay on your side, are you?”

“No. I promise. I’m just gonna curl up.”

It’s an awkward position to be curled up. I like to lie flat or try out a lot of different positions – I’m still talking about reading. We don’t curl up to do other things. We never say we’re gonna curl up and surf the Internet or curl up and knit. In fact, if you’re curling up while you’re doing anything besides reading you might want to look into Boniva.

Anyway, what was I saying? Oh, yeah, we lose focus, have no attention span, yada, yada, blah, blah, blah. You know what – you can check out my Twitter page or go to my website for more information on this.

Excerpt from *Seriously...I’m Kidding* by Ellen Degeneres ©2011 Grand Central Publishing

SPRING FUN-RAISER

As the weather begins to warm up, my mind turns to having some fun! What do you do for fun? Make a list of some ideas and do them. Here are a few ideas to consider:

- ☺ Game night with friends ☺ Hold a movie marathon
- ☺ Arts & Crafts project ☺ Take a hike
- ☺ Go dancing, or dance in your living room
- ☺ Make up a funny story ☺ Laugh ‘til it hurts ☺

- ☺ Play some music you don’t normally listen to ☺
- ☺ Put on a costume (or fancy clothes) & take pictures ☺
- ☺ Look up some funny jokes, tell ‘em to someone ☺
 - ☺ Play miniature golf ☺ Get a massage ☺
 - ☺ Host a house concert ☺ Take a day trip ☺
 - ☺ Sing some childhood songs ☺
- ☺ Take a walk, smile & say “hi” to everyone ☺
- ☺ Sign up for a class to learn something new ☺
 - ☺ Try a new recipe ☺
- ☺ Make a list of things you are grateful for ☺



SPRING FUNDRAISER

Hello, Friends! Happy Spring!

Many of you have responded generously to our annual Spring Fundraiser. This is the time of year that our readers are encouraged to send a voluntary contribution to help cover the cost of publication and other ministry endeavors. For the cost of just one meal at a local restaurant, you can make a huge difference in supporting the ongoing work of this ministry.

This is a golden opportunity to say “yes” to the cycle of Giving and Receiving. Take a minute right now to write a check payable to **Agape Interfaith Ministries**, donate online, or feel free to send a book or two of postage stamps, which also give great support. Your help truly does make a difference. Whether you send \$5 or more, every bit of support makes this sharing of inspiration possible.

Thank you for your support!
Blessings to you!

Reader Response Coupon

Thank you, *Agape Interfaith Ministries*, for sharing this publication of *Self-Empowerment*.

Here is my contribution of \$ _____
(Checks payable to *Agape Interfaith Ministries*)

Name _____

Address _____

Email (Optional) _____

Phone (Optional) _____

Mail your donations to Agape Interfaith Ministries, 1100 Friendship Street, Phila., PA 19111 or donate online via www.AgapeInterfaith.org. Thank you!

Fun Fundraiser

I recently attended a fundraiser for a friend who had a serious health issue and no insurance. Several friends teamed up to create a concert in a church, serving healthy refreshments, and selling some items to share the profits with our dear friend.

The recipient of this groundswell of support was delighted to receive our love and help. After the beautiful musical sharing, she acknowledged and thanked everyone. She also shared some words of wisdom gained through her reflections, and offered handouts of healthy foods and recipes. What a blessing!

How to be Happy

Spirit Speaks via Barbara Dutcher

Dear Children, the way to be happy when you see so much that seems ‘wrong’ in the world, is to remember that you are ‘in the world but not of the world,’ as the scriptures state. This physical world is not your home. Heaven (what you consider the higher plane of existence) is your true home.

‘But,’ you say, ‘we see the world of physical reality before our eyes every day and that is the world we have to live in!’ And I say, ‘Yes, so it would seem and yet if you will lift up your eyes and view the physical world from a higher perspective, you will recognize that it could not be that God would have placed you in a world where so much suffering seems to be happening.’ Suffering is not the final reality, although it can seem very real. True happiness is not even found in this world, although that is where most people are seeking for it. This may sound like an impossible or difficult statement to accept – that happiness can’t be found in your world. Is there not joy in life, in loving your fellow man, in seeing the beauty of the natural world?

Yes, of course, happiness is there, and yet the things that make you happy in this world are only reminders of your true home in God’s heart. Beauty reminds you of your own eternal Beauty; love reminds you that you are only Love, forever; and sharing reminds you that God shares everything with you always.

Think to yourself: Who are the very happiest people that you have ever seen or heard about? If you are honest, you will recognize that those who are truly the happiest are not those who seek happiness where it can’t be found – in the things of this world. Those who are the happiest, the most joyful, the most at peace, are

those whose peace and joy come from within – not from without.

This is not to say that you are not to enjoy love, beauty, and friendship. I only ask you to remember that within you, where God speaks to your heart, is where your true happiness lies. Seek this sacred space within, for from that place of true joy, you will share of yourself freely with your fellows.

Barbara Dutcher is a mystic, teacher, and counselor. She publishes a monthly newsletter and is the author of *When I Listened: Spirit Answers Life’s Frequently Asked Questions*. Visit www.TheGuideWithin.org for recorded lessons, classes, and private sessions.

Using Your Gifts, Shining Your Light

By Joseph Anthony

Once upon a time the Moon was happily reflecting the light of the Sun when a nearby planet said to her, “Excuse me, Ms. Moon, doesn’t it bother you that you do not shine your own light? I mean, shouldn’t you be trying to develop your own ways of shining?”

The Moon slowly turned her face towards the planet, “Bother me not to shine? Dear One, there are many ways to shine. The Creator saw fit to endow me with a silvery complexion, one that does not give off a light of its own. One could say it just isn’t a talent I have been given. I used to try, eons ago, to make my face shine, but I simply do not have that skill. One day, I saw the Sun and asked if He would share His light with me, and of course, he said yes. Now I am the light of the night sky. I am an inspiration to generations of poets and singers. I use what I have been given; I use it in such a way as to honor the gifts of others. My gift is to reflect, to utilize the light of those around me. So, you see, I *am* shining.”

Joseph Anthony is a musician, songwriter, storyteller, life-coach, mentor, self-esteem coach for kids, and the author of the inspirational book “Following Your Heart’s Desire”. Follow his motivational and creative writings at blog.thewonderchildblog.com

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Daily Word

*This day is a new beginning for me,
and I embrace it with enthusiasm!*

No matter what has happened in the past – no matter what crisis or disappointment occurred one moment ago or a day, a year or a decade ago – I can make a fresh start today.

I begin by letting all thoughts and beliefs that do not contribute to the well-being of myself or my loved ones fall away. With a fresh start, I embrace all that enriches me in mind, body and spirit.

Aware of my Creator, and aware of myself as a creation of God, I see myself and all others in the light of divine love. This love blesses my relationships and activities. With Spirit guiding and inspiring me, I am on my way to a new life that is waiting for me.

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Love

Sent to you with
Love & Blessings

The mission of Agape Interfaith Ministries is to encourage, support and inspire a deepening conscious relationship with Divinity for the greater experience of wholeness, abundance, love and peace. We serve to elevate consciousness through individual and group educational activities, and community service.