



FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



November 17, 2016



CNS/TOM TRACY

REACTIONS TO CASTRO'S DEATH: A woman poses for a photo in Miami's Little Havana Nov. 26. The death of former Cuban leader Fidel Castro triggered both excitement and a more subdued reaction among Cuban exiles in Miami.

Lessons Hidden in Meaningless Trivia

From the youngest age I can recall, I've always had a knack for remembering useless bits of trivia. On any given day, I can forget where I put my car keys, but I know there are 13 states in the United States that are entirely north of Canada's southern-most border.



While some would think random facts are useless pieces of knowledge, I think we retain this ephemera for specific reasons. It includes facts that not only interest us but also reflect who we are and who we want to become.

I'm going to share three pieces of random knowledge stuck in my head and reflect upon the lessons they reveal for me.

My first random piece of knowledge involves a person — Dr. Denton Cooley. Dr. Cooley was one of the people responsible for inventing the artificial heart. Once, he was asked in court whether he thought he was the best heart surgeon in the world. He answered he was. The lawyer questioning him pondered whether the answer was immodest and Dr. Cooley responded, "Perhaps. But, remember that I'm under oath."

This quote stands out to me because I always struggle when it comes to accepting praise for my accomplishments. Being singled out feels immodest. Dr. Cooley teaches me something different. While some would say Dr. Cooley's response was arrogant, I see it as confidence.

If you're good at something, be proud. False modesty undervalues who you are and what you're capable of accomplishing. Don't worry what others think.

A lesson related to the opinion of others can be found in trivia connected to the movie "E.T." Many people know the friendly alien loves Reese's Pieces because the makers of M&M's chose not to participate in the movie. What's lesser known is the reason why; they thought the E.T. character was ugly and would scare children.

Boy, were they wrong.

They underestimated their audience and made one of the biggest mistakes in marketing history. They stopped at the superficial and forgot people always see beyond the surface.

While kind hearts can be found, even when hidden, many people don't seek them out. In some eyes, kindness is a weakness. While this tragic flaw of human nature occurs in all ages, it's particularly prevalent during the teen years.

As a result, my third random fact should come as no surprise. According to research from the University of Cambridge, children often have closer relationships with their family pet than they do with their siblings.

The reason is simple and easy to believe. Pets accept you unconditionally and they don't really understand what you're saying (and if they did, they couldn't tell anyone). Equally important, pets know when you're feeling down and the way they respond often feels like they are empathic to your problems.

Don't we all wish we could have the same empathy? While it would be difficult to feel the weight of others' problems, it would also feel good to know we were making a positive difference and helping others.

The next time a random bit of seemingly useless trivia enters your head, don't immediately dismiss it. Try to find meaning. That knowledge could be your subconscious trying to guide you in the right direction.

For example, my knowledge about states and Canada: I'm still trying to understand what it means, but I know the information is true; I looked it up. Canada's most southern point is Middle Island, which is part of Ontario and located in Lake Erie near northern Ohio. Alaska, Idaho, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin are all to its north.

Now, I just have to find my keys.

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— Erick Rommel

(This column is part of the CNS columns.)

Finding Faith in On-Screen Families

I'm not one to plop down on the couch and glue my eyes to the TV on a regular basis. In fact, besides watching re-runs of "Law & Order," I'm not one to watch much TV at all. Time gets away from all of us and sitting in front of the TV is not usually one of my top priorities.

However, after listening to my mom rave and rave about the new NBC show "This is Us," I made the time to catch up on all of the episodes. I was instantly hooked watching this family lean on each other during challenges and speak openly and honestly about the struggles they faced as children and adults, all while making me laugh, cry and reflect on my own family's dynamics.

It's not the show that has me hooked. It is the new connection I have with my mother, my daughter and my sister — all avid fans of the show. It makes me smile when I get a group text asking whether or not I have watched the latest episode or a call from my daughter, who is away at college, asking about elements of the show that confused her the previous night.

There is something about a song, a

movie character or a television family that brings up memories of our own childhood, our own experiences and our own faith. I find myself watching this family navigate the birth of multiples and adoption while reflecting on my relationships with my siblings. I find myself watching the involvement of the father of the show and reflecting on the emotional and difficult relationship I have had with my own father.

Television shows that help us to reflect on our own lives, our own struggles and our own faith are worth the time. I may feel sad or emotional after one episode, but for me, this is a sign that I'm actively evaluating how I treat others, how I react to those I love and how I aim to better myself.

At a time when many prime time shows focus on scandals, murder and manipulation, it is refreshing for me to find a show that spotlights a real family, with real concern for each other and one that prompts me to reflect on the value of my own family. And, the texts from my mother that read "I haven't watched it yet. Don't you dare tell me what happened" are entertaining as well.

— Shannon Philpott

Shannon Philpott is a freelance writer and college journalism instructor, but most of all a mother of two teens. You can see her work at www.shannonphilpott.com.



CNS/ALESSANDRO BIANCHI, Reuters

VIVA MEXICO: Pope Francis greets people dressed in traditional Mexican clothing Nov. 16 during his general audience in St. Peter's Square.

Fresh Take: a way to look at faith from a different perspective

This is an online-only page dedicated to young adult Catholics, their interests, their needs, their challenges and their faith.

We want to give young adults something to "chew on," to think about when they're looking for something more than an on-line horoscope or the

latest star news.

This page offers columns we believe will interest our young adults. Let us know.

Email us at cathnews@bellevillemessenger.org with questions, suggestions or for more information.

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