

VOICE OF THE VILLAS, October 18, 2024

From Marie Palagonia <happyvillas@yahoo.com>
Date Fri 10/18/2024 2:02 PM
To happyvillas@yahoo.com <happyvillas@yahoo.com>



Jane Rodgers (janerodgers518@gmail.com) has a contractor who has agreed to come to your home for soffit and fascia repair work. His name is Genero Medina. He is a licensed and insured contractor. It will take about 2-3 weeks for him to come and do the work. Every house will be at a different price depending on the amount of work needed. Please send Jane an email if you want Mr. Medina to repair the fascia and soffits in your home. Please provide your address and phone number. This way he can contact you when he is in the neighborhood to do this repair work.



**All Villa Neighbors Are Invited
HAPPY HALLOWEEN POT LUCK PARTY
Saturday, October 26th
4:30 pm
Sign Up Sheet at Pool
Costumes Optional**



***A Giant Shout Out with Gratitude to
ART BACON
for his extraordinary efforts
to clean up the Villas and Chestnut Creek community***



Book Review: “The Pursuit of Happiness” by Jeffrey Rosen

**by Michael Ettinger,
Attorney at Law**

“Character is destiny” said by Heraclitus some 3,000 years ago, neatly sums up constitutional scholar Rosen’s new book, “The Pursuit of Happiness”.

Examining in depth what the Founders meant by the famous phrase, we learn that Adams, Jefferson, Franklin and Washington, amongst many others, believed that happiness was found in the study of virtue and constant “self-improvement”. The concept of happiness as the pursuit of pleasure or “feeling good” instead of “being good” would have been repugnant to them. They were lifelong learners, committed to practicing daily habits of self-improvement, self-mastery, flourishing and growth. Happiness was “pursued” rather than obtained – a quest rather than a destination, a quest which Cicero described as “a prize beyond all human wealth or honor or physical pleasure”.

The Founders embraced stoic philosophy that to achieve freedom, tranquility and happiness, we should stop trying to control external events and focus on controlling ourselves – our thoughts, desires, emotions and actions. Essentially, the Founders sought to overcome thoughts of envy, arrogance, fear, jealousy and that only by acting without regard to oneself, can one live in harmony with nature in the present.

Virtue can today be called “good character” or what psychologists call “emotional intelligence”, defined as “the ability to understand, use and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges and defuse conflict”.

“In their private letters and diaries, public speeches and poems, the Founders talked constantly about their own struggles to control their tempers and to be their best selves by using reason to regulate their selfish passions”, writes the author. Citing Epictetus, who urges calm in the face of adversity, he says, “Do not seek to have everything that happens happen as you wish, but wish for everything that happens as it actually does happen, and your life will be serene”.

One passage that Jefferson shared throughout his life was Cicero’s definition of the wise and happy man as one “whose soul is tranquilized by restraint and consistency and who is at peace with himself”, writes Rosen. The Founders believed that the “right” to pursue happiness included the “duty” to do so. They believed that happiness was essentially peace of mind obtained through the pursuit of virtue – actually learning how to be a good person, a person of character.

Both Franklin and Jefferson were fond of quoting Seneca’s prescription for happiness: “The true felicity of life is to be free from perturbations...to enjoy the present, without any anxious dependence on the future. Not to amuse ourselves with either hopes or fears, but to rest satisfied with what we have, which is abundantly sufficient; for he that is so wants nothing...tranquility is a certain equality of mind, which no condition or fortune can either exact or depress. Nothing can make it less, for it is the state of human perfection.”

Seneca wrote extensively on how to control anger by avoiding rash judgments, techniques used by Washington to delay his responses sufficiently to allow his passions to cool. Of anger, Seneca wrote “There is no encountering the first heat and fury of it, for it is deaf and mad. The best way is (in the beginning) to give it time and rest”. Declared Washington in his first inaugural address in April 1789, “There is no truth more thoroughly established than the indissoluble union between virtue and happiness.” Both Jefferson and Adams, exchanging letters for fifty years, believed virtue consisted of benevolence to all, with Adams summing up his 60 years of reading with four short words “Be just and good.” After a lifetime of reflection, author Rosen notes that Adams and Jefferson “agreed that the pursuit of happiness, and moderation of the passions the key to tranquility of mind”.

The author considers that modern psychology has confirmed the ancient sages' advice saying that emotional self-regulation is essential for fulfilling our potential, leading to long-term happiness. Cognitive therapy today, drawing on the Founder's concept of using reason to calm the mind, uses examining our thoughts to help us discard the "cognitive distortions" that contribute to depression and anxiety. As Emerson said in concluding his essay on self-reliance, "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles."

If character is destiny, then improving one's character is the key to improving one's destiny. Jeffrey Rosen's new book points the way by unearthing the wisdom of the ages through the thoughts and actions of our Founding Fathers.