

American Essence

FOR EVERYONE WHO LOVES THIS COUNTRY

The Fall Harvest

*Why pie represents Americans'
love of self-expression*



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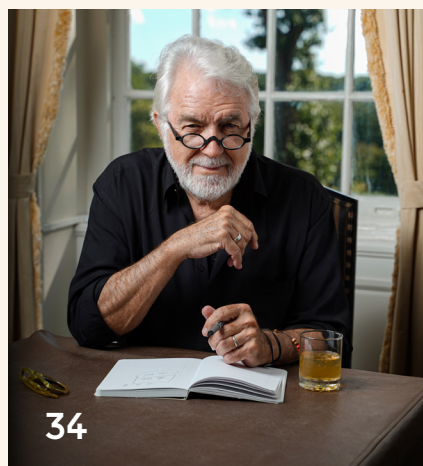
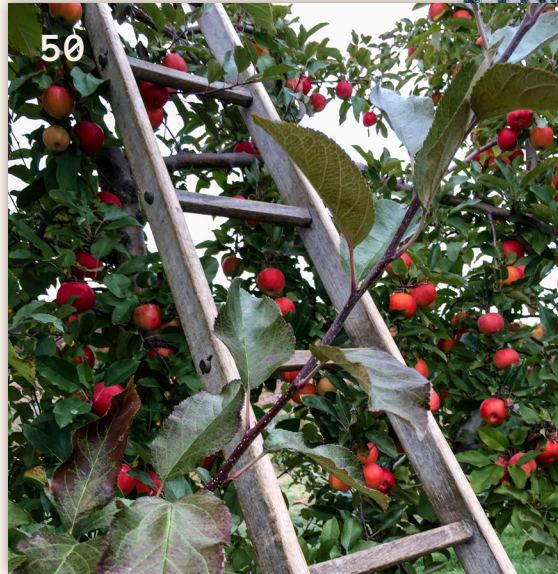
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Silver Dollar City invites guests to rediscover the former days, highlighting everything from blowing glass through a pipe extending deep into a 2,000-degree furnace, to hewing logs and handcrafting furniture in an 1800s-style workshop powered completely by a series of pulleys, belts, and gears.

Antique clocks harken back to the late 1800s—the time period that the Silver Dollar City festival is set in.

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Local Culture | Features

SILVER DOLLAR CITY

Home of American Craftsmanship

A Missouri festival takes visitors back to the 1800s,
showcasing heritage trades and crafts



Dreams & Determination

Together with her parents, eleven siblings, aunt and uncle, and three cousins, the family moved from war-torn Vietnam to the United States with none of them knowing English. Through hard work and determination, the American Dream came into focus

Jacqueline Thompson is living her dream life in Newport Beach, California, but it was a long, difficult journey to get there. As one of 12 children in Vietnam, her parents dreamed of getting their children to the land of peace and freedom—the United States. But in the 1970s, it wasn't easy to get from their war-torn land to the United States.

Jacqueline's parents owned a thriving business that they had built from the ground up by hard work and sheer determination. They scrimped and saved every penny to get to the United States, and through the help of a college professor in southern California, they found a Catholic church that sponsored them to enter the United States.

There was a small house behind the church that had been donated, and the priest let them move in. Jacqueline and her 11 brothers and sisters, her mother and father, her aunt and uncle, and their three children, 19 people in all, moved into the tiny house behind the church. And despite the fact that they had only the clothes they were wearing, they couldn't have been more grateful to finally be in the United States.

There was just one little problem. None of them spoke English. Jacqueline's parents and her older brothers and sisters, who were already in their 20s, had been well-respected, educated members of their community. Now they were depending on the kindness of others, the generosity of the church, and for a short time, the government, to keep them all fed and clothed.

Jacqueline and her siblings all quickly learned English, got jobs, and applied themselves in getting educated. Can you imagine being in your 20s and learning a new language and getting a job in a new country? They never complained.

Jacqueline's older siblings did just that. They kept focused and stayed the course so they could support themselves their parents, and the younger children.

Jacqueline's mother learned the new language and new ways along with her children; however, her father did not. Sadly, Jacqueline's father didn't adapt well to the new place, new ways, and new way of living. He passed away just a few years after arriving in the United States. As the second to the last of the 12 children, Jacqueline was still a very young girl when her father died.

Acceptance didn't always come easily. "My family experienced discrimination back in those days, but it never deterred us from our focus. My family are devout Buddhists. We all get our compassion and acceptance of others from our parents," she said. "Growing up, I never knew the difference between Asian, Anglo-Saxon, or African American, as no one in our family ever made racial distinctions. My first exposure to the idea that I was somehow different from others was in the 1st grade when a boy looked at me and used his index fingers to pull the corners of his eyes up so that they looked slanted. I wondered why he did that. I truly didn't know. I went home and looked in the mirror for hours and still did not understand why he made his eyes look like that. I thought my eyes looked fine!"

Jacqueline wanted to work like her older brothers and sisters, so she went to work after high school every day with the first company that would hire her. She finished high school when she was 16 and was accepted into the University of Southern California. To support herself and to pay for her education, she started a line of cosmetics specifically for Asian women. Her company

Q&A

Tell us about the life that you live now:

I am happily married to my college sweetheart. We are best friends, and we spend time together relaxing at home most of the time. I work so much that I prefer to stay home every chance I get! We have no children. I live a life that I only dreamt about. But the dream wasn't just handed to me. My hard work paved the way to my dream. I still pinch myself as I get to meet athletes, celebrities, business moguls, and other high-profile individuals, and to even become their friend. Having wealthy and famous people who are supportive of me is nice, but the best part is that I've found them to be kind-hearted, normal people. I am proud that I am now in a position to be able to help my mom with anything she needs, and I must say that is the best feeling!

What are three things that you do for others?

In addition to providing the best possible customer service I can give, I do my best to do these three things daily:

1. I give people compliments to build their self-esteem or just so that they have a better day. I work hard to be kind and patient with others.
2. I share my private stories of being blessed by God with people I love and people I believe need to hear that God is there for them.
3. I secretly pray for people who do not know I am praying for them. I am a strong believer in prayer. Like others, I am a living testament to the power of prayer!

Do you have a favorite quote?

Actually, I have two favorite quotes that have guided me throughout my life: "Be kind to everyone you meet because you never know what battles people are fighting." Kindness is free and it can make a huge impact on people. The other is, "The sky's the limit!" This favorite quote of mine guided me when I wrote my goals in 2005 as I began my real estate career. Here in the U.S., the

sky truly is the limit for anyone who will work hard, stay focused, and do good for others. This is something I believe deeply and feel strongly about.

Is there a book that has inspired you?

"The Purpose Driven Life" by Pastor Rick Warren inspires me to be a better Christian, a better person. During the pandemic, I took it out and read it again."

Tell of something you've created (or would like to create):

"I have always wanted to write a book/script of my journey in the luxury real estate world. My first passion is the movie business, and I almost became a different type of agent – a talent agent. I have not finished my script or my book. Maybe I'll write it one day if I ever slow down long enough to write it."

What does your family enjoy doing together?

"We love to cook and eat! Then we sit around all day to reminisce about the past. Simple, yet so meaningful. This is my favorite way to spend a day with family!"

What's your best advice that you would like to share with others?

There are three pieces of advice I like to share. They are,

1. Respect your parents.
2. Respect your body – do not be too harsh on it, do not abuse it – whether through sports, substance abuse, or any other way. Take care of yourself. This is the only body you get.
3. Forgive those who have hurt you. Forgiveness is powerful.

Is there a fun story you would be willing to share?

Many years ago, when I was just starting in real estate, I showed a home to a prospective client and his brother. During the showing, I asked the buyer if he traveled a lot, and his brother jumped in quickly and said, "Oh ya he travels a lot." I said perfect! The roof

top deck with breathtaking panoramic views would be the perfect sanctuary for you to relax after you return from your travels! I took them up to the roof top deck where they agreed that the view was spectacular!

We spent quite a bit of time going through every room of that large home. As we concluded the showing, I realized that in my excitement to show the beautiful home, I had not properly introduced myself. I said, "I am sorry I forgot to introduce myself, my name is Jacqueline Thompson." The buyer said, "Hi, I'm Will." And his brother introduced himself as well. I remembered thinking, that is so funny, Will looks like the actor, Will Ferrell, and he is also named Will. A little while later, as I was closing up there was a knock on the door – it was Will's mother and her friend who also wanted to see the home. The mom's friend said, "Well, did you recognize him?!" I said "WHO?" She said, "Will Ferrell – did you recognize him?"

Later that day, when I got back to the office and told my colleagues the story, they asked me if Will was as tall as he looked on the screen. I said, "No he is not that tall." Everyone had perplexed looks on their faces. I really believed it when I said it too. In reality, Will is quite tall at 6'3", and his brother is tall as well.

I'm 5'3", but I never thought of myself as petite. I realized that I didn't feel small next to Will Farrell and his brother. I felt as tall as them. In the same way, even after all of our years together, I am constantly surprised when I see my husband and my reflection in the mirror. I always ask, "Are you really that much taller than me?"

Obviously, I don't put limitations on myself, and I simply don't see differences between people. I appreciate and thank God every day for His gift to me – and that is the gift of life and my ability to work hard to make my dreams come true. I love that He made me confident, strong determined, and simply incapable of seeing differences between people!

As a result of hard work and determination, Jacqueline Thompson is now living her dream life in Newport Beach, California, where she helps people own their piece of the American Dream by owning real estate.



thrived, and so did she. By the time she graduated with a business degree, she had decided that she wanted to go into real estate.

That the Southern California market was extremely competitive was not a deterrent in her mind. “We arrived in Southern California in the fall of 1979. I was a little child when we came to the U.S. The United States of America is the only country I know, and I am very patriotic. I have always felt that part of the American Dream was to own a home. For me, for as long as I can remember, my dream was always to live in Newport Beach, California. I thought that real estate would be the best vehicle for helping me to achieve my goal while helping others attain their piece of the American Dream too.”

As a result of hard work and determination, Jacqueline Thompson is now living her dream life in Newport Beach, where she helps people own their piece of the American Dream by owning real estate. She has sold over \$1.3 billion in residential real estate since starting in the business in 2005.

When she arrived in Newport Beach with no real estate experience and no connections, Jacqueline knew that she could succeed despite what she lacked because of the exceptional work ethic that she had learned from her family. She worked every day (yes, seven days every week for many years) to make it in the highly competitive Orange County, California, real estate market. She worked open houses every weekend for almost ten years straight to build her clientele. Even with her remarkable success, she continues to work 12 to 15 hours per day to ensure that her clients have the service they have come to expect from her. She doesn’t complain—she loves her work. Helping people attain their own American Dream isn’t work, Jacqueline says. “It’s my joy to see people move to this beautiful area that I love so much.”

Rhonda Sciortino, author of 13 books, including “Succeed Because of What You’ve Been Through,” used the coping skills from her abusive childhood to create personal and professional success. She built two successful businesses, then turned her attention to helping others to find their purpose and real success. ■

When Imagination Perseveres

Screenwriter JV Hart is the artist behind some of our nation's most beloved family films

James Von Allmen Hart, lovingly referred to as “JV” by his family and protégés, is the creative force behind several of our nation’s most prominent family films, including “Hook,” “Tuck Everlasting,” “Dracula,” and “August Rush.” Well before he began his career as a Hollywood screenwriter, he grew up on drive-in movies and Saturday matinees in Fort Worth, Texas. His whimsical childhood adventures and deep connection to his family helped to shape him into the great creative that he is today.

In 1952, when JV was 5 years old, his father built a two-story Cape Cod house overlooking several acres of land, called “the field” by him and his brother. “It became our fantasy world, our Neverland,” said JV. “We built forts, tree houses, slayed dragons, buried and unburied treasure. It was literally a field of dreams for the imagination.” It would be the place where, at only eleven years young, he would film his first eight-milimeter movie.

Every Saturday at 10 a.m., JV’s mother would drop him and his brother off at the Gateway Theater, a classic Art Deco style cinema with a large marquee and tall neon sign. “For

25 cents we got a truckload of cartoons, two serial installments like Flash Gordon and Commando Cody, and then a double feature,” said JV. These Saturday mornings would serve as the foundation for his future creative endeavors in the film industry.

There is something so extraordinarily authentic about the characters that JV dreams up. “There is always part of me in everything I write,” he said. Though JV attributes this iconic authenticity to letting his characters, rather than his pen, take the lead, it is obvious that there is a tremendous connection between writer and character. Take, for example, Peter Banning of Hart’s quintessential swashbuckler adventure film, “Hook.” When asked which character in the picture he relates to most, it’s no surprise that it is Peter Banning, the grown-up version of Peter Pan. Banning’s childlike wonder is nearly a mirror image of JV’s own disposition.

“Certainly the grown-up Peter Banning who pursued success at the expense of his family came from my personal fears about losing [my] imagination as an adult and missing [my] children’s milestones.” This idea deeply resonated with Dustin Hoffman, Robin

Williams, and Bob Hoskins, who marvelously acted in “Hook,” and Steven Spielberg, the film’s director.

Always on the lookout for a good idea to turn into a story, JV credits his family with providing him with the most inspiration. After all, it was a game of “What If” in 1985 at the dinner table with his son, Jake, then 6 years old, that inspired JV to develop “Hook.”

“This is now part of our family mythology as Jake, now grown up and one of my writing partners, claims he does not recall this evening. It went something like this:

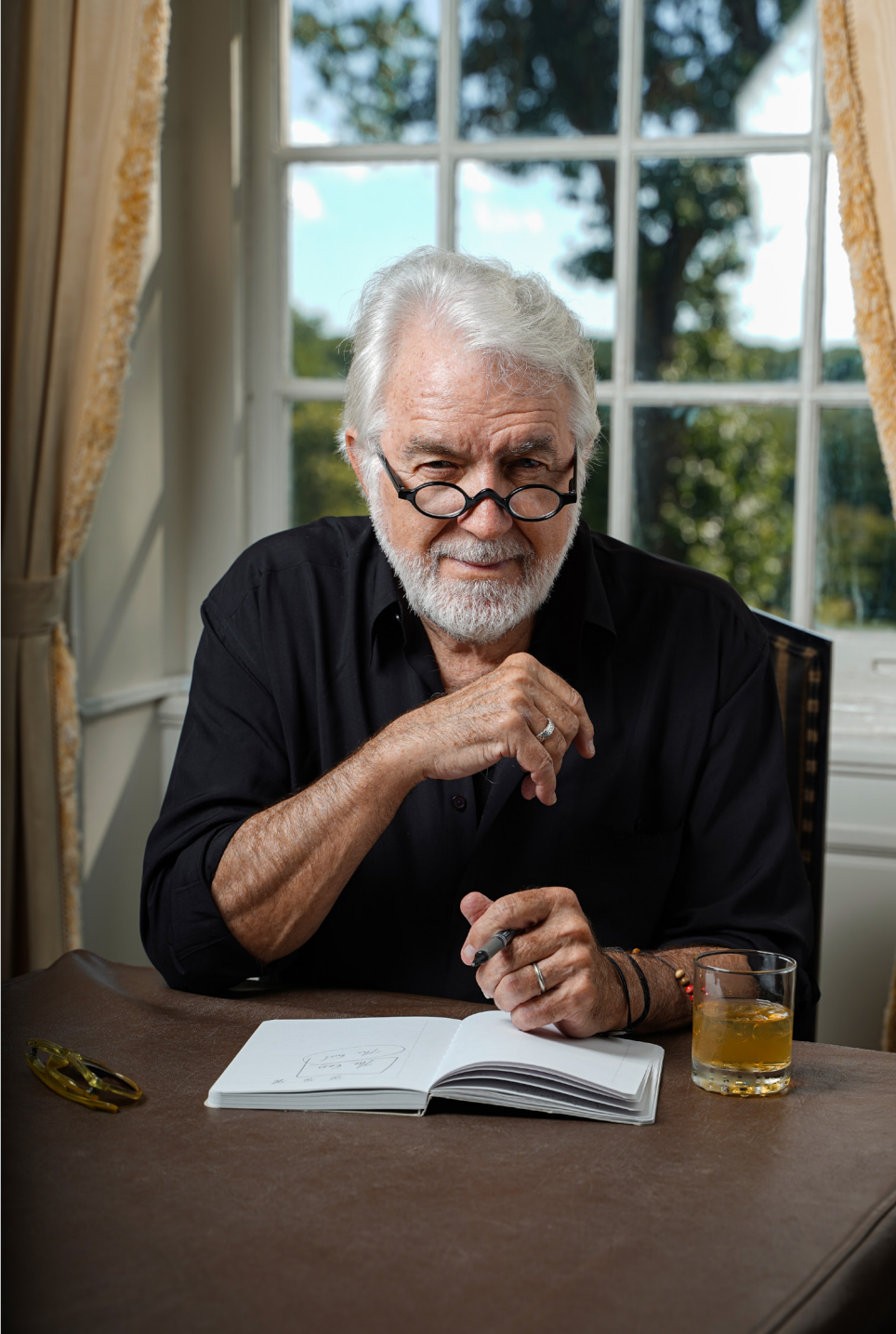
Jake: Hey Dad, did Peter Pan ever grow up?

Dad: Now that’s a really dumb question. (Good Parenting.) Of course he didn’t grow up. He was the boy who couldn’t grow up.

Jake: (Defiant.) Yeah, but what if Peter Pan grew up?”

As soon as he asked the question, something clicked. Jake had unlocked the code of the Peter Pan story that so many talents in Hollywood had been trying to crack.

“We cobbled together the story based on Jake’s innocent and brilliant question. Captain Hook would kidnap



“Don’t be afraid of death, be afraid of the unlive*d* life. You don’t have to live forever, you just have to live.”

—JAMES VON ALLMEN HART

time. He explains, “I never would have written ‘Hook’ had I not been a father with Jake and Julia to inspire me.”

JV is constantly preparing new content and brainstorming new ideas in order to bring more joy to the world. Of all the lines he has ever written, one of his favorites is, “Music is proof that God exists in the Universe.” This comes from his Oscar nominated film, “August Rush.” The picture traces the life of a boy (played by Freddie Highmore) who uses his musical talent as a clue to find his birth parents.

When reflecting on the important themes that are artistically woven into his works, JV believes Americans should pay most attention to “Tuck Everlasting.” The story of Winnie Foster, a girl on the cusp of maturity who must ultimately decide to live forever or let her life continue as planned, instills in the audience a sense of the importance of a life well lived on one’s own terms. “Don’t be afraid of death, be afraid of the unlive*d* life,” said JV. “You don’t have to live forever, you just have to live.”

Rachael Doukas and Laura Doukas are sisters and filmmakers currently working on their first feature film, “The Ryan Express,” based on their award-winning short, “Rocket Man.” ■

grown-up Peter Pan’s kids and force the adult Pan to return to Neverland with all his adult hangups, and having forgotten how to fly (since all adults do), and having to face his old nemesis Captain Hook in order to save his kids.”

The next day, JV wrote a story treatment and called his agent, who then shopped the project around. Every producer and studio passed. The following years were misery for JV as “Hook” was, in his own words, “the best idea [he] had ever stolen from [his] kids.” His family remained ever supportive; they

tried lifting JV’s spirits by gifting him with Peter Pan themed presents at holidays and birthdays.

Finally, the year 1989 brought a break. A producer read the script and believed it to be one of huge potential. The script was then taken directly to Robin Williams and Dustin Hoffman, who attached themselves immediately. And the rest is history.

“Hook” went on to generate over \$300 million at the box office and is globally known as one of the most exemplary American family films of all



Fran Solomon's 20 years of working in bereavement care began with an intense personal experience. "My father died in 1998," she said. "His death was the first of a significant person in my life. I did what I think many people do. I grieved through the funeral, and then I had to get ready to return to work on Monday. "So I put my grief into a box, tied a pretty bow on it, and stuck it on a shelf. I thought I was going to get over it, move on, and with time, forget.

"Fast forward to 2002, my daughter was born. Somehow this beautiful life that had entered mine was accompanied by profound sadness. A friend sat with me and listened to all the reasons for my sorrow. Then there it was. The last thing I said encompassed all my grief," Solomon said. "I was grieving that my father wasn't here to see the one thing he had wanted more than anything—to have a granddaughter. Until that moment, I had no idea that the loss of my dad had had such a profound impact on me. It had resurfaced now many years later, as I welcomed my daughter."

It ended up impacting Solomon's own relationships going forward. "Because of my friend's willingness to sit and listen, I was given an invaluable gift. I was able to understand the association between my sadness around the birth of my daughter and my father's absence. Had that not happened, my relationship with my daughter could have become a resentful one, resulting from my having displaced my emotions. Through that experience, I came to understand the importance of bereavement care for support, understanding, and appreciation for what grief really is."

UNBOXING *GRIEF*

After healing from grief firsthand, Fran Solomon has been helping people remove barriers, boundaries, and taboos when it comes to dealing with grief

Solomon founded HealGrief.org, a nonprofit website that provides the tools, resources, and information to guide one's journey after a death, through grief and into a healthy post-bereavement equilibrium.

Solomon founded HealGrief.org, a nonprofit website that provides the tools, resources, and information to guide one's journey after a death, through grief and into a healthy post-bereavement equilibrium. It also provides a place to celebrate the lives of loved ones, including pets.

The site provides these tools through offerings like a podcast archive, featuring interviews with a wide array of people who have survived the grief process themselves. The podcast, *Let's Talk Death*, can be accessed as a printed transcript, as audio only, or viewed. Central to its mission is removing the cultural taboo that has surrounded death. A virtual support network connects people who are grieving with others who have lost loved ones too. These connections help to dilute the feelings of isolation often associated with grief.

Philanthropy has been a long-term commitment for Solomon. She has been a member of the Cedars Sinai Medical Center Board of Governors for some 20 years. Simultaneously, for a decade, she served as a member of the Board of Directors, as well as the Chair for Our House Grief Support Center, a community-based agency located in Los Angeles.

Now a certified grief-recovery specialist, Solomon lives in LA with her husband, Rick, and their three children, Matthew, Alex, and Lianna. Solomon's husband serves on the HealGrief.org Board of Directors. He has long supported her work, she said, because he's realized how much it has enriched her life and the life of their family.

During her work with Our House, Solomon's focus began to expand beyond community boundaries. She realized that grief is universal. She perceived the need for a place where people across the world could come to celebrate the lives of those they love. She realized that this place also would need to provide resources to help those who are struggling with grief to recover.

Actively Moving Forward is another HealGrief program. Best known as AMF, it began with college students supporting other college students through their grief journey. It evolved into a program supporting all young adults, allowing them to communicate with each other in a way they communicate best—digitally. It's an app that is a hybrid of a social network, database of resources, and a notification center for daily inspirational quotes. It also offers a community board for posting.

The app since has extended to people of all ages, hosting separate and distinct communities for young adults and for those who are over 30. App members can participate in regularly-scheduled virtual support groups and in book clubs.

"It's such a gift to hold a safe and sacred space for people to share their most intimate feelings about something so deep within them. And it's a gift to witness deep friendships emerging from this thing called grief," Solomon said. "None of this costs our members anything. They can sign up for as many kinds of virtual support as they like."

"Our members have learned that although grief has a start date, it doesn't have an end date. Grief is an uninvited companion that we somehow learn to take with us through the rest of our lives," she observed. Solomon says her work in bereavement care "teaches me to live life to the fullest, to never wait for tomorrow. To tell my family and those I love how much I love them and how important they are to me. It's a daily reminder of how precious life is and how important it is to be present for those we love." The site averages about 10,000 new visitors each week, according to Solomon. Poignantly, she reports that the most-visited page by far is "Death of a Child."

Services are offered at no cost to the site's users. Solomon reports that HealGrief.org, as a 501c3, accepts donations and has received grants. One was from Funeral Service Foundations, who recognized the importance of the app.

Traditional bereavement care was disrupted during the time that Covid shutdowns were most intense, according to Solomon. People who work in bereavement care were unsure of the best ways to serve their clients during that time, so many referred them to HealGrief.org.

"Being virtual, we were in a prime position as the continuum for serving those in need," Solomon said. "In-person care for many will always be necessary, however we have found that people tend to be more comfortable and share more from the comfort of their own homes," she explained. "We have been able to serve in new ways. People with disabilities or who don't have transportation, for example, now can access the support they need too."

"Support is crucial," Solomon reflects. "Lack of support can lead to poor coping skills, which can lead to addictive behaviors, suicidal ideology, etc. Grief can change the trajectory of a person's life. We find that when people try to put their grief into a box or shut down their feelings, this tends to trigger displaced emotions and manifest in ways that they themselves often don't understand. I was a clear example of this."

The organization provides training to university faculty, staff, and social work students. It works to help faculty become more grief-sensitive and to understand the needs of grieving young adults through its Grief Sensitive Campus Initiative.

"Many institutions offer bereavement leave to faculty," she observed, "but not to students. Students have had to negotiate their workload with each professor, interfering with their need to be with families. And upon returning, grieving students can't be expected to function equally with their peers."

Christine Colbert holds a master's in journalism. She has written for and edited a variety of media. Her preferred "beat" is good news. ■

THE BEAUTY OF AMERICA'S

APPLE ORCHARDS

We share the stories behind some of the
country's beloved family-run orchards

An apple orchard in Medina, Ohio.



A DAY TRIP

Back in Time

A historic trail in Arizona brings Wild West adventure, scenic views, and more



Abandoned ore cars at the Goldfield Ghost Town, along the Apache Trail in Arizona.

The twisting, ever-rising roads aren't for the nervous driver, but the views as you wind through the mountains are stunning.



**A magazine for anyone who loves America—
and the values we stand for.**

American Essence focuses on traditional American values and great American stories. It recounts significant historical events, from the time of the Founding Fathers, through to the average Americans today who want to give back to their community and country. *American Essence* celebrates America's contribution to humanity.

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