

The Family's Guide to Cultural Conservation by Mark Evans



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THE FAMILY'S GUIDE TO CULTURAL CONSERVATION

Welcome to *The Family's Guide to Cultural Conservation*. It's an invitation to you and your family to participate in an exciting set of activities and learning experiences that can transform your life. They can also make our world a better place in which to live.

Did you know that we are in the midst of a cultural crisis? My name is Mark Evans. I'm a composer and author of a number of books for adults and children. I also host and produce a television program called "Mark! My Words." Much of my professional career has been spent in music, writing, broadcasting, and education. I've been privileged to know some of the world's most accomplished men and women in those fields, several of whom have been mentors or teachers of mine. The cultural crisis I describe can have a profound effect on your family. Your children and grandchildren's future is at stake. Although I hold a Ph.D. degree, this doesn't prevent me from recognizing that the solution to this crisis is not likely to be found in our colleges and universities or in our schools.

I am concerned about students emerging from our classrooms, unfamiliar with any music, other than what they've encountered on MTV. Many haven't read a book that hasn't been assigned to them. Many others are woefully ignorant of even the most basic facts of our history. But too many are familiar with what I call "the celebrity culture." We all know who the celebrities are. Their faces are glaring at us on the covers of every supermarket tabloid. Meanwhile, our best music, including the classics, jazz, film scores, and the masterpieces of musical theater are in danger of fading into an undeserved oblivion. This crisis extends not only to music, but also to any ignorance of good

books, art, theater, and films. Meanwhile we are witnessing a serious decline in our ability to use language and a simultaneous decline in the family as the pillar of our society.

I believe that it is better to light candles than to curse the darkness. So I wrote a book detailing what we can do as a society and what you can do as an individual to embark on an exciting journey of discovery that can truly impact your daily life. Like my television program, the book is called *Mark! My Words* and it has a really long subtitle, *How to Discover the Joy of Music, the Delight of Language, and the Pride of Achievement in the Age of Trash Talk and MTV*. But the crisis can't be solved by a single book. So I founded Cultural Conservation, an organization and a movement dedicated to the proposition that we should devote the same energy to our cultural resources that we devote to our natural resources, our national parks, streams, and deserts.

You may ask "What does this cultural crisis have to do with me? My children or grandchildren are doing well in school." Unfortunately, doing well in school doesn't tell the whole story. Many high-school and college students make good grades and are still enveloped in today's pop culture. They are also likely to be subjected to a tremendous amount of peer pressure from others who are distinctly part of the problem, not the solution. In fact, we often turn to schools, government, and the entertainment industry to help us, but the institutions are also part of the problem.

The Family's Guide to Cultural Conservation has been designed to help you. It has been written so that you and your family can begin exploring a world of cultural resources that will likely be ignored in

school and in the mass media. This exploration can be inspiring and can have an impact for a lifetime. It can definitely be fun. Most importantly, it can bring your family together with a set of goals that make every day an adventure. Let's start by exploring the idea of Cultural Conservation and what it can do for your family.

In today's fast-paced, digital world, there are thousands of competitors for the attention of your children and grandchildren. While they spend hours in school, many of us mistakenly assume that they are learning the things everyone in our society was expected to know. This included a familiarity with the basic facts of our history, the ability to speak, write, and read the English language properly, and a familiarity with the best of our culture, including fine music, art, and literature. Today however, there is no guarantee that students are learning these things in school and considerable evidence that they are not.

In addition to films and television, the 21st century offers a host of high-tech innovations that make claims on the time of children of every age from the moment they start school. These include home computers, the Internet, all kinds of video games, and devices such as smart phones and I-Pads that deliver digital content in seconds. Before the social revolution of the 1960s and the high-tech revolution of recent years, the family was the base and the building block of our society. Children learned their values from their parents and grandparents and these values were reinforced by other institutions, especially schools and churches. But today every boy or girl is subjected to a constant blast of information from all kinds of people who are sending very different and often conflicting messages as to the identity of our heroes and as to what is important.

As a result, it is pop culture, with its emphasis on fame and celebrity rather than achievement which can dominate the lives of your children, grandchildren, and the friends with whom they spend most of their time. With new technology available on the Internet, it is easy to find out what names and subjects are being entered into search engines such as Google or Yahoo. A little research tells us quickly who and what people think are important today. In one survey, there was an average of over eighty-thousand monthly searches for information about TV reality star Kim Kardashian, more than five times the number of searches for information on the United States Constitution, Ludwig von Beethoven, George Gershwin, and William Shakespeare combined.

As a prank, the producers for a You Tube Channel went to Isla Vista, California, a community heavily populated by college students from nearby Santa Barbara. On July 4, the students were asked the simplest questions about Independence Day. They proved unable to explain why we celebrate on the Fourth of July, how many stars or stripes there are in the American flag, or the identity of the country from which the United States won its independence. (One student asked hopefully, "France?") Another student suggested that "Independence Day" is a movie and July 4 is "today." In a few years, the students who are oblivious to their own lack of knowledge will be choosing America's leaders, deciding which books, music, films, art, and plays will be successful, and ready to give society the benefit of all that they do not know.

How did this happen?

In part, it happened because we have made the fatal mistake of confusing change and progress. Too often we automatically assume

that change is always a good thing, that change for its own sake always yields improvement. In fact, quite the opposite is true. In the wise words of Russell Kirk, recognize that “change may not be salutary reform: hasty innovation may be a devouring conflagration, rather than a torch of progress“ In less lofty language, what Dr. Kirk meant was that running across the street may get you where you’re going more quickly, but if you don’t watch where you’re going, you may be run over by a speeding truck.

More often than not, the phrase “new and improved” means a bigger box and fewer corn flakes. In music, art, and literature, change often means dismissing the best works of the past to make it easier for inferior and even fraudulent “artists” to become famous and financially successful today. The students who don’t have a clue as to why we celebrate the Fourth of July are likely to be totally ignorant of our best music or books. But they typically are quite knowledgeable in regard to celebrities.

Do your children and grandchildren know the basic facts of our history? Are they familiar with our best music, books, and art? If the answer is “yes,” they are fortunate. But if the answer is “no,” it may not entirely be their fault. They may never have been exposed to anything other than today’s pop culture which delivers all the wrong messages. You can help remedy this situation by joining them in a host of activities inspired by the idea of Cultural Conservation. If they are exposed to the best of our cultural early in life, they will have a completely different outlook regarding every activity in which they engage. A family of Cultural Conservationists can have fun while learning and through sharing a journey of discovery. While these activities can provide your whole family with countless hours of joy and

a lifetime of memories, they also enable you to do your part in helping to conserve our cultural resources.

As we explore Cultural Conservation, you will find that there is no single formula, no magic list of books or music, no unique theory that applies to everyone and every learning opportunity. Each family and each person is unique. There is an obvious difference in exploring music or books with small children or teenagers. Working with grandchildren isn't the same as working with children. Although this is a "family's guide," there is nothing to prevent a single person from taking advantage of these learning opportunities. What makes Cultural Conservation special is that we can all share a sense of values. We can again agree as to a attitude, a point of view, and a set of principles that can be used to recognize the best in our culture. We may not always agree. Even experts don't always agree. But we can begin a remarkable journey together.

In his writings on education, Dr. Mortimer J. Adler identified three different types of learning and three different types of teaching that correspond to the three types of learning. Cultural Conservation has been designed as a movement and a learning system to incorporate all three types. But since Cultural Conservationists are encouraged to be self-educators, this program has been adjusted to encourage you and your family to study on your own as well.

First, a student must acquire organized knowledge through traditional instruction, often called "didactic teaching." In "Cultural Conservation", our web site will provide an introduction to the best in our arts and history that are too often neglected today. Next, a student needs to develop the intellectual skills of learning through

supervised practice and coaching. This requires an ability to develop skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. In “Cultural Conservation,” we will explore the elements of language and especially the ways in which we our verbal, visual, and aural skills can help us separate the wheat from the chaff in today’s cultural confusion. Finally, the student needs to acquire an enlarged understanding of ideas and values by learning how to ask and answer questions. This is called “Maieutic” or “Socratic” participation. In “Cultural Conservation,” you will learn through the opportunity to participate in workshops and groups and to devote family time to discussing and evaluating music, books, art, theater, and films. The third type of teaching was practiced by Socrates and involves asking and answering questions about the music you hear, the books, you read, and the art, films, and theater you see.

None of these techniques should seem daunting or intimidating. In fact, moving through the various levels of learning can be fun. There was a time when families learned together and regarded it as a source of pleasure, not a boring or irrelevant school assignment. Adult education and lifelong learning has a grand historic tradition in America. In 1836, Josiah Holbrook, a traveling lecturer and educator founded the first American lyceum, a platform to present lectures, classes, and debates. Lyceums appeared in many locations during the years prior to the Civil War, with speakers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau and even a young man named Abraham Lincoln. In 1874, Methodist minister John Heyl Vincent and businessman Lewis Miller organized the first Chautauqua Assembly in New York. At the height of its popularity, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Chautauqua movement inspired educational summer

camps for whole families throughout the country, especially in rural areas. The Chautauqua movement provided an opportunity to hear concerts and lectures delivered by celebrated national figures. The advent of radio, the movies, and ultimately television hastened the decline of most Chautauqua gatherings. But the spirit of adult education lives on. Through Cultural Conservation a family anywhere can experience encounters with the finest music, books, art, the best use of our language, and an awareness of our history. This can be done at your own pace and according to your own tastes and instincts and with emphasis on the things your family most enjoys.

THE DELIGHT AND DECLINE OF LANGUAGE

What has happened to our language?

Listen to the even our most prominent figures speak during radio or television interviews. Celebrity sports stars and Hollywood personalities are among the worst offenders. Their behavior is regularly emulated by teenagers who insert the word “like” or phrases such as “y’know” into every sentence. A modern day Hamlet would undoubtedly say, “To be or not to be,y’know, like that is the question.” As a nation that began with the eloquent words of the Declaration of Independence, how did “y’know” get into the picture? As for words of praise, anything good is invariably described as “awesome.” The once eloquent citizen has become the inarticulate citizen.

Nor are professional writers immune from our linguistic decline. Journalists revel in the use of clichés, adding the suffix “gate” to every scandal and referring to everyone present as “you guys.” The rules of

formal English grammar are either not taught or taught badly. Alleged experts have suggested that such rules are dated and old-fashioned and that correcting a student's grammar, reading, or spelling may mean that the student won't feel good about himself. Today's students are likely to ask if "Syntax" is a rock group or inquire as to which sin is being taxed. So many emerge from high-school thinking they are ready for college or emerge from college expecting employers to beat a path to their doors. In fact, many cannot string together the words to write a simple declarative English sentence.

While the inarticulate may be limited to a few words, the rest of us are drowning in a flood of words from bureaucrats. In academe, diplomacy, the military, law, and especially government, bureaucrats write and speak using long words to camouflage their intent and the reality of their behavior. A celebrated scientist once proudly explained that "putting his ideas in simple sentences simply confuses." Congress passes laws which are understood by no one, even those who write or vote for the laws. Dr. James Boren, a master satirist, described the essence of bureaucracy as "doing nothing, but doing it with style."

THE JOY OF MUSIC

Compare the great speeches of the past with most utterances by politicians today. Ghostwriters, committees, and consultants oversee our political rhetoric. Political correctness has become a plague on our house in which even the most innocent form of self-expression can fall under suspicion. A recruiter for hospitals in England was accused of discrimination when she advertised for an employee that is "reliable and hard-working." She was told that people who are unreliable and not hard-working might be offended. Power-brokers in Hollywood,

song-lyricists, screenwriters, and comedians, among others, have spread the worst of our language on the streets and in films, pop music, and on the Internet. The vulgarians have triumphed and foul language is everywhere. The best of our language is still here for us to discover, but this will only occur through a 21st century renaissance of English. To do this, we must develop a consciousness of language, how we use it, how we read it, how we hear it.

How important is music in your life? Music has been described as an international language, one that can be understood by people all over the world with whom a composer might never communicate verbally. Today when people speak of music, they almost invariably speak of a few genres: rock, pop, rap, and occasionally country. A noted music critic once said of modern concert music that much of it isn't modern and much of it isn't music. The same can be said for the lion's share of music to which your family is likely to be exposed today. Do your children and grandchildren know what is being lost in the interim?

For years people spoke of "classical music" or "popular music," although these categories were quite arbitrary. "Classical music" was understood to encompass symphonies, operas, chamber music, choral works, and solo pieces for instruments such as the piano and violin. "Popular" music usually meant everything else. Today both "classical" and "popular" music are in a crisis. Audiences for classical music have declined radically in recent years, although there are a few classical stars who can still draw huge crowds. What is of greater concern is that the audience for classical music has become increasingly older. In past years, parents and grandparents passed their love of such music onto the next generation. But in today's 21st century digital environment, classical music appeals to a niche market which is in danger of declining

every passing year. Symphony orchestras, even those with legendary reputations, are facing more financial challenges than usual in their struggles to even survive.

When many people express their love of classical music, they are talking about a group of brilliant composers who lived in the 17th, 18th, and especially 19th centuries. They are often unaware that composers didn't stop writing music when the "classical" or "romantic" eras ended; if they are aware, they simply don't like new concert music. There is an audience for such music, but it is very limited and is often confined to a group of men and women who consider themselves elite and who are more often than not found on college faculties. This problem is not entirely the fault of the audience. In the 20th century, a musical revolution occurred. Composers abandoned many of the traditional elements used as building blocks to create great music: melody, harmony, and rhythm. Instead certain composers began composing according to mathematical theories while others tried outlandish experiments designed for shock value. Composers who do not adhere to such theories or experiments have been dismissed or ignored. The classic music world has become a museum with fewer and fewer people in attendance.

The crisis in popular music is even more serious because it has a much wider impact. Jazz, a thoroughly original American musical art form, traveled across the country and around the world. During the first half of the 20th century, a gifted group of composers and lyricists created what has become known as "The Great American Songbook," a treasure-trove of marvelous music and sophisticated lyrics that made the American popular song an art form as well. Many of these songs came from Broadway's musical theater, a new theatrical form in which

music, lyrics, and book were fused to create a lasting legacy. Composers for motion pictures wrote dozens of important film scores that became an important part of our musical heritage. But in the late 1950s and 1960s, the rock music revolution overthrew all previous traditions in popular music. The new music and lyrics were often directed to the least common denominator of taste and wildly popular with teenage audiences. With hundreds of millions of dollars at stake, the pop recording industry transformed the world of music into an amplified spectacle of talentless performers appealing to gullible listeners. James Maher called the new audience notorious for its short attention span and its insatiable hunger for the new. "The new," in most cases, meant primitive, often sexually explicit lyrics, music based on a few notes and fewer chords, a throbbing beat, and enough special effects to rival a fireworks display on the Fourth of July.

America's true musical heritage seems headed for oblivion while the public debates who will be the next "American Idol." Unfortunately, America's true musical heroes have been consigned to obscurity. Classic musical has abandoned its audience and is now perceived as offering little but memories of a nearly forgotten past. Popular music has jettisoned standards and skill for the rewards of publicity and profit. What will now happen to good music, to the classics, the Great American Songbook, jazz, and our finest film scores? All of this wonderful music is waiting for you and your family to discover it. Even music teachers and accomplished performers have more to learn. If this music is new to you or members of your family, you have an incredible discovery in store.

THE DILEMMA OF ART

What is art? This may seem like a simple question, but unfortunately, many of the upheavals that took place in the world of music also took place in art. The public often pays little attention to the art world today. Like the composers of contemporary music, many modern artists abandoned the standards by which art had always been judged. When it was no longer necessary for anyone to recognize what had been painted on canvas or relate it to real objects or people, anyone could do what he pleases and declare it to be "art." As in music, those dealing with abstractions and theories receive the most attention in the academic world. Meanwhile the public pays attention to self-proclaimed artists promoting shock value for its own sake. Among the world's most famous "artists" are those who produced paintings of Campbell's Soup cans, threw paint at a blank canvas, and even exhibited a shark pickled in formaldehyde as a work of art.

Simultaneously, realistic artists, those whose works reflect proportion, form, three dimensions, and color are belittled or denigrated by haughty critics who consider themselves arbiters of public taste. Frank Covino is a renowned painter, teacher, and writer who says that craft must precede creativity if creativity is to be communicative. But in an age when anything can be considered "art," anyone can be considered an artist. In effect, the art world has been turned upside down. Artists who paint portraits or realistic images you can recognize are dismissed by critics who are afraid to praise them lest they themselves be subjected to ridicule. Gilbert Keith Chesterton was a brilliant writer of books on many subjects ranging from philosophy

and religion to detective stories. He identified the flaw in the modern art world with precision when he said, “ By a curious confusion, many modern critics have passed from the proposition that a masterpiece may be unpopular to the other proposition that it cannot be a masterpiece.”

The domination of the art world by charlatans has been so extensive that museum curators, critics, and wealthy collectors have been oblivious to hoaxes or pranks that prove that much modern art reflects the classic tale “The Emperor’s New Clothes.” People are so afraid of appearing foolish that they ultimately prove just how foolish they are. The experts have sung the praises of new artists only to learn that the artist was really a chimpanzee or a small child playing with paint by throwing it at a canvas for fun. In his landmark book, “The Painted Word,” Tom Wolfe suggested that the values in the art world had changed so radically that words, not images, had become the new currency of art. What counted today, Wolfe said, was not a work of art but the theory the artist used to explain it. Andy Warhol, the Prince of Pop Art, summed it up when he said, “Art is what you can get away with.”

Does your family appreciate art? Trips to museums can be enjoyable and enlightening. But just because an exhibit receives public attention doesn’t mean that it is filled with masterpieces. Art can add a tremendous dimension to your life, but only if you have a real basis for appreciating the truly great and dismissing the frauds and poseurs. As in music, there are gifted practitioners today studying and teaching the classic techniques that defined great art for generations. In many instances, their work is simply waiting for you to discover it. Today many college graduates cannot name a single artist unless the artist in

question has been involved in a scandal or received unlikely publicity in the media. Your children and grandchildren shouldn't miss out on the values of art in their lives. But they should also learn the difference between a painting by Leonardo Da Vinci or Rembrandt and the work of someone who throws paint at a canvas and sells it for high prices with the aid of two dozen publicists.

OUR VANISHING HISTORY

Do you care about what happened yesterday? What about things that happened two hundred years ago? More than two centuries have passed since the American colonists signed the Declaration of Independence separating the original states from Great Britain and eventually adopted the Constitution establishing basis for America's government. Yet the principles established in founding documents are widely debated today and the freedoms they guarantee make it possible for you to not only care about what happened yesterday but to speak your mind or publish your views on the subject.

Why then would educators jettison the study of our own history from the curriculum and replace it with a list of vague topics subject to the whims of the moment? In 2010, North Carolina unveiled a proposal to radically redesign its high school curriculum, replacing "World History" with something called "Global Studies." The Greeks, the Romans, and the French Revolution would be replaced by "environmental modification," "quality of life," and "effectiveness of organizations to maintain peace and security." In effect, students would be led into discussions of contemporary and often highly political issues with the background or knowledge of history to understand the origin of today's problems. Worse, North Carolina also proposed limiting high

school studies in American history to events beginning in 1977. That's right, no more Founding Fathers, Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, American Revolution or Civil War. No more study of the Bill of Rights or the conflict over slavery. No more Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, or Lincoln. Instead this new and thoroughly modern history instruction would begin with the presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes and give students the chance to learn about "struggles for power and human rights," "changes in the physical environment and technology," and "changes in lifestyles." The result of this absurd proposal is easy to predict: students heading into college ignorant of the history of their nation or the world around them, but able to mouth politically correct slogans regarding current debates about the environment and economic policy according to the agendas of those designing the curriculum.

Unfortunately, this problem is not limited to North Carolina high school students. Our history and our knowledge of it is vanishing right before our eyes. A survey by Colonial Williamsburg estimated that more than five million teenagers couldn't answer basic questions about Independence Day. A study by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni concluded that 55% of top colleges grant degrees to students without requiring any study of American history. Although most students couldn't answer simple, basic questions about history, 99% knew the names of television cartoon characters and celebrity rap stars. A survey on behalf of the Bill of Rights Institute reported that 42% of Americans identified the phrase, "From each according to his ability to each according to his needs" as an excerpt from our founding documents. 20% actually thought the phrase came from the Bill of

Rights. Of course, this is one of the signature quotations from the writings of Karl Marx, author of *The Communist Manifesto*.

The problem is not exclusively American. A teacher in Britain described fourteen-year old students who think “Churchill” is the name of an animated dog in a television commercial. The source of the problem has been clearly identified by renowned historian David McCullough: history teachers who only have degrees in education, not the subject they teach, textbooks overwhelmed by political correctness, fads in teaching that emphasize minor figures in history instead of giants, and historians who are more interested in impressing each other than teaching . Learning about history doesn’t have to be boring. How much are your children and grandchildren really being taught about history? The past affects the present and you and your family can learn about the best of the past if you only take the first step.

A NATION OF HARES

Which member of your family knows the most about computers and what does this mean? How many parents declare proudly that their children are so much smarter than they were at the same age because their sons or daughters are facile with computers? How many grandparents are similarly proud to declare that the those in the current generation have skills with devices such as I-Pads that they couldn’t even imagine? It’s easy to understand the pride of parents and grandparents; it was ever thus. But just because someone knows how to use a computer doesn’t mean that he knows or understands what to do with the information it generates. In fact, if your daughter or granddaughter sits before a digital monitor, the issue at hand isn’t what answers she gets from the computer, but what questions she asks. If

your son or grandson is facile at reading on a Kindle tablet, it is more important to ask about what he is reading or whether he understands it than how fast he is in using the device.

High technology, like radio and television in former times, has altered not only the way we absorb information but the way we think and behave. The speed of high technology has reduced our attention span. We expect instant answers to problems and often assume that if we read a statement generated by a computer, it must be true. The computer has made a world of information available to us. But if we do not use such information intelligently or acquire the skills to do so, we simply render ourselves ignoramuses in a hurry. Consider two children: one lived in the nineteenth century and voraciously read books; this child didn't listen to the radio or watch television or go to the movies, because none had yet been invented. The second child is busy spending his time playing video games, listening to rock or rap music through a device plugged into his ear, and closely following the lives of the celebrities who dominate the attention of his friends. Which model would you rather have your children or grandchildren follow?

Of course, no one would suggest that we should go back to former times and fail to take advantage of the incredible opportunities made available by high technology. But we have to go further and deal with the quality of time spent using computers, not just the quantity of information or the speed with which it is delivered. The Internet offers an opportunity to discover the best of our culture, instant information, and a chance acquire the wit and wisdom of the ages with a mouse click. The Internet also offers hate speech, pornography, misinformation, and unbelievable amounts of bad advice.

High technology places a huge emphasis on speed. But there are times when “fast” isn’t best. In Washington, DC, crowds of commuters in a subway station dashed past a violinist playing for their pleasure. A few tossed coins in the hat had placed on the ground nearby, but they all ignored his music. They didn’t realize that they were the subjects of an experiment which led to a Pulitzer Prize-winning report. The musician was the famed concert violinist Joshua Bell. Without the trappings (and high ticket prices) of a performance, the music itself meant nothing to them. The fable of the Hare and the Tortoise is a familiar one. A hare is convinced he can outrun a slow, plodding tortoise. He cannot imagine losing a race in which his natural speed gives him an unquestionable advantage. But when the hare and tortoise actually race, it is the hare who is in for a surprise. His lightning speed gives him such a lead that he stops for a nap. When he awakens, he finds that the tortoise, patiently and slowly taking one step after another, is so far ahead that he cannot catch up. Children for generations were told of Aesop’s adage, “Slow and steady wins the race.” But today, speed for its own sake is dominant. Texting began in 1992 when a British test engineer used a computer to send the greeting, “Merry Christmas” to a colleague’s phone. Today 2.5 billion phone users send text messages around the world.

Texting involves speaking in abbreviations and today’s English teachers are now coping with students who don’t know (or even care) how to spell words correctly or form complete sentences. As students and their peers become immersed in their own world of video games, texts, downloaded music, and digital messages, they are oblivious to much of the real world around them. Author and professor Mark Bauerlein has spoken of “latter-day Rip Van Winkles” sleeping through

the movements of culture and of history. Bauerlein quite correctly says that many care little for history books, civic principles, foreign affairs, comparative religions, serious media and art, and know less. Bauerlein adds that to many, tradition is a foreign word and that they are more interested in their peers, the allure of screens, and career goals.

Although I wouldn't have the temerity to compare myself to George Bernard Shaw, I will follow Shaw's advice when he said, "I often quote myself. It adds spice to my conversation." I summed up the dilemma of high technology and its offer of incredible opportunities and serious problems in my book, *Mark! My Words*. I said that in the 21st century people are "rushing around, scrambling about, tweeting, twittering, grabbing their cell phones, clutching their Blackberries, often doing three or four or twenty-four things at once. E-mails go anywhere in the world in seconds. A Few years ago, only birds twittered, Google was once a comic strip character. No one had ever heard of eBay or Wikipedia and "the Web" was spun by a wise spider in E.B. White's famous children's book, *Charlotte's Web*. Now, everyone twitters and tweets. The best of times and the worst of times are now on You Tube. For today's parents and grandparents, the challenge is clear. Families can discover that high technology is obliterating our traditions, values, and culture, or they can harness its power on behalf of creativity, imagination, and a life enrichment. You do not have to know as much about computers, smart phones, or I-Pads as your children or grandchildren. But you do need to place the role of these devices in perspective. Mozart wrote symphonies and Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence with a quill pen. Computers and other high tech devices are tools and how we use them is entirely up to us.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU READ

Ask a recent high school or college graduate, “What’s the most recent book you’ve read that wasn’t assigned to you in class?” If the student in question can’t remember, don’t be surprised. Reading for pleasure or to pursue knowledge on your own is declining. Caleb Crane, writing in *The New Yorker*, suggests that such reading is on its way to becoming “an arcane hobby.” Surveys indicate that one in three college seniors do not read for pleasure at all. Yet readers are the likeliest to visit museums and libraries, attend concerts and plays, and surprisingly, participate in sports. If reading is the key to so many constructive activities as well as academic success, whether or not your family is reading family is of prime importance. To understand what has happened, we have to answer two troubling questions, why have reading skills declined and precisely what are people reading today?

Reading skills have declined for a simple reason. Reading is not taught properly in many schools. This isn’t a new problem, but despite years of evidence, little has been done to remedy the situation. In 1955, Dr. Rudolf Flesch published a famous critique, *Why Johnny Can’t Read*. Flesch’s explanation was to the point. Students weren’t reading well because instead of learning the sounds of the letters of the alphabet (phonics,) students were being taught the “whole word” method, in which they memorize a list of words and then try to remember them when they appear in a book. The President of the American Reading Council explained that if a student sees the word “horse” and says the word “pony,” it’s not very important because the child understands the meaning of the sentence. But this isn’t reading, it’s guessing. Incredibly, she said, “Accuracy is not the name of the game.” Accuracy evidently isn’t the name of the game in teaching mathematics either today. The

curriculum coordinator at a school recently explained the new trend in teaching arithmetic. If a student says $3 \times 4 = 11$, the teacher is more interested in an explanation of his thinking process than the wrong answer. It's more important to explain that he had a rationale for arriving at the wrong answer than simply memorizing the right one. As for reading skills, Dr. Rudolf Flesch was back in 1981 with a new book, unfortunately and accurately titled, *"Why Johnny STILL Can't Read."* You can determine for yourself if your children or grandchildren can really read or if they have simply been taught to memorize words.

One reason why these problems exist is that teachers today are often trained primarily in educational methodology. They are expected to know the currently fashionable methods of teaching rather than the subjects they teach. Marva Collins, the extraordinary teacher who started a renowned school of her own, insists that elementary school teachers should be broadly trained in music, art, literature, philosophy, and science. The American Council of Teachers and Alumni surveyed fifty highly regarded liberal arts colleges and fifty of the most prestigious universities. Only one Ivy League college required a course in Shakespeare. So did four of the universities and three of the liberal arts colleges. So students at the other schools could graduate with English degrees and become teachers of English without ever encountering Shakespeare at all. Michael Gorman, President of the American Library Association, described as "appalling" the results of a study by the National Center for Education Statistics which determined that only 31% of college graduates could really understand a complex book. Many had difficulties reading the labels on prescription medications or comparing newspaper editorials. Even libraries, where we would expect to find the best books, are taking classic books off the

shelves to replace them with more popular (and more commercial titles.) High technology enthusiasts are quick to point to the proliferation of digital tablets, such as Amazon's Kindle, and insist that future generations will just read differently, choosing screens instead of traditional books. But if these future generations can read well or understand what they are reading, does it matter that when they do try to read, they do so using high technology? Reading is not only an essential skill, it can brighten your life and provide your family with hours of unending pleasure.

PROFESSORS, POLITICIANS, AND PRODUCERS

When confronted by the cultural crisis we are all facing, you may be tempted to search for a solution outside your family. In fact, there are three places where we might expect to find a solution. But unfortunately, the three groups of men and women most likely turn out to be part of the problem. They can be found in the fields of education, government, and the entertainment industry. Let's examine each one. When we're through, I think you may conclude, as I have, that activity within your own family offers a far greater chance that your children and grandchildren will still encounter the best of our culture, language, and history.

Schools would seem to be the obvious choice to introduce children to the arts, teach them the skills needed to use language, and familiarize them with the facts of history. But a close examination of trends in both secondary schools and colleges reveals serious problems. A number of these problems are the result of mistakes made by self-styled education experts for years; others are new efforts to follow recent fads and fashions. All mean that your children and grandchildren

are in danger of not receiving the education they deserve. Even as far back as the nineteenth century, there was tremendous resistance to the study of music in the Boston Public Schools and at Harvard, where the first music courses were offered to children and to college students. Do the arts matter? Many educators aren't sure. (Music instruction was absent from the New York City public schools for twenty-five years before being restored by Mayor Rudi Giuliani.) Even if members of your family are enrolled in music courses, this does not guarantee the quality of what they are learning. Many music teachers think the way to teach music is to use phrases such as "communicating with the kids" and "meeting the kids at their level." This means they try to interest their students in music by identifying with the rock, rap, and pop with which their pupils are already familiar, all in the futile hope that one day their students will mature and change their taste. Real music, including the classics, jazz, the Great American Songbook, among others, may be neglected. Often the teachers themselves have grown up with pop culture and see nothing wrong with it. Parents may say, "My son plays in the school orchestra" or "my daughter sings in the choir." But this activity by itself pales in comparison to the massive pressure from their peers who are downloading the latest offerings from the untalented tabloid pop stars who can't sing or play well but are the beneficiaries of massive promotion.

Schools and universities alike have become highly politicized. We often mistakenly think of academicians as living in ivory towers. But today's teachers and the professors who are their mentors are as human as everyone else, subject to the same failings and temptations. The greatest temptation facing teachers is to "go along to get along." What they are often expected to do is follow the latest trends to prove

they are up-to-date and in fashion. Teachers who dissent in favor of tradition are apt to be attacked and dismissed as behind the times. The whole idea of standards has been challenged as arbitrary and unfair. A leading professor has written that there is no one group of facts of subjects that everyone should know. When we apply this to music, art, or literature, it suggests that as long as a student listens to something or reads anything, everything is all right. One school officially defended the use of rap in his curriculum by declaring, he was satisfied if his pupils were reading or listening as long they were paying attention to something that was not “completely objectionable” Is this the way children should be learning today?

If the schools don't provide a solution, what about the government? Government involvement with the arts usually follows two paths. Government can provide money to artists and it can regulate content. Artists, writers, and musicians are usually talking about the freedom to express themselves. But when government provides money, power rests in the hands of those who decided how the money should be spent. Usually this means an alphabet soup of government agencies and bureaucrats. While advocates of government involvement speak of “public support,” the support is usually determined by so-called peers, artists, writers, and musicians who are the friends and allies of those in power.

The result is typically a group of artists or academicians channeling money to their friends, colleagues, and those with whom they are in ideological sympathy. In dictatorships this often leads to censorship. But even in a free country, crony capitalism and political patronage are common. So the government brings money to the arts, but it also brings politics, incompetence, and favoritism. Often it brings

the involvement of people who are like the academicians we find on campuses today. Their primary goal is to stay in fashion and always opt for what they can identify as change. Tradition and classicisms will find an unsympathetic ear.

Government money invariably means government supervision. Taxpayers often object to their money being spent on “art” which has only shock value. Many of the so-called peers who ultimately make decisions about government support bring their own biases to the table. More often than not, they have little enthusiasm for the traditional. So expecting the government to take the lead in addressing our current cultural crisis is a pipe dream.

“ Far more influential in the advent of our celebrity pop culture is the entertainment industry. Your children and grandchildren are exposed every day to the influences of entertainment producers, whether their chosen medium is film, television, video games, social media, print, or online and digital devices. But nearly all of the issues we have been discussing have been affected in a negative way by the entertainment industry. We speak of “Hollywood” and the entertainment industry as if the two terms were synonymous. The real Hollywood is unlike the marvelous myth that has captivated generations of men and women dreaming of fame and fortune. But whether products are produced in Hollywood, New York, Silicon Valley, or anywhere else in the world, there are two overriding obsessions that dominate the industry. The first, obviously, is money. The entertainment business is just that, a business, and the powerful executives who run it are determined to make more money than their competition. Unfortunately, they often accomplish this with little or no regard for the consequences of the products they promote. The

second fact we need to recognize regarding the entertainment industry is that it is overwhelmingly obsessed with the present. Motion picture studios, for instance have shown so little regard for their classic films of their past that the largest studio in Hollywood, MGM, dumped priceless artifacts, scripts, and scores from their archives into a Los Angeles landfill. “Wheel of Fortune “ host Pat Sajak acquired a unique perspective on the subject during a multifaceted broadcasting career. Speaking of the Hollywood and New York executives, he quite rightly observed, “It’s not that they’re evil people. They have kids and they care about them. But they see no connection between what they do and the results of what they do. And besides, you’re not really families and communities. You’re ratings, demographics and sales.”

To put it bluntly, Hollywood’s power brokers are engaged in a rough, brutally competitive business and they find it easy to rationalize explicit sex, foul language, and needless violence in their products. They offer excuses, often that they are merely following trends and reacting to public taste. But in recent years they have massively degraded the quality of entertainment, all the while exerting a powerful and negative influence on your children and grandchildren. They respond to criticism by declaring, “We have to give the kids what they want.” But the result is that your children and grandchildren may not know what they like, they may simply like what they know. What they know is likely to be the products of the entertainment industry. They have no idea about the books, music, art, theater, and films they are missing, let alone the significance of their language or history. So the entertainment industry should offer a solution, but it will not do so because it is part of the problem. A writer once suggested that too many in Hollywood pursue “the morality of hard cash.” I have described them as “artists of the fast

buck.” However we describe them, they are not unlikely to help your family.

CULTURAL CONSERVATION

The idea of “Cultural Conservation” has three components: the best of the past which shouldn’t be forgotten, the best of the present, which shouldn’t be ignored, and the best of the future which shouldn’t be undiscovered. The best of the past is a concept that should be easy to understand, but in this day and age, it is a concept often ignored. We stand on the shoulders of those great men and women who have gone before us. The greatest minds and talents of the past have given us a foundation on which we can build. But in today’s fast-paced pop culture, many people of all ages are in no position to build on this foundation; in most cases, they can’t even recognize the names of those responsible. For instance, how can someone express lucid opinions today about the United States Constitution if it is a document he has never read and if the names of the Founding Fathers are unfamiliar to him? How can someone respond intelligently to today’s music if she has never listened to anything written earlier than last year? So the first element of “Cultural Conservation” is the rediscovery of the best of the past. Learning is a never ending process. Classic books or pieces of music or works of art may have something new to teach us or a new way to inspire it even if they have been familiar since childhood. There are also countless such classics that are yet undiscovered or about which we simply don’t know. The word “classic” is used here in a broad sense, referring not just to classical music or books of the classical era, but to works of recent times that share the same values of past traditions.

The best of the present reflects a need to recognize that there are creative men and women today who are working hard to preserve the best values of the past in works that are contemporary. They may be composers, writers, or artists whose modern works have a lasting value rather than simply following the fads of the moment. Or they may be people such as historians or preservationists who are working today to see that we don't forget what happened yesterday. In today's world, dominated by aggressive and ubiquitous media, we are often told who and what should be regarded as "the best of the present" while today's most gifted creators toil in obscurity.

The best of the future will remain undiscovered if we don't pay attention to the values expressed through the first two elements, the best of the past and the best of the present. To do this, we must become conscious of the differences between change and progress, the worth of values and standards, and of our own ability to evaluate what we see, hear, and read, often without the help of self-proclaimed experts and even in spite of them. Acquiring this consciousness doesn't always happen by accident. It may come to us through simple applications of common sense, but it's also helpful to develop our powers of reason so that we do not allow ourselves to be led astray by those with huge promotional budgets and a giant media megaphone. If your family begins discovering the best of the past and appreciating the best of the present, you may be taking the first step to see that your children and grandchildren become participants in the best of the future.

What can you do to insure that you and your family will partake of "the best?" Should you be discouraged about the prospect of your children and grandchildren learning and growing in the age of Trash

Talk and MTV? There is an answer. You can not only become an informed and motivated learner, you can share these goals with everyone else in your family.

Ray Bradbury was the world's most famous writer in the field of science fiction, penning novels, stories, and screenplays. But Bradbury never went to college. When he emerged from high school in the Depression, he simply couldn't afford to go to college, so he educated himself through regular library visits. For the rest of his life he described himself as a graduate of the public library. Of course, colleges worldwide now offer courses incorporating the books and stories he created.

Some of our most famous historical figures were the products of self-education. George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Abraham Lincoln weren't college graduates. Inventors such as Thomas Edison, industrialists like Henry Ford, and even celebrated writers and composers, including F. Scott Fitzgerald, Robert Frost, William Faulkner, and Irving Berlin, didn't have college diplomas hanging on the wall. This doesn't mean that the right kind of college education doesn't have value. But it does mean that you and your family can learn and explore and enjoy wonderful adventures of the mind and heart together. You can do these things without formal classroom instruction.

You don't need to establish a rigid schedule or arbitrary list of things to do. But you do need a plan. Ronald Gross, who has written numerous books on self-education and lifelong learning says that you can discover what is beautiful and important in the world by becoming a "risk taker of the spirit. " There is a certain level of risk in studying any subject or even pursuing a hobby on your own. You can make

mistakes or follow the wrong advice. If you suddenly conclude that $5+5=11$, you need to be able to discover the error of your ways. If you encounter a self-styled “expert” who tells you that it doesn’t matter as long as you can defend the notion that $5+5=11$, you’ve found an “expert,” and there are many, whose advice should be ignored.

Cultural Conservation is not just a movement, but a way of thinking. You and your family can enjoy acquiring the skills to learn on your own. You can discover new ways of reading, observing, analyzing, speaking, and yes, listening. With the proper skills, you’ll be ready to begin learning together and know where or to whom to go if you need help or guidance. You’re never too old or too young to learn. Even small children can learn about beauty by listening to music and learn about color and light by seeing wonderful pictures. A child’s imagination can be stimulated by hearing stories of adventure. If children are introduced to quality in the arts at an early age, they will be far more able to withstand the influence of peers in later life. Nor should age be an impediment to learning. Many of the great works of art, the finest book, the most incredible musical masterpieces, have been painted, sculpted, written, or composed by men and women of mature years. If these creative geniuses have been productive in their eighties and nineties, those far younger should have no difficulty in pursuing learning for a lifetime.

Remember the following:

1. Learning is a never-ending process.
2. You never know what you may need to know in life.

3. Often we think we know what we like, but we like that which is merely familiar.
4. It is always better to light candles than curse the darkness.
5. Develop a set of goals for self-education.
6. Use a personal plan of action so you and your family can reap the rewards of cultural conservation.
7. Use the marvelous new tools of technology to achieve your goals.

A JOURNEY FOR YOUR FAMILY

Best of all, you don't have to do set these goals or accomplish them alone. Because I have been considered about the cultural crisis that faces all of us and what it is doing to our families, I founded "Cultural Conservation." Cultural Conservation is not only the name of a movement, it is the name of a new non-profit organization whose mission is to make it easy for families to learn together and insure that everyone will have access to the treasure trove of ideas, information, and resources you need.

If you embark on this exciting journey all alone, your family may find itself caught in the crossfire of misinformation and conflicting opinions that flood the media today. No single book, outline, or program fits every situation. Every individual is unique and every family is different. Even within one family you can find different personalities, tastes, and attitudes. The key to discovering the joy of music, the delight of language, the legacy of history, and the pride of achievement is the acquisition of several basic skills that enable you to work on your

own. So one of the principle goals of Cultural Conservation is to provide you and your family with those skills.

Even those of us who read are rare given a basis for evaluating what we read. Our ears are virtually assaulted by a cacophony of sounds, but when was the last time anyone talked to you about how you listen to music or the spoken word? We're told that the Internet brings us a cornucopia of images, but how should we look at those images? We often take for granted the notion that we already know how to read, look, listen, or speak. But all of these skills also require us to think; how we think about what we read, see, listen, or say often determines far more than you might ever imagine. Acquiring these skills doesn't have to be difficult. It requires some guidance and a bit of common sense. In addition to discovering a whole new outlook on reading, viewing, listening, and speaking, you will also be introduced to new outlook on the subject of change and progress. Centuries before modern invention such as the smart phone or digital tablets, Aristotle spoke of different types of change. "Change," for instance, can imply differences in quality or quantity.

For example, children and parents alike are told that reading is important and essential to our well-being. But there are those who suggest that as long as boys and girls are reading anything, their mission has been accomplished. But it's not only a matter of what you read, but how you read. Many years ago, Dr. Mortimer Adler wrote a best-selling volume called *How to Read a Book*. Adler's analysis is still intriguing today. He cites four separate types of reading. First is elementary reading, the basic reading that children are supposed to be taught in school, how to read and understand words forming complete sentences. Next comes what Adler calls "inspectional reading," in which

a reader learns to skim a long or complicated text to get an impression of the author's basic approach. Third on his list is "analytical reading" in which the reader begins to ask questions and search for answers inspired by what the author says. Finally comes what Adler dubs "syntopical" reading in which the reader chooses a topic and compares the views of more than one author. Adler talks about the difference between simply remembering what you read and being able to explain it to someone else.

What do you actually do when you listen to music? Do you just listen casually with one ear directed toward the music and one ear focused on something else? Do you think about what you're hearing? Formal schooling often pays so much attention to speaking that we don't often devote thought to listening. What about looking at a painting or watching a movie? These activities can be fun, but do you think about what you're seeing and what messages it delivers or what they mean? By discovering new ways of reading, listening, and viewing, as well as speaking, you your family can together find new ways of seeing the world. It's like finding hidden treasure in your attic or your back yard without ever having known it was there.

What has all this to do with us today? In the modern world, your family is exposed to all kinds of influences. They are broadcast into your lives over a constantly expanding world of media. Everything from television to streaming video to e-mail to amplified music carries messages and ideas. A number are irritating, like "robocalls" trying to sell you something. Others are more troubling, promoting ideas, values, and behavior that may be completely at odds with your own beliefs or ideals. All of us are subjected to the obvious temptation to assume that something is good if it is popular, that someone is important if he is

famous. The celebrity culture is everywhere. Can your children distinguish between the greatest music ever written and the commercial noise that passes for music pop music today? Chances are that unless you take action yourself, they may never encounter the latter while their friends and peers spend a fortune on the former.

This is true not just about music, but about every element of our culture, language, and history. If your children and grandchildren don't grow up learning about the pride of achievement, we shouldn't be surprised if they confuse achievement with fame or public attention. But with the right skills (and a something that is most uncommon today, common sense,) it is possible to know the best our culture has to offer and to see how it compares favorably with the objects of most media attention today. By becoming cultural conservationists, your family can share wonderful experiences in learning and discovery.

What can you do about this problem to help your family? There is a solution.

1. As a Cultural Conservationists, we can all work together to change and improve the institutions that affect our future, our schools, our government, and the entertainment industry.
2. You don't have to wait to alter these institutions. You can develop a set of goals and a plan tailored to the interests and needs of your own family.
3. Cultural Conservation, the organization, offers many resources to help you accomplish your goals, including a web site filled with materials in all media, including print, audio, video, and interactive programs that you can share with you entire family. Your children and

grandchildren don't have to be deprived of their cultural heritage. They can learn about the joy of music, the delight of language, the legacy of history, and the pride of achievement.

There is no perfect plan to solve these problems we have been discussing and no easy solution. The distinguished American humorist Richard Armour used to describe himself as a "realist with dreams." We can all be realists with dreams if we set bold and exciting goals for our families. Lifetime learning is available to everyone. Cultural Conservation is an idea, a movement, and a learning opportunity for all. You and your family can begin today!

DR. MARK EVANS



Mark Evans, Ph.D, is a composer, conductor, pianist, and organist with a multifaceted background in music, writing, broadcasting, and education. He hosts the popular, "Mark! My Words," television program and is founder and president of "Cultural Conservation," a foundation, "dedicated to the principle that society should preserve its cultural resources with the same care and devotion that a nation devotes to its

natural resources."

He began his broadcasting career on radio, producing 500 radio programs under his trademarked title, "Mark! My Words," also the name of his newspaper column in The New York City Tribune and his series which airs on the Pinehurst, North Carolina television station he founded.

Mark Evans literally grew up in the world of film music in Hollywood. He was a private pupil of such renowned composers as Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco and Roy Harris. His book, "Soundtrack: The Music of the Movies," has been recognized as the definitive book on the history of film scoring.

As a writer and lyricist, he is the author of numerous books for adults and children and has collaborated on books with such varied personalities as Robert Stack and Xavier Cugat. He began his broadcasting career on radio, producing 500 radio programs under his trademarked title, "Mark! My Words," also the name of his newspaper column in The New York City Tribune. Many of the world's most prominent figures in fields ranging from music, art and literature to government, diplomacy and education have been guests on radio and programs he has hosted and produced. "Mark! My Words" programs are devoted to the best of the past which shouldn't be forgotten, the best of the present, which shouldn't be ignored and the best of the future, which shouldn't be undiscovered. He is widely in demand as a speaker.

His latest book, also titled "Mark! My Words" is subtitled "How to Discover the Joy of Music, the Delight of Language, and the Pride of Achievement in the Age of Trash Talk and MTV." It is the first major book to address our current cultural crisis and to provide positive solutions that can impact your life and the state of our culture.