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## **History Reborn: A Birthright of America's Young**

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*Author and lecturer Vicki Jo Anderson holds a master's degree from George Wythe College. Vicki Jo has lectured about her book History Reborn all across America at seminars and conventions, colleges and universities. She specializes in taking youth on historical trips to Washington, D.C. and Boston. She is the former president of the Arizona Charter School Association, co-founder of American Heritage Academy and the president of Zichron Historical Research Society. She and her husband Steve are the proud parents of eight children and four grandchildren.*

Recently, George Wythe College interviewed Mrs. Anderson over the telephone from her home in Cottonwood, Arizona, about her love of education and especially history.

GWC: Thank you Vicki Jo for consenting to this interview. I guess to start off with, what is new with the projects you are currently working on?

ANDERSON: I am very excited about our new building that is about half finished. The K-6 segment of the building is virtually ready to move into, and the other sections are moving right along. Research on my next volume is slow but sometimes that is how this works. I also teach Government and Senior Literature at Heritage and that keeps me busy.

GWC: I knew that you were teaching, but I thought it was a history class, how do you incorporate your strong biographical approach to history into a government class?

ANDERSON: There is more to it than this, but I simply present the kids with a list of the signers of the Declaration and the US Constitution. Their assignment is to find a name that really jumps out at them and then, basically become that person. They will write papers about their person and come to know how that person thought and what views they supported. This is really evident during the Board of Review, a term we borrowed from the Boy Scouts for the Oral Examination that all of our graduates must pass to graduate. They will use this individual that they have spent so much time studying as a resource to answer questions. It is really amazing.

GWC: That's great. I can tell you really love working with these kids.

ANDERSON: I do, but they are so disconnected from the past, which helps explain why so many do not know who they are. They have lost their birthright.

GWC: What do you mean, "Birthright"?

ANDERSON: Our youth have been deprived of a birthright and that is to know that they

are heirs (and "heir" is an important word") of a long line of great men and women who performed great deeds. This is their birthright. This is their destiny. My mother taught us that people without a history is like a man without a memory not knowing where he'd been, it is hard for him to find direction for the future and inspiration for their work. This is what GWC is all about.

Even as a young child, I always had an interest in history, although I did not like the way it was taught in school. Being a people person, I could not stand the academic focus on dates and places. I wanted to know about the people behind the facts. I graduated with a bachelor's degree in sociology, to be sure I could focus on what was important to me-people. I am not trying to put a plug in for home schooling, but that is really what got me started. As my children started approaching school age, my perspective on education led me to home schooling. I wanted the kids to study the people of history, their lives and character, their ups and downs. I wanted them to come face to face with these great men and women. Well, you know the old saying, the teacher always learns the most-it's true. I found that I could not settle for surface knowledge. This ultimately led me into a ten-year, incredibly rewarding, research project that completely changed my life. At first it started out as a personal thing to help my home school children, then an event occurred that convinced me that I had to share my findings with others.

In 1989, Steve and I were returning from a trip to Israel. As I looked out of the airplane window into all that ocean vastness, something came over me. I felt as if I was somehow linked right there with my ancestors, who in 1650 crossed this very same body of water. It was as if I could see their crowded frail vessel being tossed and driven by the wind and the waves. I pondered over their conditions and their privations, which were a stark contrast to my own comfortable air conditioned seat on the airplane. I asked myself, "What was the driving force that caused them to strike out into unknown regions and into perils they could only imagine?" I knew the answer-but I had never before felt the answer the way I did that day. My ancestors were fleeing persecution and going to an unknown land in hopes that one day their children and children's children would be able to live in freedom. Difficult conditions and privations were secondary to this single hope and dream.

And so, in a profound way I became very aware that I, their progeny, was the recipient of all of their hopes and dreams and sacrifices. This touched my inner soul. We as a people had lost our connection with the past, and owing this great debt to my ancestors, the least I could do was try to bridge that gap. It was almost as if they were extending me an invitation to help others see the past in a way that goes beyond the cold hard facts. I felt a charge to take my research and develop it into a printed form that would focus on the good things they did, rather than create another typical negative or saucy collection of biographies. A focus on the intent of their hearts, not just the headlines of the day. I chose to avoid all fault finding or tearing down. The prevailing historical approach since the 20's has been to show the weaknesses or perceived weaknesses and miseries of men. I just couldn't do that.

GWC: Wow, that is quite an undertaking. I can imagine that over the years you have

come across some amazing stories.

ANDERSON: Yes, ten years of researching and writing about the lives of eminent men, has opened a wonderful resource to me of powerful stories of individuals who made a difference. Many of these inspiring stories I have shared in hundreds of lectures across this land and in my book. Now, with focused research into the lives of eminent women, I have also found great stories of strength and courage that in many cases have never been told or shared with a modern audience. It is interesting to find that generally the men's lives are about one man and his impact on society. However, the women present a little more complex life. It seems that one cannot tell the woman's story without her accompanying family, her many relations, the heartaches, the sorrows, the happy marriages, the sad marriages, the no marriages, the children who bring you happiness and the children who break your heart and so forth. Because the stories are more involved, they become much more complicated to retell. Just the same, these biographies need to be shared so that each of us can draw strength from these women's lives, for they did not give up, they fulfilled the role that Providence sent them here to do. Each left an impact and each contributed to the foundations of freedom in some way.

GWC: What time period are you now researching?

ANDERSON: The women we have been researching were born somewhere between the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Eight were single and never married, four were divorced or separated from their husbands, forty-five experienced happy marriages, one's husband traveled to Romania from England and was never allowed to return, seven experienced very unhappy marriages, one died on her wedding day, six were forced to flee from their homes for personal safety, two were tried and guillotined, one was poisoned and died, seven were personally involved in war, twelve had to earn or supplement the family's income in a major way, one died on the eve of her husband's inauguration, and three were accused of adultery. Eighteen were novelists, poets, or authors. Three were actresses, one a famous mathematician and one a dancer. Several suffered extreme poverty. Although most had an opportunity for education of some sort, our research shows much of their education was self-education. These women come from a variety of backgrounds and positions in life. Most had been married and the importance of family was common among all of them.

GWC: Obviously with a list like that, we don't have enough time to talk about all of these fascinating stories, however, which would you consider as your most significant discoveries?

ANDERSON: It is difficult to pin it down to just one. Let me share some highlights from two of the American women we have researched. When I say we, I refer to myself and Jaydene Buhler who has been my right hand throughout all of this research.

Sarah Livingston Jay's family was extremely committed to the cause of Liberty wherever it was found. Her father William was an ardent promoter of the rights of the colonist. So deeply did he feel for the cause that he named his home, "Liberty Hall." Though a rather

poor speaker, William was a superb writer and did much to promote the cause of liberty through pamphlets and constant newspaper articles. Sarah's uncle had the privilege of signing the Declaration of Independence and her brother Henry became a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Her son, Peter, a prominent lawyer was instrumental in founding the American Bible Society. Her son, William, was a staunch champion of the emancipation of the slaves.

As a young girl, Sarah watched her father continually flee into hiding as he was often sought by the British, and at times, she with her mother and sisters had to flee. At seventeen, Sarah was introduced to a young lawyer friend of her father's named John Jay. Jay was the only founding father not of direct English descent. His ancestry was French Hugonot. He was keenly aware of the sacrifices made by his Protestant ancestors and was taught in a French Hugonot school. Like his ancestors, John not being of British descent was not influenced or partial to the English national character.

The early years of the revolution found John away on congressional duties and high on the wanted list by the British. Once again Sarah found herself and her baby having to flee in order to avoid British raiding parties. In 1779, John was assigned to travel to Spain in an attempt to secure their help with the Revolutionary War. Sarah and her husband John were inseparable. Not wanting to be apart, Sarah made the hazardous journey to Europe to remain by her husband's side. While in Spain they were treated with disdain. Spain feared that the influence of the American Revolution would incite its citizenry to rebellion. This was a humiliating and sad experience for John and Sarah. In Spain, Sarah gave birth, but the child did not live long. This nearly devastated her spirit and her health. Spain refused to respond to the request to help America so Jay was reassigned. The couple moved to France to assist Benjamin Franklin in obtaining France's aid. Sarah flourished in the social life of France and at times was mistaken for Marie Antoinette. She also became a close companion with Madam Lafayette.

Unlike the more reserved Martha Washington, and even to some extent Abigail Adams, Sarah was born to entertain and to be a hostess. Upon returning to America, Sarah put her skills to good use. Mr. Jay was appointed Secretary of Foreign Affairs, and with Sarah by his side, it was only natural that the center of official entertainment take place in the Jay home. Sarah's dinner list of 1787 reads like a history book in which appears the names of the most well known colonial families and the most noted statesmen of the Constitutional Convention. Historians have observed that within those pleasant surroundings of the home of Sarah and John Jay the details of the Constitution that were having difficulty in being agreed upon in convention, often found resolution. It was in her home where much of the impetus came for the new Constitution and the vision took root for a united people of liberty.

Another woman high on my list is Abigail Adams. Abigail is one of the most distinguished Americans of all time. She is the first woman of American letters. Because her letters give us such an intimate view, Abigail has also been described as the first fully emancipated woman in American History. The compilation of her personal letters is written with such insight and clarity that they interest a cross section of readers. They are

a documentation of the life of the common people of her time. They are still read today with great interest. Abigail received her first lessons at home from her parents and then was self-taught. The forward thinking found in her letters reveals her devoted support of the new republic.

Like Sarah Jay, Abigail's family was also deeply involved in the founding of this country. For nearly sixteen years, she and her husband represented the United States living in the great cities of London, Paris, New York, Philadelphia and finally, they were the first presidential couple to occupy the White House. Her husband, John, had signed the Declaration of Independence, served as the second President of the United States, and also as ambassador to France and England. She personally was separated from John for over ten years due to his call as a representative to Europe. Once she was asked that if she had known that John would have had to be gone so long, would she still have agreed to his absences. She responded, "If I had known, sir that Mr. Adams could have effected what he has done, I would not only have submitted to the absence...I would not have opposed it, even though three years more should be added to the number. I feel a pleasure in being able to sacrifice my selfish passions to the general good, and in imitating the example which has taught me to consider myself and family but as the small dust of the balance, when compared with the great community." Abigail's son, John Quincy Adams, also served as the sixth President of the United States.

During the Revolutionary War, Abigail became the sole provider of the family. She managed the farm through the first years and never once did it ever go into debt. From the trinkets John sent her from France, she began to trade. This grew into a rather substantial business, so much so that she was soon placing orders directly with the manufacturers in France. Abigail prospered so well in this venture that she began to buy land. Even though at the time married women could not hold property, she got around this by signing John's name to everything. In all her business success, she never lost sight of the fact that home was the most important place she could put her energies.

Abigail, having been taught at home by her parents and grandparents was determined to teach and train her children at home. And like the mother of John Wesley, she sensed the special gifts that John Quincy possessed and decided upon a special course of education for him. For she had a "concern for the town school," which she felt was filled with impure language and corrupt behavior. So she engaged the help of her husband's young law clerks to mentor her son. John, her husband, was not always in agreement with her actions.

In his old age, John Quincy Adams wrote of his mother, "My mother was an angel upon earth. She was a minister of blessing to all human beings within her sphere of action. Her heart was the abode of heavenly purity. She had no feelings but of kindness and beneficence:...She had known sorrow, but her sorrow was silent...She had been fifty-four years the delight of my father's heart...If there is existence and retribution beyond the grave, my mother is happy. But if virtue alone is happiness below, never was existence upon earth more blessed than hers."

GWC: I'm watching the time and see that we have approached your deadline.

ANDERSON: I'm sorry but you're right, I do have to go.

GWC: It is no wonder, that over the years you have had so many requests to lecture. I am truly spellbound and inspired. Thank you so much for this interview. I hope we can do this again sometime after your next book comes out.

ANDERSON: Thank you, this was fun.

GWC: Thank you.