

Podcast 536: A Rich Heritage of Freedom†

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: They were engaged in conference, discourse, argument, and they wrote with such precision that those words are absolutely critical to who we are as a nation today

Julie Walker: Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, “IEW.” My name is Julie Walker, and I’m honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

Julie Walker: Well, happy Fourth of July, Andrew

Andrew Pudewa: It comes around fast, doesn't it?

Julie Walker: Well, this is a special year this year.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, because it's a big Fourth of July

Julie Walker: It is. So where were you 250 years ago?

Andrew Pudewa: That's kind of a ridiculous question.

Julie Walker: It is. It is. Do you remember where you were 50 years ago? Because we were old enough to remember the bicentennial.

Andrew Pudewa: I don't. I was probably working because I would've been 16, and I was very interested in working as much as possible to get as much money. At one point between 16 and 18, I had three restaurant jobs at the same time.

Julie Walker: Oh my word. Yeah, we call those joblets.

Andrew Pudewa: The summers I would work thirteen shifts a week between three restaurants, if you can imagine. So I was probably working.

Julie Walker: Probably working. I was on vacation in Minnesota with my family, a big family reunion on Big Lake. You know how many Big Lakes there are in Minnesota?

Andrew Pudewa: I hear there's thousands of lakes.

Julie Walker: There are tens of thousands of lakes, and so many of them are called Big Lake, which is pretty hilarious. But we, of course, are celebrating 250 years of Thomas Jefferson writing the Declaration of Independence, which started our whole journey of being a nation.

Andrew Pudewa: Yes. And what a lot of people don't necessarily remember or realize or even learn is that there's quite a big gap between the writing of the Declaration, the winning of the War for Independence, and then the writing of the Constitution.

And I recently went to an absolutely fascinating movie, *A Great Awakening*, which was about George Whitefield, I think, and his influence in bringing about a religious revival that was really kind of at the core of the faith and the courage that people had to engage in the revolution, and his relationship with Benjamin Franklin, who published his sermons, and his influence on Franklin, who was kind of a very staunch deist. In the movie, he said, "I'm a respecter of all... a friend to all churches, but a member of none," and that kind of, "I don't need religion. I'll just be where I am." But there's so much rich heritage, so much... so many great stories. We don't necessarily know all the facts, but I think it's worthy of reflecting on those founding fathers every year, and especially on this 250th.

Julie Walker: Yes. So can you see what I have?

Andrew Pudewa: That's a flash from the past.

Julie Walker: This is old and dusty, but we keep it around. This is the Student Writing Intensive student course that we sold for many years, decades really.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, yeah.

Julie Walker: Was it two years? It, at least a decade,

Andrew Pudewa: I think we did in 2001.

Julie Walker: So for those of you listeners who don't know what this is, this is something that we discontinued when we came out with the new Structure and Style for Students.

And there's, there are so many, this is the level C course, and there's so many advantages over this one. But this initially, Andrew, you intended for the *Student Writing Intensive* mostly to be an opportunity for teachers to watch you teach, so you could model for them what good teaching looks like. But the students learned so much, of course,

Andrew Pudewa: And what we did was we had four videos, and then we had in between those videos suggested assignments, and then it was evident we needed to redo this. And then I think I'm the one who said, "Well, let's just do a whole year's worth of video." And that's how we ended up with the 24-class cycle.

Julie Walker: Which I know you know because you were there when you told me this. I was shocked and so delighted that this was the big project that we were going to undertake. A lot of work.

Andrew Pudewa: I must have been a little bit crazy, ambitious, or inspired or all three, I don't know. But, it's nice to have that now. But this was a good run. Why do you even have that right now?

Julie Walker: Well, because there's a source text in here that I want to read. And this is one of those things that we're not entirely sure how factual this is. We were trying to be really careful with the new Structure and Style for Students to be careful to get our facts straight. But I do know that this was-- if it's not 100% true, it is close to being true because Thomas Jefferson...this article that I'm going to read now in its entirety, this is level C. This is the very first lesson, unit two. Students do a key word outline from this interesting article about "Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence."

Andrew Pudewa: Now, just a little disclaimer here. I created this before we had any editors.

Julie Walker: True

Andrew Pudewa: I almost created this before there was much of an internet available.

Julie Walker: It's true.

Andrew Pudewa: Certainly, we didn't have the fact-checking capabilities that we do today, and so go ahead and read it, and then I will tell you where the source is and why we can't necessarily trust the facts that are in this. But it is-- It's kind of like a legend, and that's okay too.

Julie Walker: And it's a delightful story because of your background in playing violin and knowing that Thomas Jefferson, he actually did play violin and would practice hours a day and all of that. So that we know for a fact. But here's the story of music, Jefferson, and the Declaration of Independence.

And I'm gonna stop because Andrew, you are a much better reader than I, so please read your source text here. Gets out his glasses. See, I came prepared

Andrew Pudewa: All right. The committee assigned the task of writing the Declaration of Independence consisted primarily of John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and unofficially Thomas Paine. The first draft contained the basic points they all agreed upon, but they also knew the language used in the final document would have to be artistic and inspiring as well as precise. Adams was too rough, Franklin too sick, and Paine too controversial to author the final draft, thus the task fell to Jefferson. His landlady recorded in her journal the struggle he had in completing his task. Upstairs, she would hear him pacing the floor endlessly. He seemed to accomplish little for many days. Then he sent home for one of his violins. After it arrived, Jefferson would pace a little, then play for half an hour or so, then quiet descended upon the house for a while. In a few days, the vital document was complete and ready for presentation. Playing music may have helped unlock his linguistic genius, or perhaps it made him be more receptive to the words of destiny, "when in the course

of human events...” Either way, few people know the important role the violin played in the founding of our country.

So, yes, this story came from a musical. It was a Broadway musical, 1776.

And in it there's kind of a song and some dialogue that basically tells this story of his landlady recording this. But on more recent searching, and I will confess to have used an AI search to try and find the source of this story. There's nothing really in the historical record that Perplexity could find. But I think it's very plausible, and of course you know that, actually the very first convention talk that I ever did was a talk on the profound effects of music because I was still full-time violin teacher and collecting up all this research and data about how playing music improves intelligence of mice in mazes, or well, listening to music improves intelligence of mice in mazes, improves test scores of students who listen to certain types of music. And then of course the, the conclusive evidence showing that growing up playing a musical instrument creates all sorts of brain connections that don't happen in people who don't. So, it's a legend.

Julie Walker: This is such a good message, this idea of teaching music is such an important lesson for today's culture because we are so much the consumers now of everything, media, music, that we're no longer producers. And to have that ability to play a musical instrument is not only valuable for your brain and your soul, it also is that hook to connect with other people.

So here's a funny story that I'll tell you just about my son, and he's a musician.

Andrew Pudewa: Joel, I'm assuming

Julie Walker: Yes. He brought his guitar to play for my mother, and it was very sweet and she enjoyed it very much and we... It was just our family, and we were in her room and we were singing, and then she invited us to go have lunch with her and asked Joel to bring his guitar.

And my mother is, a very humble, sweet lady, and so it really surprised me that when lunch was over, she banged her glass and then the whole dining room with all the other residents in the assisted living announced to the crowd, “My grandson is here and he's going to play for you.” So he was definitely put on the spot, but he was ready with his repertoire.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, well he's, he's a little bit of a show-off himself,

Julie Walker: Oh,

Andrew Pudewa: I'm sure he enjoyed it. It's a pretty safe audience

Julie Walker: Yes, yes, and, and the important thing is did he know songs like “You Are My Sunshine” and “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.”

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, things that 90-year-old people remember from their early childhood.

Julie Walker: Exactly. Exactly. So there you have it. Thomas Jefferson and his influence on our country could very well have been informed by his ability to play the violin.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, and I think one of the things-- I will confess that Thomas Jefferson has long been someone of great esteem to me personally. I actually have a pretty thick book called *Thomas Jefferson: In His Own Words*, and the entire book is just mostly his correspondence and other writings. But you think, "Wow, this guy produced more brilliant stuff than most people could produce in 200 years of living."

He had insights into economics, into agriculture, into art, and of course into government and politics, and he was fluent in many languages. And the mastery of language itself is something that was so critical in the establishment of the country. We had Thomas Paine writing *Common Sense*; we had *The Federalist Papers* with Madison. We had Jefferson and his correspondence. John Adams. I don't know that Washington wrote as much, or, or that we have as much that he wrote.

Julie Walker: He was busy fighting battles.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, he was more on the active front. But the careful use of language, the idea that these men had these well-furnished minds and were putting together these ideas in cooperation, negotiation.

Like the negotiations to create the *Constitution* required a tremendous amount of compromise between the various opinions of the states and the fear that the smaller states had that the larger states would run roughshod over them in a representative form of government and the brilliance of establishing the three branches of government that there would be that kind of balance, that division of powers that would allow us to continue.

One of the themes in this movie, *Great Awakening*, which was really quite good. In fact, it was very strange. I wasn't planning to see this movie because I thought, "Oh, no, it's one of these Christian movies. It's going to be cheesy." And I actually had thought that I bought a ticket to a different movie. And when I showed up, I saw on my phone, oh, I accidentally bought the wrong ticket, and I was there at the right time for the wrong movie. So I thought, "Well, I'll just go in and watch it. Maybe it's a sign from God. I don't know." I was captivated. The acting was superb. Franklin and Whitfield, that really showed to me the power of well-trained rhetoric in the service of good, in the service of God.

And so often when we hear the word rhetoric in this modern world, it's always in somewhat of a derogatory way. "Oh, that's just rhetoric. That's just someone trying to persuade us of something we shouldn't. That's just manipulation." But no. Yes, rhetoric is an art of persuasion, but there are some things we should be persuaded to, which is right thought, right action, right relationship, sacrifice, working for the good of our fellow man.

And this story of George Whitefield was just amazing to me. It was so amazing, in fact, I did something I almost never have done. I went to see it again within a couple weeks, and I took

grandchildren and their cousins because I thought, This is a lesson where we can see that, here's this man, he wanted to be an actor. He was trained on stage. He had this powerful voice and this commanding presence, and then he went to Oxford, I believe, and, and had this conversion, and then became this, this phenomenal preacher of truth. And basically, the prophet is without honor in his own land. The Church of England said, "Get rid of this guy."

So he came over to the colonies and on horseback traveled from place to place to place, preaching the gospel, calling people to repentance, to awaken to the truth. And the line that was so compelling, Benjamin Franklin was talking to his grandson, and his grandson said, "Well, did George Whitefield, did he have a part in the revolution?"

And in this movie, and, and Franklin says, "He was the revolution." He was so proud that his spirit just imbued people with the vision of freedom. Freedom in Christ, freedom in the light. So I think when we look back and we see these great luminaries, they had I think what Bacon talked about in "reading maketh a full man, what was it? Discourse or conference maketh a ready man. Writing maketh an exact man."

That's what they practiced. They understood what they were doing. They were furnishing their minds with the greatest, that had been thought in the greatest way it had been said. They were engaged in conference, discourse, argument, but respectful argument toward a purpose, toward a goal. And they wrote with such precision that those words still are absolutely critical to who we are as a nation today, and as a model for so many other people around the world.

So hopefully, we here at IEW will inspire people to at least aspire toward that level of educated, articulate confidence in expression.

Julie Walker: Yep. Amazing. Thank you, Andrew

Andrew Pudewa: Thank you, Julie.

Julie Walker: Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast or just visit us each week at IEW.com/podcast. Here you will find our show notes and relevant links. One more thing: would you please rate and review our podcast? This helps other smart listeners like you find us. Thank you.

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