



69

by Philip Schultz

This morning I'm tired of the same newspapers and arguments.
I'm tired of sticking the same legs into the same pants,
the same hands poking out of the same sleeves, going west
and then east, heating up the same tea, watching the same sun
rise over the same horizon, the same trees shedding the same leaves.
Tired of climbing the same stairs to look out the same window
at the same street, tired of shaking the same hands, opening and
closing the same doors, dreaming the same dreams, saying hello
good morning happy birthday I'm so sorry please forgive me.

"69" by Philip Schultz, from *The God of Loneliness: Selected and New Poems*. © Houghton Mifflin, 2010. Reprinted with permission. ([buy now](#))

It's the birthday of the man who said: "Determine never to be idle. No person will have occasion to complain of the want of time who never loses any. It is wonderful how much can be done if we are always doing." That's **Thomas Jefferson**, ([books by this author](#)) born in Albemarle County, Virginia (1743). And he certainly lived by those words. He wrote the Declaration of Independence for the fledgling United States and then served as its minister of France, secretary of state, vice president, and president. But he was also — among other things — an inventor, philosopher, farmer, naturalist, astronomer, food and wine connoisseur, and musician. An early biographer, James Parton, described the young Jefferson a year before he helped write the Declaration of Independence: "A gentleman of 32 who could calculate an eclipse, survey an estate, tie an artery, plan an edifice, try a cause, break a horse, dance a minuet, and play the violin."

Jefferson was an important force in American architecture. He was inspired by Andrea Palladio's *The Four Books of Architecture*, which drew from classical Roman principles, and he determined to improve Virginia's architecture, which he disliked. He designed his great estate, Monticello, as well as the University of Virginia, the Virginia State Capitol, and a number of federal buildings in Washington, D.C. — he is responsible for the neoclassical look of our Capitol. He read widely in architecture throughout his life, and he observed buildings as he traveled and brought back new ideas to incorporate into his designs.

He loved to read about much more than architecture — he said, "I cannot live without books." He wrote to John Adams, "I have given up newspapers in exchange for Tacitus and Thucydides, for Newton and Euclid; and I find myself much the happier."

Jefferson said, "Nature intended me for the tranquil pursuits of science, by rendering them my supreme delight." Even as a scientist his interests varied widely. He knew physics, anatomy, botany, and geology. He was a talented astronomer who accurately predicted an eclipse in 1778. When he founded the University of Virginia in 1819, one of his main plans for its curriculum was astronomy, and he wanted to build the first planetarium and observatory in the country. He was also an enthusiastic naturalist and paleontologist. At one point, he had the East Room of the White House covered with potential mastodon bones.

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His talent for botany was evident in his Monticello gardens and farm. In the gardens, he grew 170 varieties of fruit, 330 varieties of vegetables, and ornamental plants and flowers. He grew Mexican varieties of peppers, beans collected by Lewis and Clark, broccoli from Italy. The English pea was his favorite vegetable, and he had a Garden Book in which he kept exhaustive notes on the states of his turnips, lettuces, artichokes, tomatoes, eggplants, and squash — when each variety was sown, when it was mulched and how, when the first leaves or fruits appeared, which varieties were tastiest. His household ate from the garden, and he said that he ate meat and animal products **"as a condiment for the vegetables, which constitute my principal diet."** **Some of the varieties that Jefferson cultivated at Monticello have been passed down as heirloom vegetables, and people still plant them in their backyard gardens. Overall, he had about 5,000 acres of farmland, planted mostly in wheat and other grains. The man who wrote "All men are created equal" defended the institution of slavery, and he was dependent on the labor of hundreds of slaves to keep his farms running. He spent a large part of his days supervising them; he wrote, "From breakfast, or noon at the latest, to dinner, I am mostly on horseback, Attending to My Farm or other concerns, which I find healthful to my body, mind, and affairs."**

Jefferson loved music. He wrote to an Italian friend: "If there is a gratification which I envy any people in this world it is to your country its music. This is the favorite passion of my soul, and fortune has cast my lot in a country where it is in a state of deplorable barbarism." He played the violin, and sometimes the cello and harpsichord, and sang. He walked around Monticello singing and humming to himself. Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, exactly 50 years after his Declaration of Independence had been adopted. He was 83 years old and wrote his own epitaph before he died. It didn't mention anything about being president. It said: "Here was buried Thomas Jefferson, Author of the Declaration of American Independence, of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, and Father of the University of Virginia."

He said: "In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock."

Be well, do good work, and keep in touch. ®

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