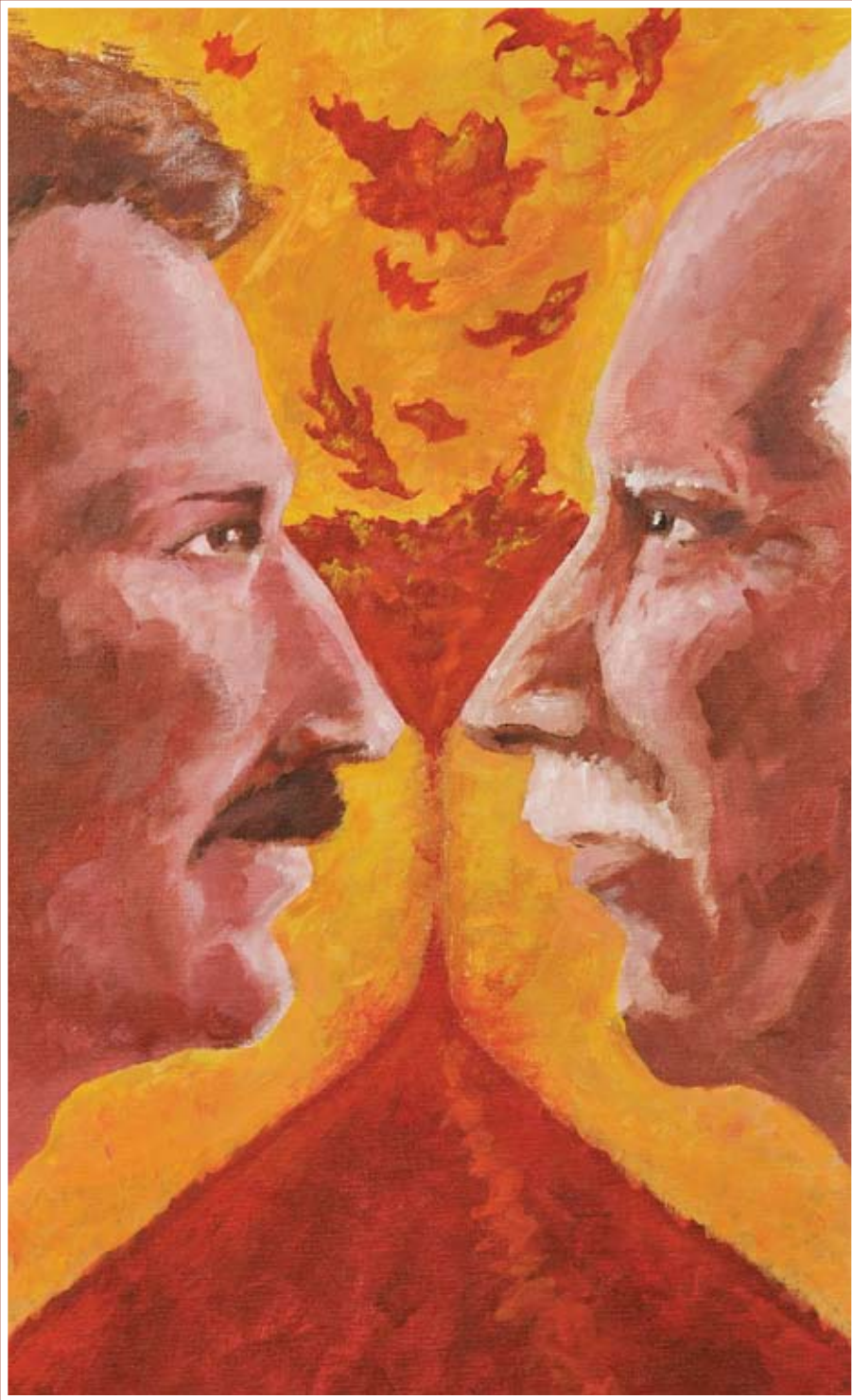




# Insights

*A Study Guide to the Utah Shakespearean Festival*



*Tuesday's  
with Morrie*

The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespearean Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival's stages.

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# *Tuesdays with Morrie*

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# A Look into the Lives of Playwrights Mitch Albom and Jeffrey Hatcher

By Carly Higley  
The Novelist

Mitchell Albom, the second of three children, was born May 23, 1956 to Rhoda and Ira Albom and recalls, “I’ve been blessed with wonderful parents who wanted me to fly and to aspire and to do things. I grew up in a small, middleclass neighborhood from which most people never left. But my parents said, ‘don’t expect your life to finish here. There’s a big world out there. Go and see it’” (Mitch Albom, *Biography*, [www.mitchalbom.com/five-people.html](http://www.mitchalbom.com/five-people.html)).

As a child, Mitch developed a love of comics and music, and with the help of his uncle Eddie he learned to play the piano, which would become a means of pleasure and creativity throughout in his life. (Albom). He was involved in various bands in high school and later utilized his skill as a pianist to help earn his college tuition (Albom). It was as a sociology major at Brandeis University, Massachusetts, that he would meet his beloved professor Morrie Schwartz, the man who would change his life and be the catalyst in a successful writing career (*Reading, Bridge to a Wider World*, [www.duluth.lib.mn.us/Programs/Morrie/Albom.html](http://www.duluth.lib.mn.us/Programs/Morrie/Albom.html)).

After graduation and touring in Europe and throughout America as a singer and pianist, Albom dabbled in journalism, taking a job working in New York for a weekly newspaper, the *Queen’s Tribune* (Albom). Journalism suited Mitch so well that he returned to Columbia University to attend graduate school with it as his focus. He received a master’s degree in both journalism (1981) and business(1982) (*Reading*).

His career as a sports columnist began in Florida, but it was after relocating to Detroit in 1985 that he began to receive national attention for his sports commentary for the *Detroit Free Press* ([www.answers.com/topic/mitch-albom](http://www.answers.com/topic/mitch-albom)). Eventually he would be a regular on ESPN and SportsCenter, and the Sports Editors of America would give him the title of “#1 Sports Columnist in the Nation” multiple times (*Reading*). Albom is also a seven-time APSE feature writer winner, an honor no other has managed to receive more than once ([www.roycecarlton.com/Mitch-Albom-Biography](http://www.roycecarlton.com/Mitch-Albom-Biography)).

The year 1995 was eventful for Albom: he married his wife, Janine Sabino, and reconnected with Morrie Schwartz, then dying of Lou Gehrig’s disease. The result of this reunion would be weekly interviews that would become the bestselling book *Tuesdays with Morrie*, the success of which would lead to Albom being named National Hospice Organization’s Man of the Year and pay for Morrie’s medical bills (*Answers*). With other bestsellers such as *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* (2003) and *For One More Day* (2006), Albom’s books would sell over 26 million copies worldwide (*Answers*).

Albom used his writing to remind people of what is most precious in life and help himself, as well as all his readers, remember to savor and pursue love and human connection above all other endeavors. According to Mitch, “I have been exposed to people dying at various stages in my development. That may be more positive than it sounds. Each of those events ultimately taught me the value of cherishing everyday, and the foolishness of pretending death isn’t a real part of life. . . . I have realized that loss, love, and finding meaning in your life while you are here are all universal themes” (Albom). Albom put these lessons into practice on a large scale as a founder of three charities in Michigan. The Dream Fund is

dedicated to helping underprivileged youth experience the arts, A Time To Help organizes volunteers monthly to perform humanitarian projects, and S.A.Y. Detroit funds homeless shelters (*Answers*).

Mitch Albom is a member of The Rock Bottom Reminders band, along with Steven King and Dave Barry among others, which donates money to literacy promotion programs (Albom). He currently lives in Michigan with his wife, continues his writing, and hosts two radio talk shows broadcast in thirty-eight states (*RoyceCarlton*).

### The Playwright

Jeffrey Hatcher grew up in Steubenville Ohio, a “gritty Ohio river town better known for its mob connections, houses of ill repute, and industrial detritus than for its literary sons and daughters” ([www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Jeffrey\\_Hatcher](http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Jeffrey_Hatcher)). As Hatcher himself says wryly, “Remember in *It’s a Wonderful Life* when George finds out what the town would have looked like if he hadn’t lived? Pottersville? We’re Pottersville” (Toby Zinman, *Jeffrey Hatcher Can’t Dance* [Theatre Communications Group, 2006]).

After his father died when he was a child, he and his mother had the extra burden of dealing with his father’s old debts and shady connections (Zinman). Hatcher recalls, “My mother was a traditional 1950s housewife who was not brought up to deal with guys named Vinnie who wanted cash deposits or else something bad would happen” (Zinman). These exact difficulties would, however, become the inspiration for later successful writing.

His decision to pursue a career as a playwright was due in large part to his high school drama teacher Glenda Dunlope, “an old school thespian” gem (*Nationmaster*). However, it was not writing plays but the desire to actually act in them that inspired him to study in New York. Hatcher reminisces, “I really very much wanted to be a character actor. I went to New York, went to NYU for a while, did some off-off-off-Broadway. That was all fun, but I don’t think I ever really had the stamina or grit required of an actor. It’s a ghastly life” (Zinman). Years later when Hatcher performed in *The Three Viewings*, he said, “It was fun to do again, but only because it was my own stuff, and I could get away with casting me” (Zinman).

After time in New York, Jeffrey Hatcher went to Minneapolis, Minnesota “on a fellowship from the Playwrights Center” where the artistic ambiance delighted him so much that he ended up settling there with his wife (Zinman). His original plays include *Scotland Road*, *Fellow Travelers*, *Sockdology*, *Turn of the Screw*, and *Compleat Female Stage Beauty*.

However, it was in writing adaptations of existing plays for the screen and the stage that would garner him the most recognition with successes like *Stage Beauty* (2004), *Casanova* (2005), and *The Duchess* (2008). This addition to his repertoire was “not by accident but firmly by design. . . . Sometimes when you’re writing a lot of your own material you can go to the well a little once too often (Jeffrey Hatcher, interview with Howard Sherman and John Von Shusten, [www.americantheatrewing.org/downstagecenter/detail/jeffrey\\_hatcher](http://www.americantheatrewing.org/downstagecenter/detail/jeffrey_hatcher)). One of the perks of adaptations, according to Hatcher is that “usually I work with authors who are dead and can’t argue with you.” Additionally, it “reenergizes you for the next time you do one of your own, original pieces (Sherman and Von Shusten). Jeffrey Hatcher continues to enjoy success as a playwright and is a member of New Dramatists, the WGA, Dramatist’s Guild, and The Playwright’s Center.

## Synopsis: *Tuesdays with Morrie*

Mitch Albom is a newspaper sports reporter and husband whose busy life is filled with work and travel. He has become so absorbed in his work that it consumes his life.

Morrie Schwartz was Mitch's favorite college professor at Brandeis University. Although sixteen years have passed since that time, he still remembers his graduation day: he says goodbye to Morrie and notices that he is crying as they hug. Mitch promises to stay in touch with Morrie but fails to do so after college.

Morrie has since been diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), or Lou Gherig's disease. Sensing that death is near, Morrie begins jotting down his ideas and thoughts onto scraps of paper. He also writes his philosophies on life and death. One of Morrie's friends becomes fascinated with his writings and sends them to a Boston Globe reporter who writes a feature story about Morrie. The story gets the attention of one of the producers of the show *Nightline* who then does a feature story about Morrie. Mitch happens to see the *Nightline* show and recognizes his old professor. He calls him to arrange a visit.

During their discussions (every Tuesday for the next few months) they cover many topics, including learning to accept death, loving others and being a better human being. Mitch is so intrigued by Morrie's philosophies that he starts taking notes and even brings a tape recorder to the second visit. He takes time out of his schedule and faithfully visits Morrie every week. The conversations are powerful and very emotional.

With each meeting, Mitch is learning valuable life lessons but sees Morrie becoming increasingly sick. How long can these conversations continue? What lessons will Mitch take away from his Tuesdays with Morrie?

## Characters: *Tuesdays with Morrie*

**Morrie Schwartz:** Morrie is Mitch's former college professor who has been diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gherig's disease). He meets with Mitch in his home every Tuesday and teaches him about the meaning of life.

**Mitch Albom:** Morrie's former student who has since become a journalist with a very busy life. After sixteen years of being out of touch, he sees Morrie on ABC's *Nightline* and starts to visit him every Tuesday.

# *Tuesdays with Morrie:* a Professor's Final Class

By Lawrence Henley

Mentors truly are special people. By and large, the accomplished and talented in society choose to spend their valuable time in pursuit of their own dreams and accomplishments. Contrastingly, mentors selflessly invest significant chunks of their own time and resources in the futures of others, not limiting themselves to self-indulgence. From mentors, we learn the essentials necessary to attain future career success. Yet the best mentors also can influence how we learn to handle life's most difficult situations, affecting our total human experience. *Tuesdays with Morrie* is the extraordinary story of one such mentor.

Is mentoring essential to teaching others to succeed, or has it been overhyped? It is a word that's seen and heard constantly in all media. Schools and training programs have embraced the concept. Most professional organizations have programs to mentor newer members, and the vast majority of mid-sized to large employers these days offer some form of mentoring for new employees. Adults mentor youth. Teens mentor pre-teens. Most of us can recall a mentor that served as a conduit toward success, which certainly validates the mentoring concept.

As a rule, mentors bond with us while we're young and inexperienced, entangled in the puzzlements of youth. They work with us, sharing experience and helping us to see how we might correct our missteps. Because of our dependency we easily develop special feelings for them while they see us through.

Then suddenly, as quickly as they arrived, our mentors disappear. It's nobody's fault, and it isn't because they no longer care. The time arrives when we're ready to move on and put the teachings of mentors into practice. Others are waiting to be touched by these special people. Once we've received their best, we learn to stand on our own. The trouble is, when we lose track of a mentor it's often forever.

How special it would be if, as adults, we could regain that opportunity and take a graduate refresher course from mentors. Surely they've accumulated life experience since last contact, and, just as certainly, we have more to learn. Lucky Mitch Albom. He got exactly that chance.

In his Brandeis University cap and gown, Mitch pledged to stay in touch with his favorite professor on commencement day in 1979. Morrie Schwartz (nickname 'Coach') surely had heard that from students a thousand times. Life gets in the way. Work. Work. More work. After matriculation Mitch completely dropped the ball on his promise to the professor, engorged in a whirlwind career as a sports columnist (jazz piano wasn't his golden ticket). Further complicating matters, he met an attractive vocalist named Janine and married her. Albom hopped onto a treadmill he couldn't master. Mitch struggled with the challenges of balancing family with career, and attempts at improving his quality of life were thwarted by lack of time for contemplation, coupled with bouts of denial that a problem existed.

If not for an ABC News Ted Koppel's profile of Morrie Schwartz's struggle with ALS (better known as Lou Gehrig's Disease) Albom's radar wouldn't have blipped in time. A chance hotel room channel-surf of *Nightline* delivered the cold reality that there would be scant time to visit and say farewell to his fading professor.

On a midsummer Tuesday afternoon in 1995, thirty-seven year-old Mitch navigated his rental car into Morrie's driveway in West Newton, Massachusetts. When Morrie's wife, Charlotte, opened the screen door to wave him in, Albom had no idea how far Morrie's

physical being had declined since the Koppel taping. Recalling that Schwartz loved to eat and dance, he brought gourmet treats. Coach was still able to appreciate a few morsels. Dancing, however, was now possible only in daydreams.

Astonishingly, Morrie's brilliant mind was unaffected. Their initial reunion provided little clue that the next fourteen Tuesdays would constitute one final semester in Albom's education (and, thankfully, in ours). It would be a crash course in dealing with humanity, Thesis required. The topic? Finding happiness.

Albom's second chance to bond with his mentor was a race with the calendar. Morrie's Tuesdays were growing scarce; yet his need to teach was equal to Mitch's need to learn. In 1994, the professor had been diagnosed as terminal. After toughing out his last semester at Brandeis, Morrie was forced to say goodbye to teaching, his great passion. These final Tuesdays represented a last chance for both men. After their reunion, each would make the most of the dwindling months. These lessons, taught every Tuesday for fourteen weeks, proved forever transformative for Mitch Albom.

One would surmise that life in a rapidly degenerative state would destroy the spirit long before the disease was finished with the body. Not with Morrie, no chance. Teaching and promoting personal growth in others had been his entire life. While the malaise had forced his retirement, Morrie couldn't shake his love of pedagogy. His ability to teach made him continue to feel alive. The Coach found a way to extend his career. Through teaching Mitch he would leave his values and philosophy behind for anyone who would listen. Mitch Albom could channel Morrie, establishing a legacy.

In the beginning, Mitch intended to make only one trip to West Newton. Charmed back for a second round, he found himself under Morrie's spell, addicted to spending Tuesdays with the Coach. Soon nothing was more important than their time together. Not risking the loss of precious words to the human memory, the journalist asked permission to use a recorder. Only half-jokingly, Morrie assigned Albom a thesis project, and that idea became *Tuesdays with Morrie*.

Speaking too freely about the contents of Morrie's teachings might dampen the viewing experience for playgoers, so, giving hints only, let's cover the titles from Morrie's lesson plan: The World, Feeling Sorry for Yourself, Regrets, Death, Family, Emotions, The Fear of Aging, Money, How Love Goes On, Marriage, Our Culture, Forgiveness, The Perfect Day, and Goodbye (the final lesson). Through these lessons Albom experienced enormous personal growth. Tremendous professional success would follow.

The seasons changed, summer to autumn, and winter. Each week Albom scrambled to work a flight to Logan Airport into his chaotic schedule. Initially mobile enough to walk from room to room with a cane, Morrie later became restricted to a wheelchair. Closer to the end, Morrie further regressed, being lifted from and into bed, chair, and commode. With humor, Morrie dreaded the day he would require help to wipe his [rear end]. That unwelcome day arrived quickly. Blasts of machine oxygen and vigorous massages (severe therapist beatings, in truth) became critical to loosening the toxins in Morrie's body for elimination.

As a result of a year of in-home care and physical therapy, Morrie and Charlotte had enormous medical bills to cover. Albom, already published as a sportswriter, shuddered to think of Morrie's wisdom and spirit disappearing with his physical being. The former proposed an idea that would preserve these intimate Tuesday sessions in book form. If a publishing deal for a memoir could be found, the debt could potentially be eliminated. After numerous rejections Albom sealed the deal.

Albom parlayed his experiences with Morrie into new careers. *Tuesdays with Morrie*, his first literary foray outside sports, became a worldwide hit and sold tens of millions. His follow-up titles, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* and *For One More Day* have also sold stupendously. Today, Albom is also a fixture on the national speaking circuit.

Mitch was fortunate to know Morrie. We are equally fortunate that *Tuesdays with Morrie* (now the biggest selling print memoir of all time) was subsequently adapted for screen (in 1999, starring the late Jack Lemmon) and stage (in 2001, with playwright Jeffrey Hatcher [*A Picasso* and *The Fabulous Invalids*]). The show you will see at the Randall L. Jones Theatre this summer opened off-Broadway at the Minetta Lane Theatre in February 2002, and has since been produced numerous times throughout the world.