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AUSTRALIA Reader's Digest

**RD
TALKS**
OUR STORIES
AS PODCASTS

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Trail of the*

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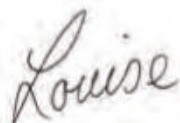
EDITOR'S NOTE

Why We Value Animals

IT OCCURRED TO ME, as I sat to write this letter, that the one issue that ignites the loudest cries of protest in so many of our readers, and indeed myself, is senseless cruelty to animals. This month's Bonus Read, 'Tracking the Tiger Butcher', (page 126) details the efforts of one man to stop the farming of tigers in Laos. That's right, *farming of tigers*. Today, Laos-based criminal syndicates have turned one of its natural and unique wonders into a commodity, with the animals' prized features trafficked to consumers that value magical potions and trinkets over nature's beautiful wildlife.

The flip side of this cruelty is the love and affection expressed in stories like 'He Trots the Air' (page 64), which is a heart-warming portrayal of the depth of friendship horses offer, as well as Smart Animals (page 16). This regular column has been in every issue of the magazine since 2006. We never run out of great stories about domestic and wild animals, with each one proof of the valuable place animals occupy. If you have a story you'd like to share, please send it to us (see page 8 for details).

Other great reads among the more than 17 stories in this month's issue include a crime spree like no other ('The Bank Robber on the Bicycle', page 92), the importance of DIY immune boosters ('Fight Off Viruses', page 32), and a hiker's heroic encounter in the snow ('Footprints in the Snow', page 54). Enjoy!



LOUISE WATERSON
Editor-in-Chief



AUSTRALIA Reader's Digest

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LETTERS

Reader's Comments And Opinions

Defending the Zoo

Animals can say more without words than humans can with them ('No Ordinary Day at the Zoo', December). That was all that was needed to be said for keepers at Mogo Wildlife Park to risk their own lives to save these magnificent creatures during bushfires. The dedication of the rangers is a measure of their devotion which needs no explanation at all.



MICHAEL WOUTERS

Grizzly Drama

Rarely does a Drama in Real Life ('A Scream in the Wild', December) have me on the edge of my seat, heart racing. Omar Mouallem describes the grizzly attack, Colin Dowler's injuries and his amazing will to survive so vividly that I could almost feel the weight of the bear on my own chest.

Thankfully all ended well for Colin but I don't know that I'd be

hiking with or without bear spray ever again!

GEOFF SHORT

Success From Mistakes

As I was reading 'The Magic of Making Mistakes' (October), my vision blurred with tears because this is what the five-year-old version of myself would have needed.

Growing up to be a young adult no one ever told me that failure was OK. Mistakes were considered

Let us know if you are moved – or provoked – by any item in the magazine, share your thoughts. See page 8 for how to join the discussion.

the ultimate mortification. Success was the only term I knew and I developed an inferiority complex in my early teens as I was more comfortable with art, nature and poetry than pens or calculators. People always talk about their struggle to succeed but I believe that the real struggle is building resilience, never forgetting why one failed and recognising that you are unique. **FATIMA AHTESHAM**

Seasonal Cheer

‘Oh, Christmas Tree’ (December) was the first Christmas-themed story I came across for the season and I loved it for its originality; no miracles, tragedies or family squabbles. Just a refreshing, feel-good story that would make even a Christmas grinch smile. **JOHN BENSON**

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WHAT A SERVE!

We asked you to think up a funny caption for this photo.

What no chocolate?

DARRYLL ROBERTS

Just what I need for ice-olation!

SURYA THOMAS

One final treat, diet starts tomorrow!

MICHELLE O’HARE

Coming to you live with the inside scoop!

MELISSA CHANDLER

Anything is popsicle – you cone do it!

JENNIFER FLEMING

Congratulations to this month’s winner, Surya Thomas.



CAPTION CONTEST

Come up with the funniest caption for the above photo and you could win

\$100. To enter, email

editor@readersdigest.com.au

or see details on page 8.

READER'S DIGEST

546 Voyages of Discovery

I thought you may be interested to know that when I received my Reader's Digest in the mail today it made a total of 546 Reader's Digests that my husband and I now have. Just out of curiosity, I decided to count them today.

For many years they have been arranged in order of date on our living room shelves. Our oldest one is February 1965. On a recent move they were packed into boxes (in date order, of course) and are now arranged on our new book shelves.

Since we'll never remember everything that is published in 546 Reader's Digests, it continues to be a voyage of delight and discovery each time we go through them.

SARAH BUTCHER

A Reader's Digest Karen

With all the talk about 'COVID Karens', I'd like to talk about a 'Reader's Digest Karen'. I was named after Karen Killilea whose story was featured in Reader's Digest Condensed Books, Volume III of 1955.

'Karen' by Marie Killilea was an inspiring story about her daughter, Karen, who had cerebral palsy and overcame many adversities. My mother was inspired by this touching story and I am named after her. The book and story are treasured possessions and have inspired me throughout my life. KAREN SOUTHCOTT

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Smart Animals Up to \$100

Share antics of unique pets or wildlife in up to 300 words.

My Story \$400

Got an inspiring or life-changing tale? Submissions must be true, original, unpublished and 800-1000 words.

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NEWS WORTH SHARING



Bacteria That Feast on Plastic Raise Hopes for Recycling

Since the 1950s, more than eight billion tonnes of plastic has been produced, with much of it polluting the world's land and oceans. Now scientists are looking to nature to help with innovative recycling solutions to reuse hard-to-recycle plastics.

A team at the University of Portsmouth, UK is working with a 'super-enzyme' derived from bacteria that can digest polyethylene terephthalate (PET), the material used in plastic bottles, opening up the possibility of fully recycling the plastic.

Natural degradation of plastic can take hundreds of years, but the super-enzyme can convert PET back

to its original building blocks in just a few days. The process would reduce our reliance on fossil resources, said Professor John McGeehan, director of the Centre for Enzyme Innovation.

Meanwhile, a team at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research in Germany has found a bacterium that can break down polyurethane, a plastic widely used in sports shoes, nappies and foam insulation – object currently sent to landfill. However, this certainly doesn't mean microbiologists have a complete solution, said Hermann Heipieper. "The main message should be to avoid plastic being released into the environment in the first place."

COMPILED BY VICTORIA POLZOT

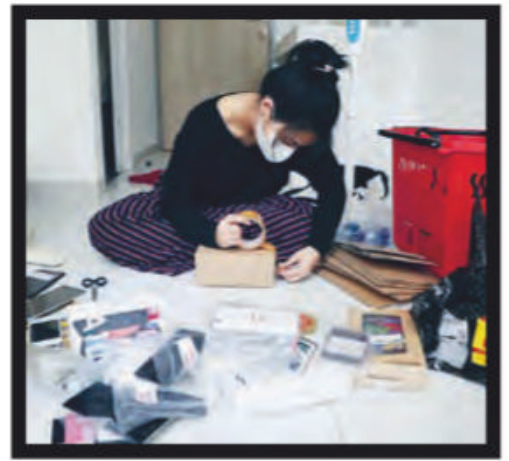
PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

Sunflower Message Spreads Joy

Frederick James from Far North Queensland wanted to send a special cheery message to the world. The words “G’day world from Oz” were ‘written’ in huge sunflower letters that could be seen from the sky at Innisfail, south of Cairns.

Neighbours and seasonal workers from Vanuatu helped Mr James plant more than 40,000 sunflower seeds on his property and, not surprisingly, it was a huge hit on social media with photos and videos attracting thousands of visitors, leaving him “gobsmacked” by the attention.

Although the sunflowers have now wilted, James is already planning another message.



Old Phones Help Kids to Go Online in Indonesia

A request from her garbage collector for an old mobile phone so that his children could access the internet got journalist Ghina Ghaliya thinking about what she could do for underprivileged students stuck at home due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

She and 11 fellow journalists had already organised a group to provide food and money for those in need, but this request along with appeals from parents who wanted their children to be able to study online caused a shift in focus.

The group announced their campaign via social media and the response from the public was immediate. Very quickly the group collected more than 200 phones and cash donations, enabling them to purchase more phones and prepaid internet.

As of December, nearly 300 phones had been distributed to students around Jakarta and remote regions of Indonesia.

MY STORY

A Consuming Passion

Growing prize-winning vegetables was a serious matter for my father

BY Anne Marr

MY FATHER ALWAYS LOVED GARDENING. After 25 years of working as a cashier in the East End Markets in Adelaide, then running his own fruit and vegetable shop seven days a week at Port Noarlunga for another 20 years, his life-long passion finally became a full-time reality in 1974, when he retired. Finally, he could concentrate on growing his own vegies.

Now Dad never did anything by halves. Growing vegies was a very serious business. Dates when everything was planted were carefully recorded. The type of seed used, the fertiliser and the prevailing weather were all documented.

Mum longed for a holiday or, for that matter, a trip out for the day, but those were a thing of the past. "It's too warm today," Dad would say. "My seedlings will need a drink every three hours."

As might be expected, as one crop was harvested, another was already planted, so caring for seedlings was a non-stop job.

"It's like starting a family all over again," complained Mum to me one day. "But you know, I thought he'd be bored and get under my feet being home all the time. That hasn't happened, and he's so happy gardening that it's rather good."

Things were to escalate. Dad discovered the local Loxton show. Somewhere he could show off his gardening expertise. The first



year he entered just four of his magnificent specimens: spring onion, parsley, beetroot and spinach.

Much to his delight he won three firsts and a second.

We all thought this was great and the bonus of eating free prize-winning vegies in the weeks following, even better.

Mum wasn't so sure. "He gets

Anne Marr lives in South Australia on a one-acre property where she can pursue her love of gardening and caring for native wildlife. She is also interested in naturopathy, radiesthesia, and writing.

up at the crack of dawn and fusses for hours getting them ready," she complained. "I should get so much attention." But I caught the small smile after this comment.

We all reminded Mum it could be worse. At least he was home, out of her hair and, besides, it was a cheap hobby. Not to mention all the fresh produce that appeared from their backyard. "You try blanching and freezing 15 kilos of beans," she said. "I don't care how expensive they are in the supermarkets, I never want to see another bean again."

But she did, and she loved the compliments she got from her

friends about how fit and young-looking her husband was, plus how lucky she was to have all the produce. "I can't let him know that - he might get too big a head," she would say.

Then came that fateful day in 1995. Nineteen entries went into the show. Nineteen first prizes came home plus the trophy for the most number of points. Now things were really cooking and Dad was gardening in earnest.

The second year saw a repeat performance and Dad was over the moon. Mum had joined in helping.

The third year, to Dad's amazement, was another repeat performance. By now Mum was getting a little tired of the whole procedure of staying up half the night to guard his prize-winning vegetables. Dad was also tiring of growing pristine vegetables. He would not use any chemicals or sprays. If there was a small hole where a wandering snail had feasted it didn't matter for home use. But it was another matter when it came to the show.

Dad patrolled at night with a torch. No earwig or snail was safe.

He then went rather quiet for a few weeks to the point where Mum asked him, "Are you OK, what's up?"

"Nothing," replied Dad. "I'm just thinking."

He finally announced the results of his deliberations to the family when we all gathered together for his 75th birthday. "I have decided that this year I won't enter the show. It's not fair to everyone else who enters if I just keep winning year after year. It's time to give other

people a chance to win. Three years in a row is enough for me to know I grow the best so I'm retiring."

"Thank goodness," said Mum.

But, of course, Dad kept gardening,

just in a more relaxed way, and both of them got to sleep all night and go on the occasional trip. No more snail guarding or patrolling the garden hourly. Our fridges and freezers were still being filled, but we all did our own blanching and freezing.

Dad passed away while in his late 80s, still looking like a young 60 year old. We all decided gardening does keep you young and my daughter and I continue to grow vegies, but just not as good as Dad's.

DAD PATROLLED AT NIGHT WITH A TORCH. NO EARWIG OR SNAIL WAS SAFE

Do you have a tale to tell? We'll pay cash for any original and unpublished story we print. See page 8 for details on how to contribute.

Affordable 'Back-Up' Digital Hearing Aids Take-Off During COVID-19

Australian company *Found Hearing* have released one of Australia's first low-cost digital hearing aids, which is now available and delivered directly to your front door. The *Jaspa 3* hearing aid was originally developed as a 'back-up' digital hearing aid, or loan device for audiology clientele, whose current pair of hearing aids were either in for repair or servicing, or had been lost. Audiology clientele could simply pick up the *Jaspa 3* hearing aid without the need for an appointment or hearing test.

The surprise came when the majority of customers who used the *Jaspa 3* 'fill-in' hearing aid during the interim period, were extremely reluctant to return the hearing aid to their audiology clinic, even after their more expensive hearing aids had been repaired and were ready to be collected.

Once COVID-19 restrictions set in, demands for a non-contact 'back-up' digital hearing aid were in full flight, with most audiology clientele putting off hearing appointments altogether.

***Found Hearing* spokesperson Lyndon Hudson said;**

"Understandably many hearing aid wearers have not wanted to put themselves at additional risk by having to attend hearing appointments. Consequently, we realised that access to a high-quality 'back-up' digital hearing aid is essential for most hearing aid wearers, and not just during a pandemic. Even the most expensive hearing aids regularly require repairs, servicing, adjustments and are commonly lost or misplaced. When this occurs many hearing aid wearers have to suffer with poor hearing until the problem is resolved. Often this can be days or even weeks that someone has to be without their hearing aids. It is extremely frustrating not just for the hearing aid wearer, but also for friends and family

who are struggling to communicate with them. With the quality and affordability of the *Jaspa 3* hearing aid, we can now solve these problems."

The *Jaspa 3* digital hearing aid has been advanced even further since the pandemic began, and now operates on one of the world's leading hearing aid microchips. It holds much of the same technology as found in expensive hearing aids, including fully digital sound processing, wide dynamic range compression, feedback cancellation, noise reduction, and digital operation across 12 bands. All these features operate automatically for the wearer. It is suitable for mild to severe hearing loss, and is equipped with a simple to use volume and program control.

The *Jaspa 3* hearing aid is a broad-prescription device, meaning it will work for various types of hearing loss without the requirement for a hearing assessment. The style is a discreet 'behind-the-ear' open-fit design, that the majority of hearing aid wearers are already accustomed to inserting and managing. It takes a standard 312 hearing aid battery.

The *Jaspa 3* hearing aid is \$429 per device and includes a 30-day money back guarantee and free delivery anywhere in Australia. No hearing test or appointments are required. To order call 1300 240 114 or order online at

www.foundhearing.com.au



SMART ANIMALS

... Are prepared to defend what they view as their rightful place



Battle in the Skies

LISA COOPER

One spring day in 2013 my husband, Brett, witnessed an amazing battle in the skies above our farm, that lasted for most of the day.

Our farm is home to a family of kookaburras that live in a hollow tree near the dam – and they are very territorial. On this particular day, a pair of dreaded Australian cuckoos thought our farm looked like a nice place to live. Cuckoos are a very large bird, with an eagle-like beak and are well known for their nasty habit of laying eggs in other

birds' nests so the clueless nest-owner will unsuspectingly raise the baby cuckoo as its own. The cuckoo baby then kicks the other chicks out of the nest and the foster parents struggle to feed the large and hungry intruder.

Now our kookaburras did not take kindly to this invasion of their home. They mustered their troops and the battle raged all day.

You could earn cash by telling us about the antics of unique pets or wildlife. Turn to page 8 for details on how to contribute.

Kookaburras versus Australian cuckoos. Sometimes the cuckoos had the upper hand. Sometimes the kookaburras had the advantage, as there were more of them and a kookaburra's beak is nothing to be trifled with. They were also able to manoeuvre better than the larger birds. Eventually the kookaburras won the day, and the cuckoos beat a retreat. My husband was quite amazed at the battle he had witnessed. It kept him enthralled for most of the day.

Kicked Out of Bed

BRENDA HUNT

My husband and I, and our baby son Andrew, stayed with my brother and his wife at their farm five years ago. As my two nephews were grown up and had left home, we slept in their room, in their old bunk bed. Andrew was in the portable cot beside us.

I was in the lower bunk, which unfortunately for me had become the preferred bed of their eight-year-old German shepherd, Cara. She wasn't happy that she had been turned out of her comfortable accommodation. Several times during the night I was woken by Cara's wet nose pushing at my face, in her efforts to regain her place.

Come daylight, she had returned and glared at me. Annoyed, she then dipped her head into the cot, grabbed Andrew's teddy bear in



her teeth and stormed out of the room. Of course, Andrew started howling. As I ran out of the room to retrieve Teddy, Cara quickly turned around and ran back into the room, leaving Teddy lying in the hallway. I turned to see Cara comfortably curled up in the bed I had been forced to vacate. My husband joined in the howling, only his howling was loud roars of laughter. Defeated, I picked up Andrew and retreated to the kitchen to put the kettle on.

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PETS

Create a Pet-Friendly Home

Simple ideas to improve comfort and safety

BY Dr Katrina Warren



Our regular pet columnist, Dr Katrina Warren, is an established and trusted animal expert.

WHEN PETS SPEND A LOT OF TIME INDOORS – especially in apartments and small spaces – it's important to provide a pet-friendly environment for them. Veterinarian Dr Katrina Warren shares her advice about features that can make a home more comfortable for our four-legged buddies.

PROVIDE MULTIPLE SLEEPING OPTIONS Place comfortable bedding in several locations so that your pet can change positions whenever they wish. This gives them the option to be somewhere warm, cool, sunny or perhaps private, as their comfort needs alter throughout the day.

TEMPERATURE Ventilation is vital for health and wellbeing, especially in hot weather. The cool home you leave in the morning may heat up considerably during the day. Some dog breeds such as pugs suffer greatly in the heat. Likewise, greyhounds and whippets suffer from cold. The temperature should be comfortable for your pet, especially when you're not around.

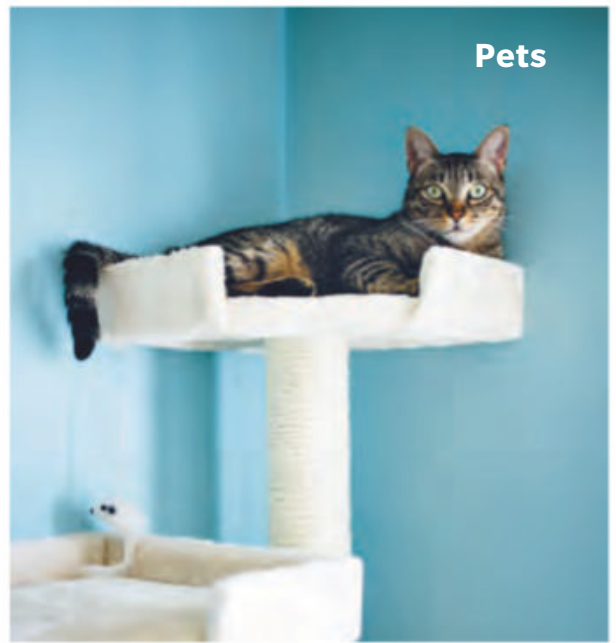
A ROOM WITH A VIEW Some animals appreciate a vantage point close to a window. A simple shelf extension on a windowsill or pushing a couch up against a window can provide a comfortable place

for them to watch the world go by. Dogs with territorial issues should be monitored as views can sometimes provide too much stimulation for barking.

VERTICAL SPACE Cats love climbing so provide climbing furniture and scratching posts and create opportunities for cats to get up high. A series of wall shelves placed close together can allow a cat to climb from one to another.

SECURITY Screens or security doors can provide an extra barrier to help keep pets secure. They can also increase opportunities for ventilation by enabling you to leave the door open. Use window-locking devices to keep windows securely open at a width that prevents pets from falling out or escaping.

CREATE AN INDOOR CAT GARDEN This may be as simple as providing several potted plants, such as catnip and cat grass. It's a good idea to



Multi-level towers give cats a place to jump, play and sleep

place a mat underneath in case your cat tips the plants over in their enthusiasm.

SAFE OUTDOOR SPACE If you live in an apartment consider enclosing your balcony with a clear mesh screen so that your pets can have free access in your absence. If you have a garden, you can potentially create a securely screened cat run.

FEATURES TO LOOK FOR WHEN BUYING OR RENTING

- Access to outdoor areas, including communal areas
- Contained inner courtyards, atriums or enclosed balconies
- Tiled or timber floors
- Pre-existing pet-friendly features, such as cat climbing racks, doggy doors and cat-flaps
- Access to direct (but not unavoidable) sunlight
- Attics with pull-down ladders make a great climbing space for agile cats – as long as the roof cavity is escape-proof and safe.

HEALTH



What Your Sleep Problems Reveal

*Can't sleep? Feel restless?
Wake up in the night?
Here's why and what
to do about it*

BY Courtney Reilly-Larke

One of the hallmarks of a sound body and mind is quality sleep. If you're not getting it, you're not alone: almost 20 per cent of Australians are estimated to suffer from a major sleep disorder. But there's a lot to be said about what kind of insomniac you are. Women's health expert Lorna Vanderhaeghe explains what your sleep problems may be trying to tell you about your body.

SUPPORT YOUR ADRENAL GLANDS

If you drift off to sleep without a problem but wake up suddenly at 3am, wide awake, it could mean your cortisol is peaking at two or three in the morning instead of at six or 7am when it is supposed to. "All of that increased cortisol will make you feel like you should get up and out of bed," says Vanderhaeghe. To combat cortisol levels, take adrenal support nutrients such as a handful of nuts – especially almonds, pistachios and cashews – during your mid-afternoon slump. To assist you in falling asleep, deep breathing techniques can help.

BLACK OUT THE BEDROOM

"Insomnia can be caused by not having enough of the sleep hormone melatonin," says Vanderhaeghe. At night, when the sun goes down, an influx of melatonin is triggered, which makes you ready for sleep.

PHOTO AND ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES

Artificial light can disturb this process. To make sure that your bedroom is pitch-black, she recommends blacking out window light and turning off bathroom and hall lights to signal your brain to secrete enough melatonin. “This is important because melatonin is your anti-ageing and sleep hormone, and protects you from certain types of cancers.” If you want to supplement melatonin, the less you take, the better. “If you feel groggy in the morning, you’ve taken too much,” she says.

UP YOUR MAGNESIUM INTAKE

When you hop into bed, do you have restless legs? Twitchy eyelids? Feel like you have bugs crawling all over you? Or maybe you can’t stop thinking or calm down? All of these may be signs of a magnesium deficiency. The mineral is responsible for 300 reactions in your body; including nerve and muscle function, and if you don’t have enough magnesium, you can’t relax and fall asleep. You can add it to your diet in the form of nuts, legumes and fatty fish, or take a supplement.

READING HELPS YOU FALL ASLEEP

You know the feeling: you’ve been tossing and turning, and you know for a fact you’re nowhere near falling asleep. Your mind is racing faster than ever. The best way to let go of that anxiety? Pick up a book. “Occupying the mind with something other than the business of the day or the stress or the concern of not sleeping is the easiest way to get back to sleep faster,” says clinical psychologist and sleep expert Dr Janet Kennedy. “Tossing and turning creates tension

that creates adrenaline,” she says. “If you distract the mind with something very interesting but not too activating, like engage in reading a story, your mind is diverted away from the stress.”

Just make sure to use a book light rather than the usual lamp on your bedside table, says Dr Michael Breus, clinical sleep specialist and author of *The Power of When*. The light wavelengths from a regular lamp signal the brain not to



produce melatonin, a hormone that helps lull you to sleep, he says. Picking up a book is a better alternative to TV, which gives off another type of light that could make you more alert. Plus, reading requires just enough brainpower to mellow your thoughts without looping back to your worries.

MARISSA LALIBERTE



HEALTH



Top Forget- Me-Not Sunscreen Spots

*You cover your face, arms
and legs, but what about
other body parts?*

BY *Nichole Fratangelo*

FROM **THEHEALTHY.COM**

SCALP As we age, our hair gets thinner and more scalp is exposed. Prevent sunburn on your scalp by applying a spray sunscreen every two or so hours or, better still, cover up with a wide-brimmed hat.

EYELIDS About five to ten per cent of all skin cancers are found on the eyelid or even the eye itself. To protect your eyes, Cancer Council Australia suggests sliding on sunglasses, slapping on a broad-brim hat and seeking shade when possible.

EARS AND LIPS Two very high-risk areas for skin cancer are the ears and lips, particularly the bottom lip, which gets more sun exposure than the top lip. Dermatologist Dr Joyce Imahiyerobo-Ip recommends using a lip balm with SPF 30 or above, reapplying sunscreen every two hours, and wearing a hat.

NECK The neck is an oft-overlooked spot for sunscreen, but your neck is always exposed to the sun if you have short hair or tend to put your hair up.

FEET AND HANDS Think your feet and toes are safe from the sun because they're in the water or buried beneath the sand? Hardly. Acral lentiginous melanoma (ALM) is a dangerous form of melanoma found on the soles of the feet and palms of the hands. Researchers aren't sure why, but ALM is usually more common in people with darker skin tones. To protect yourself, slather sunscreen to the tops of feet, between the toes, the backs of your hands and in between your fingers.

HOW MUCH TO USE? Make sure your sunscreen is at least 30 SPF, broad-spectrum and water resistant. You need at least one teaspoon per limb, according to Cancer Council Australia. A full body application should be around 35ml, or seven teaspoons.

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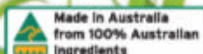
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WORLD OF MEDICINE

FIGHT MUSCLE LOSS WITH PROTEIN AT EACH MEAL

When you eat proteins such as beans, meat or nuts you stimulate muscle protein synthesis (MPS), the body's process for building and repairing muscle. This process grows less efficient as you age, which can contribute to a loss of muscle mass, strength and ability, especially if protein intake isn't spread out over the course of the day. In a UK study, most of the participating seniors reached the daily recommended allowance: at least 0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight. However, they tended to consume around three-quarters of it at dinner time. If your habits are similar, you might be able to maintain more muscle mass by including protein in all meals.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS AGEING MAY AFFECT MORTALITY

Evidence is mounting that self-perception of ageing (SPA) is among the many factors that play a role in physical health. A widely posited

theory says that seniors who've internalised negative age stereotypes are more stressed, less likely to exercise or seek medical care and more likely to have low expectations.

A recent study asked if SPA would influence mortality among people over 65 with cancer that hadn't yet spread from its original site. After controlling for other variables, participants with a negative SPA were 3.62 times more likely to die before the six-year study's end, compared to those who thought more positively about ageing. "Views on ageing could influence the will to live," says lead author Sarah Schroyen. "Maybe people with a more negative SPA are less likely to strictly follow treatment recommendations."

If you'd like to improve your SPA, Schroyen suggests using strategies such as spending meaningful time with younger people, focusing on what matters to you such as personal interests, family, the natural world, or helping others, or intentionally thinking in ways that oppose age stereotypes.





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TERRY WAITE

The humanitarian spent five years in captivity after trying to free hostages. Today he talks about his faith in humanity and sympathy for people on the margins of life

BY *Suchandrika Chakrabarti*

Between 1987-1991, British humanitarian Terry Waite attracted the world's attention through his work as a hostage negotiator – work that led to his capture by Hezbollah and subsequent five-year imprisonment in Lebanon. Now 81, he spoke with Reader's Digest about where his strength in understanding himself – and what motivates people – came from.

...Growing up in a village where the industry had shut down.

I was born in Cheshire and spent most of my formative years in Styal, a village which was built around a spinning mill. A pioneer of the factory system in the early Industrial Revolution, Samuel Greg developed a rural industrial community with cottages, a school and a chapel. But it was already pretty derelict when I was a boy and I remember seeing the





The Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie (right), with Terry Waite in December 1984

last workers go to that mill. Now it's one of the leading industrial museums in the UK.

...Being the son of the local policeman taught me how to negotiate.

We lived in the police house, which was fairly large and had a garden. They gave policemen gardens in those days of some considerable size, to make up for the small salary. We had very little money, but we grew our own fruit and vegetables. My father was there to keep the peace and to maintain some degree of order and stability in the community. He did on occasion, of course, have to prosecute people, too, but mostly he was a sort of a conciliatory figure in the community.

...I got my urge to help people from my father.

I've often wondered where that came from. I don't think I knew at the time, but reflecting back on my life now, I think it was because of my father. He was a young man at the time of the Great Depression. His father's business failed, and he left home to try and seek his fortune. He really had quite a hard time until he eventually joined the police force in Chester and that became his lifelong occupation.

He was highly intelligent, should have gone on to high school, and if he'd had the opportunity, to university, but all that was denied because there wasn't any money in the family. Subconsciously, I think that built sympathy within me for

those who find life difficult, or end up on the margins of life for one reason or another, either in prison or on the streets, or in distress overseas. So I think my father's struggle was a prompting factor for that.

...My grandmother developed my love for music, which has lasted for life.

I would cycle to see my grandparents who lived some 30 kilometres [away], where my grandmother was a music teacher. They had a piano and she often said she'd like me to learn how to play, but we couldn't afford a piano. I never did learn. After my grandfather's business failed during the years of the Depression, my grandmother had to go out to work. She used to play in the local cinema for the silent movies.

...I've always had a deep desire to travel.

But as we were poor when I was young, I thought I'd never realise it. How mistaken can you be. I remember one occasion when the school sent my class on a trip to Paris, and the cost - I can still remember it - was £15. We didn't have that spare, so I couldn't go. I remember sitting in the classroom, seeing the coach pull up outside and watching those who were lucky enough to go off to Paris. I thought to myself then, *There goes my chance, I shall never see the world now.*

...After school, I moved to London for college, and met my wife, Frances.

I had an apartment in London, where I lived on the top floor, and she lived on the ground floor. We just met on the stairs, and that was it for me. We've been married since 1964, and have three daughters and one son.

...We moved to Uganda in 1969, and witnessed the Idi Amin coup.

It was my first experience of violence and having near-death experiences. I went over to Uganda to help with some adult leadership courses for the church, not realising the volatile situation we were walking into. I had my real first experience of absolute brutality, misery and getting people out of difficulty. I had to negotiate with the gentleman who had locked up people from the church unwarranted.

...My trip to Uganda opened my eyes to suffering.

I learned one very important lesson from that: when law and order in any community breaks down, all hell breaks loose. I'm glad to have gone back to Uganda several times, where I still have friends. However, when there are no consequences, some people behave in the most appalling ways. Minority groups come under attack. The Asian community in Uganda were treated terribly, and then expelled from the country.

...We could've easily died in Uganda.

My wife and I were held up twice by armed gangs, one holding machine guns. I remember one person I knew in Uganda who said, "Oh, if I was held up, I wouldn't give them the keys to my car, I would throw the keys in the bush."

I said, "You mustn't do that. You must give them the keys." One day, this person was held up, and did throw the keys into the bush. He was immediately shot dead. Whereas on the two occasions that we were held up, I handed the keys over, and lost two vehicles. Another time, a random young man walking past a village was murdered, because he'd been mistaken for a thief. They tied him to a tree and beat him to death with sticks.

...Back in London, I was recruited by Robert Runcie, Archbishop of Canterbury.

I became his advisor on international affairs for the Anglican Communion. This meant that we would be travelling the globe together. It's the period of time covered in my book, *Travels with a Primate: Around the World with Robert Runcie, 1979-1987*. Runcie, his chaplain and myself had a lot of adventures together.

...I've learned how to negotiate with dictators.

I've dealt with Idi Amin, Muammar Gaddafi, Revolutionary Guards in

Iran, with the Islamic Jihad Organisation in Beirut, who ended up kidnapping me. What I've tried to do in all these situations is understand what's motivating people. To ask myself the question, *Why is it that they're behaving as they're behaving? What are the reasons for that?* To find a common humanity and the source of the fear, because there's always fear there.

...The years of travelling with Runcie kept my mind alive in captivity.

For those five years of captivity I was in strict solitary confinement most of the time, without books and papers. I had to put a blindfold over my eyes when anyone came into the room. So for five years, sitting on the floor, I had to try and keep mentally alive. I wrote my first book in my head there because I never had pencil and paper, apart from two occasions when I thought I was going to die. They were actually just mock executions. They gave me pencil and paper then, but otherwise I just didn't have it.

...During my years held hostage, I tried to see the funny side of life.

Oddly, in those years, I didn't have bad dreams. Sometimes I would wake up and I'd be laughing because my dreams were quite funny, and I think they were compensating in some ways for my daily existence. I



Terry Waite arrives back in Britain after five years of captivity, the first four years in solitary confinement. He was released on November 18, 1991

would wake up from a dream and it felt so real – then I'd remember, *Oh, no, I'm still here.*

...What I developed in those years was inner conversation.

We all talk to ourselves. I extended mine to having conversations with other people in my imagination. Something creative can emerge from suffering; one only has to look at the great works of art. It can be utilised.

...When I was released, there were hundreds and hundreds of press people.

An absolutely remarkable number of people showed up for me as I came out, having been all those years alone. Before I was released,

I thought, *Well, people will have totally forgotten about this.* I took the advice that I should give one main interview, and then withdraw for a long period of time, and not to do anything in public for at least a year.

...I've always had faith, but it's changed over the years.

When I was young, I had too much of a closed mind believing that I had the claim on truth. My thinking on it now is that God remains a great mystery, which we can never fully comprehend. The various religions are like handrails, to guide us towards that mystery. The difficulty between religions is that people spend their time arguing and disputing about the handrails. **R**





HEALTH



FIGHT OFF VIRUSES

How to strengthen your immune system

BY *Mike Zimmerman* FROM **AARP**

One thing that the COVID-19 pandemic has made clear is that some people who get the virus don't suffer much, while others become very sick indeed. And while the elderly have been particularly hard hit, some do survive – even centenarians. As for younger people, whose immune systems are supposed to be more robust, many have nevertheless died of it. So, what factors give some people a stronger immune system than others, regardless of age? What does it mean if, for example, your partner or child gets sick, and you don't – or vice versa?

We know that our immune-system function slowly declines with age. Just like when you see a photo of yourself from ten years ago versus one taken this afternoon, you see changes in your face, skin and hair colour. It takes time. “Same process with your immune system,” says Professor Insoo Kang, a specialist in allergy and immunology.

Professor Kang has been studying human ageing for 20 years. “Immune cells, especially CD8+ T cells [a type of white blood cell], change with ageing. We see fewer of those CD8+ T cells, which are needed to recognise newly emerging microorganisms like the COVID-19 virus. It happens to everyone on some level, just not at the same rate.”

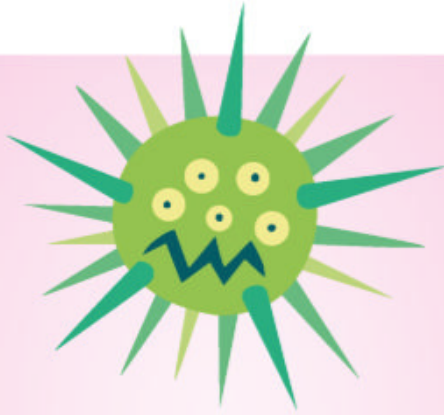
The difference in rate of decline between individuals is one of science's big mysteries. The immune system is complex, but most of us understand the basics: our body detects an intruder – a virus, bacterium, parasite or foreign object – and produces white blood cells to combat the problem. How many of these cells you produce when you're aged 73, for example, versus when you were 45 is the million-dollar question. And it's at the heart of the COVID-19 pandemic as well: how does a 104-year-old man survive when people half his age, or younger, do not?

Fortunately, we won't always be in a pandemic. But we can use this one to gain an understanding of how our immune system changes with age – and how it might be possible to slow the decline and raise our immune reserves for the next time we get sick.

IMMUNITY AND AGEING

Our body simply doesn't produce as many immune cells as we get older, says Professor Atul Butte, who specialises in epidemiology, biostatistics and paediatrics. “And no one really knows why.”

Professor Butte worked with a research team on an extensive review of 242 immunity studies that revealed patterns in how our immune systems change as we get older. Certain key immune cells – B cells (white blood cells that make antibodies to fight infection) and T cells (white



YOU CONTROL MANY OF THE FACTORS THAT CAN KEEP YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM STRONG

blood cells that attack viruses) – become fewer in number with age. For example, we possess two broad categories of T cells: ‘memory’ cells that have encountered a certain pathogen and ‘remember’ how to fight it; and ‘naive’ cells, like the CD8+ type mentioned earlier, that have yet to fight anything. “We’ve seen especially that the number of naive T cells seems to be lower as we age,” Professor Butte says.

So let’s say COVID-19 shows up. Nothing we’ve seen before as humans matches this one, so we have no memory T cells to mobilise – although new research suggests some of us may have formed some defences if we’ve had brushes with previous coronaviruses. The naive

cells have to take on the fight, and older people have fewer of those to fight with. That makes most of them more vulnerable, but not all, because not everyone’s immune system declines in the same way. For example, another factor Professor Butte observed in his study review: some healthy older people had little or no decline in T cells. Some had as many as younger people, and women seemed to have higher amounts in general as they aged.

No one really knows just what a healthy amount of B and T cells is. “If you want to have a test for your haemoglobin, they know what a normal range is,” Professor Butte says. “If you want your iron levels tested, they know what the normal range is. We have no idea what the normal level is for [B and T] cells. We don’t even measure them in a regular blood test.”

The reasons these key cells decline over time could be manifold. Is it genetic? Lifestyle? “We know genetics plays a part,” Professor Butte says. “But it’s debatable how big of a part compared with environment and lifestyle.”

Lifestyle factors like poor sleep, chronic stress and weight gain often cause chronic low-grade inflammation, as can systemic issues like autoimmune diseases and decreased liver and kidney function. This inflammation degrades the immune system because it causes it to operate abnormally by constantly firing.

READER'S DIGEST

That accelerates the ageing process on a cellular level. “Most systems in our body are tightly regulated,” says geriatrician Dr Sean Xiao Leng.

HOW TO SAVE YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM

You can't do anything about your genetic make-up, but luckily, many factors that positively affect your immune system are within your control. Take them seriously, Dr Leng urges. While you may not be able to stop decreased immunity as you age, any slowdown you can produce means a higher immune reserve at any given time. That's critical when it comes to infections.

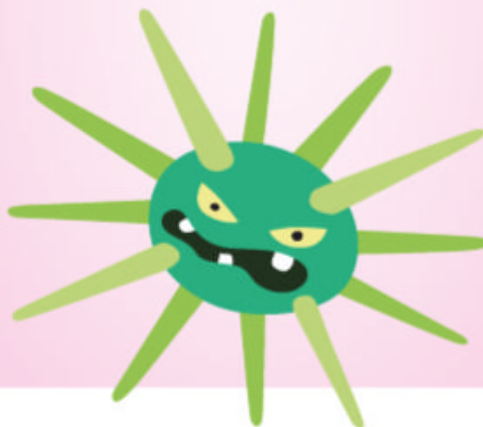
When we talk about vulnerability in older adults, says Dr Leng, there are two important parts: “One is incidence – whether you get the infection or not. But the other part is severity. Even if you don't have the incidence outcome you want, having a stronger immune function may determine how badly you'll be infected.” In other words, every bit of prevention helps, including the following:

Movement Regular workouts boost immune function and lower inflammation. A 2019 study in *Nature Reviews Immunology* noted that skeletal muscle is a “major immune regulatory organ” that generates anti-inflammatory and immunoprotective proteins called myokines. A 2018 study found that higher-intensity workouts may blunt immune-system decline

in older adults. “Exercise strengthens the body and may be the most important lifestyle intervention you can add,” Professor Kang says.

Self-knowledge Professor Butte suggests that people gain a better understanding of where their health is right now. For example, those with asthma may want to start measuring their peak airflow to know what their normal lung function is. “The more we can use digital devices and tools, the more we'll understand,” he says. “If something changes, you're not just going to the doctor and saying, ‘I'm having trouble breathing.’ You can say, ‘My airflow has dropped eight per cent.’” Staying on top of whatever chronic conditions you have will

**IF YOU EAT
RIGHT AND AVOID
OBESITY, YOU
POSITIVELY
AFFECT IMMUNE
FUNCTION**



allow you to spot declines quickly, so you and your doctor can decide on a better course of therapy.

Nutrition Eating right and avoiding obesity, which is deadly when it comes to inflammation, are common sense. But research also reveals specific nutritional effects on immune function in older adults. A study reviewed in the journal *Nutrients* in 2018 showed that basic nutrients like vitamins A, C, D, E and the B vitamins, along with folic acid, iron, selenium and zinc, are essential for ‘immunocompetence’, with deficiencies causing lower T cell production and an inability to resolve inflammation. Strive for balance, Professor Kang says: “Eat not just vegetables but also good proteins and fibre.” The latter is important because it feeds the good bacteria in your gut and can help lower inflammation. “We have a lot of immune cells in the gut that help regulate health,” he says. “Dietary fibre may have more than the single effect of making the bowel move.”

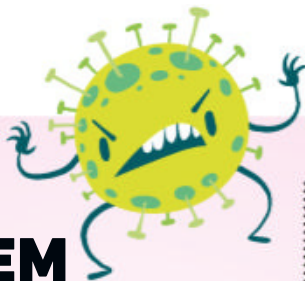
Stay Calm Research has shown that unregulated stress can accelerate immune-system decline. It comes down to a chronic immune response to whatever’s stressing you, with the resulting rise in inflammation. Self-care in this area becomes critical – from anti-stress activities (meditation, mindfulness, exercise) to asking for help in unresolved stressful situations (work, money, caregiving). People don’t talk enough about the



**KEEP YOUR
STRESS IN CHECK
TO HELP PREVENT
A DECLINE IN
YOUR DISEASE
IMMUNITY**

effect of stress on immunity because it’s not as tangible as factors such as hours of exercise or how many packs of cigarettes per day you smoke, Dr Leng notes.

Vaccines Age takes its toll on vaccine effectiveness as well as immunity. Vaccines are designed to provoke the production of antigens – the influenza vaccine is made of influenza cells – but our ageing immune reserve doesn’t respond as robustly as it did in our earlier years. None of that should make you lazy about vaccines. “It’s true they become less effective as people get older,” Professor Kang says. “But even if you do get infected, the disease will be less severe. People should get whatever vaccines their



IS YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM VULNERABLE?

Certain health conditions can mean your immune system is less able to fight off a viral infection. If you have been diagnosed with any of the following conditions, take precautions to protect yourself, and talk with your doctor about your treatments.

OBESITY

Adipose tissue (fat) is now recognised as an active endocrine and immune organ that can directly inhibit metabolic immune function, according to emerging research. A 2018 study of influenza patients over three flu seasons found that obese adults took 42 per cent longer to fight off the virus than non-obese people.

DIABETES

High blood sugar (hyperglycaemia) is an inflammatory condition that tends to inhibit the immune response and raise your risk of infection. People who have uncontrolled high blood sugar are particularly vulnerable.

CANCER

Cancer and its various treatments can reduce white blood cell counts and make patients more open to infection, while making it harder to fight infection. If you are a cancer patient or a cancer survivor, you should discuss your situation with a doctor who is familiar with your medical history.

ASTHMA, COPD AND OTHER RESPIRATORY DISEASES

Viruses love to attack the lungs, so people who have existing lung conditions are at risk of more severe symptoms when they get sick. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) patients are particularly vulnerable to

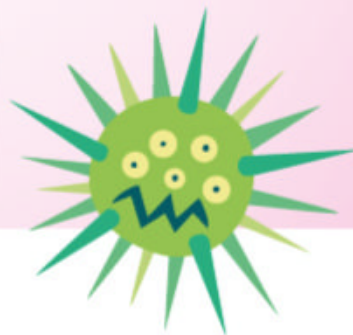
lung infections, which can further damage the already compromised air sacs.

HEART DISEASE

Hypertension and underlying cardiac issues raise infection risk for older adults. Based on early data, as many as 40 per cent of COVID-19 patients who required hospitalisation had existing cardiovascular disease.

AUTOIMMUNE DISEASES

Not only can an infection trigger a flare-up of autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis or psoriasis, the treatment of those conditions often involves immunosuppressive drugs that can raise your infection risk. Also, autoimmune conditions can cause interstitial lung disease, which is a dangerous condition that can cause scarring of the lungs.



doctors recommend based on age and underlying medical conditions.”

Medications Certain prescription medications may inhibit your immune system. For example, oral and inhaled corticosteroids (common for arthritis, allergies, asthma and inflammatory bowel disease) may raise your risk of fungal infections. The same is true for TNF (tumour necrosis factor) inhibitors that treat autoimmune conditions like rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis. “Even antibiotics could kill gut bacteria and trigger some kinds of infection,” Professor Kang says. If you’re on any ongoing medications, talk to your doctor about possible immune-system side effects and how to address them.

COVID-19 LESSONS

Aside from a deeply ingrained knowledge of handwashing and how far away 1.5 metres is, the COVID-19 pandemic will, in the end, teach us more about our health

vulnerabilities – individually, and as an ageing population.

Professor Butte believes it will usher in a new era in immunity research. “We’re going to learn a lot in a hurry.” Dr Leng foresees a large push into learning more about ageing and immunity by studying the older adult population and unlocking the unknown mechanisms in the immune response. He’s already part of a massive US National Institutes of Health initiative into geriatric science involving hundreds of researchers.

“The traditional medical model focuses on individual disease,” he says. “But we’ll try to see if we can find an underlying mechanism in immunity, something upstream in the process. Then we can do a wider search rather than chase after individual diseases. If we can do that, the older population will handle all immune challenges better.” **R**

FROM AARP (APRIL 4, 2020), © 2020 BY AARP, AARP.COM



It's a Rare Bird

Racing pigeon New Kim is worth much more than her weight in gold.

A pigeon racing fancier from China recently paid a record price of US\$ 1.9 million for the Belgian-bred bird. A few years back the quaint sport seemed destined to decline but has had a revival in China where huge prizes are on offer. Racing pigeons get used to one coop for months and then are released hundreds of kilometres away to make their way home using their sense of orientation and special speed training. AP

My Dad and I, **REBUILT**



Working on a home repair project with my father showed me I had more to learn about him than I thought

BY *Colleen Oakley*

ILLUSTRATION BY *Agata Nowicka*

Growing up, I understood one thing about my dad: he knew everything. This was our relationship, in sum: I asked him questions and he told me the answers. Is there really a man in the moon? How do sailing boats work? What is the highest score anyone's ever gotten in Pac-Man?

In my teen years, he taught me things I'd need to know to survive in the real world. How to drive a manual car. How to check your car tyre pressure (though the gauge he bought me 20 years ago still sits untouched in my glove box). The correct knife to use to cut a melon.

When I moved out on my own, I called him at least once a week, usually when something broke in my apartment and I needed to know how to fix it: the toilet; the

air-conditioning; the wall, once, when I threw a shoe at a terrifying spider.

But then, eventually, I needed him less. I got married, and my husband had most of the knowledge I lacked about gutter cleaning and water heaters and non-destructive insect removal. For everything else, we had Google.

I don't know when it happened, but our conversations when I called devolved into six words. Me: "Hi, Dad." Him: "Hi, sweets. Here's Mum." (Because her, I still needed - What's your chicken parmigiana recipe? Do I need to call the doctor for my daughter's fever? Can you read this draft of my novel?)

I loved my dad, of course, but I wondered at times if maybe he had already shared everything I needed to know. Maybe I'd heard all

his stories. Maybe, after knowing a man for 40 years, there's nothing left to say.

Then, two years ago, my husband, our four kids and I moved in with my parents for three weeks while our house was being renovated. They own a lake house, and Dad asked me to help him rebuild the bulkhead at their dock.

I didn't baulk – it was the least I could do for free rent – but I was dreading it. It was hard, manual labour. We got wet and sandy, and I'm fairly certain a deadly bacteria was unleashed from the innards of the rotted wood we hacked away from the old retaining wall.

But as we put the new timber bulkhead together piece by piece, my dad knowing exactly what went where, I looked at him. "How do you know how to build a bulkhead?"

The heavy mallet he was swinging paused in mid-air. "I spent a summer while I was at university building them."

"You did?" I thought I knew everything about my dad – all his random jobs. I knew about the apple orchard, the summer at the horseradish manufacturing plant that burned his hands raw, and even the cook position in a cafe, where he learned how to make the best omelette in

the western hemisphere. But I never knew this.

"Yep. Now come up here and let me teach you how to use this circular saw."

As he explained the importance of not setting the blade too deep (information I quickly tucked away in the same place I store the information about how to use the tyre gauge), I realised that maybe it's not that there's nothing left to say. Maybe it's just that I've spent my life asking him the wrong questions.

A few weeks later, after my family and I moved back into our renovated house, I called my parents.

Dad answered. "Hi, sweets," he said. "Here's Mum."

"Wait, Dad," I said. "How are you?" We ended up talking about the consulting gig he was working on, a new battery he'd bought for his yacht, refinancing my husband and I were looking into to bundle our home-renovation loan. Nothing life-changing, nothing earth-shattering. To anyone else, it would sound like a normal conversation between a dad and his daughter.

But to me, it was novel. A new beginning. I spent the first part of my life needing to talk to my dad. Now I talk to him because I want to. **R**

**MAYBE IT'S
JUST THAT
I'VE SPENT MY
LIFE ASKING
HIM THE
WRONG
QUESTIONS**

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**"I found it
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The most exciting thing I found when travelling Japan was a **Bidet toilet seat** in my hotel bathroom.

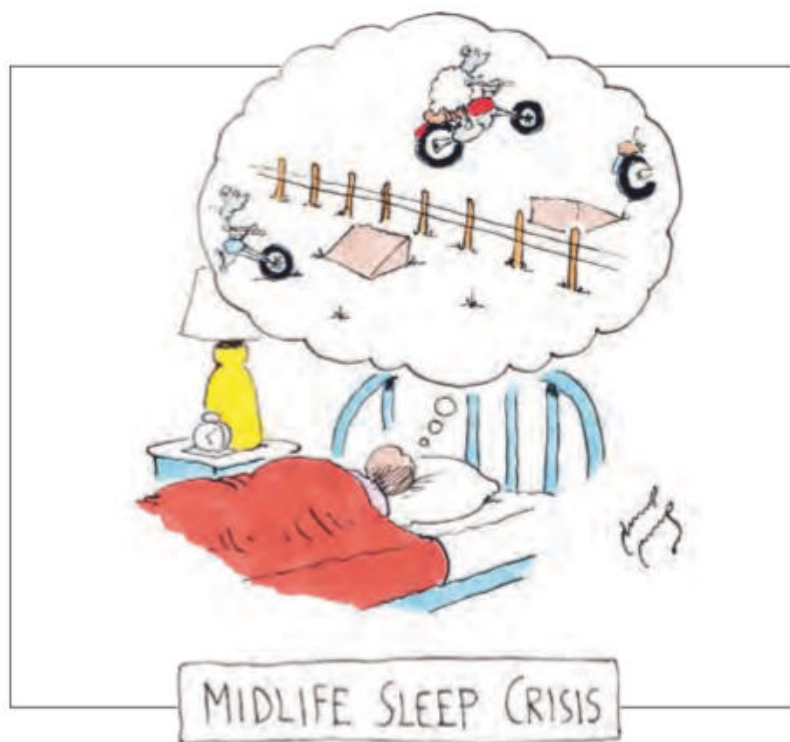
With just the push of a button the **bidet** washed me with clean water and then a warm air dryer gently dried me.

I loved it so much that when I came home I bought one from **The BIDET SHOP.**

It is just marvellous! It has a heated seat, soft close lid, instant warm water and a warm air dryer.

LIFE'S LIKE THAT

Seeing the Funny Side



Watch and Learn

My daughter recently went into labour early, and as her husband wouldn't arrive back in time from a business trip, I accompanied her. One moment made me smile when the midwife asked my heavily medicated daughter, just before she was about to push, if she minded if some students watched. My daughter replied groggily, "Only if they're medical students!"

SUBMITTED BY HAZEL BYRON

You Can't Crust the Neighbours

I overheard a conversation between my sister and my small nephew who asked her, "Mummy, when you make me toast, you put bread under the grill don't you?" She said that was right and he continued, "Well, those people next door must be very cruel... When I heard them talking to you the other day, they said after christening their baby, everyone's going to raise their glasses and toast it!"

SUBMITTED BY DAVID WEBB

Prison Food

I picked my friend's eight-year-old son up from school and we were chatting about what he'd been doing.

He said, "A policeman came today and told us that people get arrested and put in custard."

SUBMITTED BY JANE WHITAKER KENT

Who Needs Friends?

Recently, there was an unusual announcement in church from the vicar who said, "John and Hannah were married on September 23 in church. And so ends a friendship that began in their school days."

I don't think he meant it to come out quite like that!

SUBMITTED BY LOUISE COOPER

LOVE NEVER DIES

♥ Dating is just somebody revealing the grosser parts of themselves little by little until you say "OK, that's enough" or "OK, this is forever."

@AMYSILVERBERG

♥ I moved in with my girlfriend after a year. Some people say we're rushing in, but we're both so in love with saving \$900 a month.

@MONDAYPUNDAY

♥ It's almost Valentine's Day and I haven't decided what to get myself yet.

@KEVINLANGUE



THE GREAT TWEET OFF: MARINE EDITION

Finding sea creatures amusing is a shore thing for the beachgoers of Twitter.

"Hermit crab" describes me twice.

@LISAXY424

Lobsters would be proud of themselves if they knew how expensive they were.

@MEGSDEANGELIS

I'm jealous of turtles. They can go home whenever they want.

@3SUNZZZ

The most judgemental aquatic animal is probably the seal of disapproval.

@WHEELTOD

People freak out because of sharks in the ocean. News flash: that's where they live! If you see them at a fast food restaurant, then we have a problem.

@BIGKEFD





I Am the
**FOOD
ON YOUR
PLATE**



I Am *Mushrooms* A Magic, Wild, Meaty Treat

BY *Kate Lowenstein*
AND *Daniel Gritzer*

I am not an animal, a plant or a mineral. Take a minute to get your head around what a crafty ‘20 questions’ choice that makes me, infuriating little brothers and sisters on car rides everywhere. “What is it?” they shout, to which their torturer finally answers: I, mushroom, am a fungus.

I do keep you humans guessing. I am both edible and toxic, vegetarian yet meaty in flavour, wild and domesticated, a contemporary health craze and an ancient remedy. I can send your mind on a wild hallucinogenic flight. I can also kill you. And I come from a mysterious, much larger organism underfoot that you can barely comprehend. I am its fruiting body, in fact, as it spreads invisibly underground or through the fibres of a log. You can pick me as you do an apple off a tree, but you will leave almost all the superorganism behind.

Those rootlike threads you occasionally spy on my stem? They are not roots but fragments of my spreading life-form. Those delicate frills sheltered beneath my cap? They are marvels of evolutionary engineering, gills from which I release my spores by the billions. I like to think of them as nature’s origami – if you could lay the unfolded gills of just one button mushroom flat, they’d cover a desktop.

I’d wager that when you hear my name, you imagine the umbrella capped toadstool of not only

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

white button mushrooms but also fairy tales, fables, Super Mario Bros. and Smurfs. But that image is falsely narrow. I can grow like shelves on a tree trunk, round like marshmallows, translucent and gelatinous like jellyfish, and in a cascade of spines that, in the case of the lion's mane mushroom, look like a long white beard.

Native to grasslands in Europe and North America, the ubiquitous *Agaricus bisporus* variety of me can be either white or brown. In my immature state, when white you generally call me a button mushroom or champignon, while when I'm brown, you regard me as a Swiss brown. When mature, I am brown with a larger cap and am commonly sold under the name of Portobello mushroom.

In the kitchen, no matter my variety – oyster, shiitake, enoki; there are hundreds of edible ones – I add deep, savoury flavour. I am one of nature's best meat stand-ins for flavour, texture and heartiness. I just scratch that itch, making me appeal to vegetarians and omnivores alike. To properly bring out all that flavour, cook off all my water over high heat, then brown me in a pan. Use me in a filling for dumplings and pastas, such as ravioli. Cook me with cream or tomatoes and I'll make a pasta dish so

rich and filling you won't miss the meat. I'm great on meat though, including as duxelles – a combination of finely chopped me, shallots and herbs cooked slowly until paste-like. The thick mixture is a key ingredient in beef Wellington and can be used to flavour soups and sauces and fill omelettes and ravioli.

Don't be fooled by the misguided kitchen folklore that you should never wash a mushroom because it strips away flavour. This is almost always not true. Go ahead and wash me; just make sure to dry me well so that I brown properly.

I continue to be credited with health benefits, some more legit than others. Most of the varieties you eat have an array of antioxidants, vitamins and minerals, including all-important vitamin B and selenium. The maitake mushroom, also called hen-of-the-woods, is remarkably high in vitamin D.

Wild mushrooms – chanterelles, morels, truffles (an anomaly because they grow underground) – really can be intoxicatingly tasty, but they are hard to find and therefore more pricey than their cultivated cousins. Conversely, if a restaurant touts a 'wild' oyster, shiitake, or Swiss brown special, beware; those varieties are farmed.

I AM ONE OF NATURE'S BEST MEAT STAND-INS FOR FLAVOUR AND TEXTURE

READER'S DIGEST

Perhaps most valued of my wild variant is the white truffle from Alba, in the Piedmont region of Italy, whose musty aroma shouts when it's shaved raw over buttered fresh pasta or a fried egg.

In 2007, a Hong Kong-Macao casino magnate spent \$330,000 in a charity auction on a 1.5 kilogram delicacy, the largest white truffle found in half a century. Beware, however, that despite the premium price shoppers pay for 'truffle' oil, it is almost always made from synthetic flavours and not truffles at all.

Although foraging for wild mushrooms is something of a hobby in some countries, hobbyist beware: I can be deadly. On New Year's Eve in 2011, mistaking the death cap mushroom for edible straw mushrooms used in Chinese cooking, a 38-year-old Canberra chef and 52-year-old friend both died in hospital of liver failure 48 hours after eating a meal he prepared with the deadly fungus.

Another shroom craze afoot is decidedly more fun: 'magic mushrooms' that contain psilocybin are again all the rage. Several species of me come with this not entirely legal hallucinogenic included. Their surprisingly middle-aged users are often less interested in the trip than the promise of reducing anxiety, depression and PTSD. Can I do all that? The research suggests yes. Would you expect anything less from something as magical as me?



STUFFED MUSHROOMS

- 1.** Lightly trim ends of 1kg of Swiss brown mushrooms, separate stems from caps, and mince the stems and half the caps. Reserve the remaining caps to stuff.
- 2.** Melt 3 tbs butter in a frying pan over medium-high heat, and add one large (100 g) minced shallot and 1 tsp minced thyme leaves. Cook, stirring until tender, about 2 minutes. Add minced mushrooms and cook, stirring until water evaporates and mushroom mixture thickens and darkens, about 15 minutes. Stir in 1/3 cup bread crumbs and season with salt and pepper.
- 3.** Toss remaining caps lightly in olive oil and salt, stuff with cooked mushroom mixture, and arrange on a tray. Cook at 230°C until mushrooms are tender, about 20 minutes.
- 4.** Sprinkle with grated cheddar cheese and return to oven until cheese is melted and beginning to brown. Serve.

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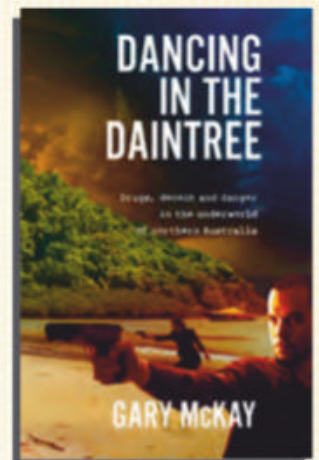
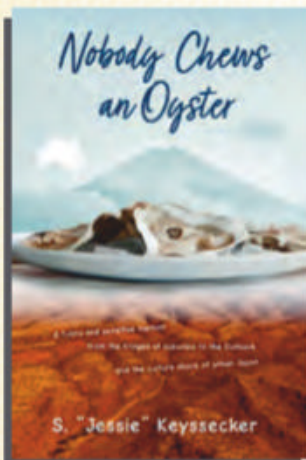


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RECENT TITLES...





SEE THE WORLD...

Turn the page »



...DIFFERENTLY

To visit this museum

you will need snorkelling or diving equipment. The Museo Subacuático de Arte, known as MUSA, in Mexico is not to be found in any city but rather on the floor of the Caribbean Sea near the island of Mujeres.

Divers can enjoy more than 500 underwater sculptures, all made from a special concrete that facilitates the growth of coral and underwater plants. Because of this, the impressive museum has since become one of the world's largest artificial reefs.

PHOTOS: (PREVIOUS PAGE) RGB VENTURES/SUPERSTOCK/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; (THIS PAGE) GETTY IMAGES/DONALD MIRALLE









DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

FOOTPRINTS

She was an experienced hiker.
She knew that the tracks

IN THE

ahead meant someone was in
trouble. But she had no idea they

SNOW

would lead to a rescue mission that
would become legendary

BY *Ty Gagne*

FROM THE NEW HAMPSHIRE UNION LEADER

Pam Bales stepped onto the snow-covered Jewell Trail. She planned a six-hour loop hike through New Hampshire's Mount Washington State Park. She had packed for almost every contingency and intended to walk alone. A note on the dashboard of her SUV detailed her itinerary: start up Jewell Trail, traverse the ridge south along Gulfside Trail, summit Mount Washington, follow Crawford Path down to Lakes of the Clouds Hut, descend Ammonoosuc Ravine Trail and return to her car before some forecasted bad weather was scheduled to arrive. Bales always left her hiking plans in her car, as well as with two fellow volunteers on the Pemigewasset Valley Search and Rescue Team.

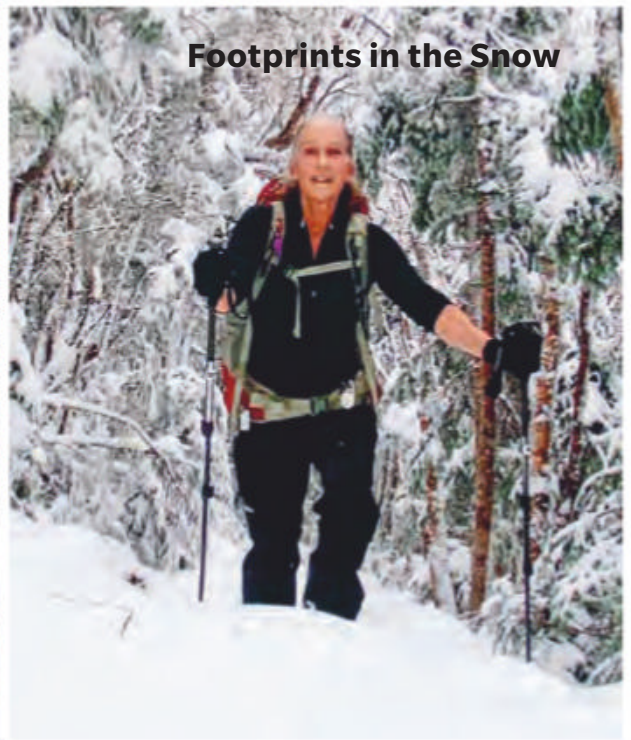
It was just before 8am on October 17, 2010. Based on her experience, Bales knew that her hike was realistic. Besides, she had two contingency plans and extra layers of clothing to better regulate her core temperature as conditions changed; the observatory had described conditions on the higher summits as 'full-on winter'.

The hike up the lower portion of Jewell was pleasant. At 8.30am, still below the tree line, she took the first in a series of on-the-trail selfies.

Less than an hour later, she took another photo, after she'd climbed into colder air and deeper snows. She now donned a fleece top and gloves. By 10.30am, the weather was showing its teeth. Bales added even more layers, including a shell jacket, goggles and mountaineering mittens to shield her from the cold winds and dense

fog. She made her way across the snow-covered ridge towards Mount Washington and began to think about calling it a day. Then she noticed something: a single set of footprints in the snow ahead of her. She'd been following faint tracks all day and hadn't given them much thought, because so many people climb Jewell Trail. But these, she realised, had been made by a pair of trainers. She silently scolded the absent hiker for violating normal safety rules and walked on.

By 11am, Bales was getting cold and decided to abandon her plan. Summitting Washington was just an option. The cloud cover had transitioned from canopy to the equivalent of quicksand, and the only thing keeping Bales on Gulfside Trail was the trainer tracks in the snow. As she fought the wind and heavy sleet, the



Pam Bales took selfies at 8.30am (left) and 9.15am to document her climb up Jewell Trail on Mount Washington, which is known for its extreme weather swings

tracks made a hard left-hand turn off the trail.

Now she felt genuinely alarmed. She was sure the hiker could not navigate in the low visibility and was heading straight towards the challenging trails of the Great Gulf Wilderness. Bales stood there, stunned. The temperature and clouds were in a race to find their lowest point, and darkness was mere hours away. If Bales continued to follow the tracks, she'd add risk and time to the itinerary she'd already modified to manage both. But she could not let this go. She turned to the left and called out, "Hello!" into the frozen fog.

Nothing. She called out again: "Is anybody out there? Do you need help?"

The strong westerly winds carried her voice away. She blew into her

rescue whistle. For a fleeting moment she thought she heard someone reply, but it was just the wind playing games with her mind. She stood listening, then turned and walked cautiously in the direction of the single set of tracks.

BALES FOLLOWED THE TRACKS gingerly for 20 to 30 metres, struggling to remain upright. She rounded a slight corner and saw a man sitting motionless, cradled by large boulders. She approached him and uttered, "Oh, hello."

He did not react. He wore trainers, shorts, a light jacket and fingerless gloves. His head was bare. He looked soaking wet. Thick frost covered his jacket. His eyes tracked her slowly, and he barely swivelled his head.

A switch flipped. She stopped

being a curious and concerned hiker. Her informal search now transitioned to full-on rescue mission. She leaned into her wilderness medical training and tried to get a firmer grip on his level of consciousness. "What is your name?" she asked.

He did not respond.

"Do you know where you are?"

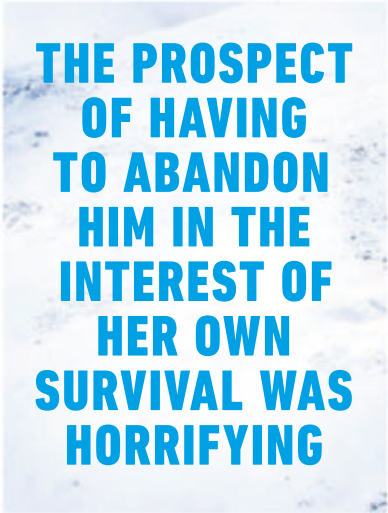
Nothing. His skin was pale and waxy, and he had a glazed look on his face. It was obvious that nothing was connecting for him. He was hypothermic and in really big trouble. Winds were blowing steadily at 80 km/h, the temperature was -3°C , and the ice pellets continued their relentless assault.

The prospect of having to abandon him in the interest of her own survival was horrifying, but she'd been trained in search and rescue; she knew not to put herself at such risk that she would become a patient, too. She also knew she didn't have much time. As he sat propped up against the rocks, she stripped him down to his T-shirt and underwear. Because he wouldn't talk and she was in such close contact with him, she gave him a name: 'John'. She placed adhesive toe-warmer packs directly onto his bare feet. She checked him for any sign of injury or trauma. There was none. From her pack, Bales

retrieved a pair of soft-shell pants, socks, a hat and a jacket. She pulled the warm, dry layers onto his body. He could not help, because he was so badly impaired by hypothermia.

Bales next removed a bivouac sack from her pack, holding it firmly so the winds would not snatch it. She slid it under and around his motion-

less body, entombing him inside. She activated more heat packs and placed them in his armpits, on his torso, and on each side of his neck. Bales always brought a thermos of hot cocoa and chewable electrolyte cubes. She dropped a few cubes into the cocoa, and poured the warm, sugary drink



**THE PROSPECT
OF HAVING
TO ABANDON
HIM IN THE
INTEREST OF
HER OWN
SURVIVAL WAS
HORRIFYING**

into his mouth.

Over the next hour, John began to move his limbs and speak. Slurring his words, he said that he had planned to follow the same loop as Bales. He had walked that route before. He said he had lost his way in the poor visibility and just sat down here. Even as he warmed up, he remained lethargic.

Bales recognised that he would die soon if they didn't get out of there. She looked her patient squarely in the eyes and said, "John, we have to go now!" She left no room for argument. She was going to descend, and he was going with her.

Bales braced him as he stood up, shivering, and with a balance of firmness and genuine concern, she ordered, "You are going to stay right on my ass, John." This wasn't the way she usually spoke to people, but she had to be forceful. He seemed moments away from being drawn irrevocably to the path of least resistance – stopping and falling asleep. That was not going to happen on her watch.

AS THE PAIR RETRACED their steps on the ridge, visibility was so bad that they inched along. Bales followed the small holes in the snow that her trekking poles had made earlier. Leaning into the headwinds, she began to sing a medley of Elvis Presley songs in an effort to keep John connected to reality – and herself firmly focused.

She was trying hard to stay on the trail, and trying even harder not to let John sense her growing concern, when he dropped down into the snow. She turned and saw that he seemed to be giving up. He curled in a sort of sitting foetal position, hunched down, shoulders dropped forward, hands on his knees. He told her he was exhausted and had had enough. She should just continue on without him.

Bales would have none of it. "That's not an option, John. We still have the toughest part to go, so get up, suck it up, and keep going!" Slowly he stood, and she felt an overwhelming sense of relief.

Bales and her reluctant companion

had travelled just under a kilometre when they arrived back at the junction of the Jewell Trail. It was around 2pm when they started down. The sun would set in three hours. Although the trees would protect them from the wind, it was darker under the canopy. Bales switched on her headlamp, but with only one light between them, she had to move slowly down a steeper section, then turn to illuminate the trail so John could follow. She offered continuous encouragement – "Keep going, John; you're doing great" – and sang more songs.

Their descent was arduous, and Bales dreaded that he might drop in the snow again and actively resist her efforts to save him. Just before 6pm, they arrived at the trailhead, exhausted and battered. Her climb up to the spot where she located John had taken about four hours. Six hours had passed since then.

Bales started her car engine and placed the frozen clothing she had taken off John inside so that the heater could thaw them. She realised he had no extra clothing with him.

"Why don't you have extra dry clothes and food in your car?"

"I just borrowed it," he told her. Several minutes later, he put his now-dry clothes back on and returned the ones Bales had dressed him in up on the ridge.

"Why didn't you check the weather forecast dressed like that?" she asked. He didn't answer. He just



By 11am, the weather had turned and Bales was about to turn back. Fortunately for one distraught hiker, she wouldn't quit

thanked her, got into his car, and drove towards the exit. Right around that time, at 6.07pm, the Mount Washington Observatory clocked its highest wind gust of the day, at 140km/h.

Standing there astonished and alone in the darkness, Bales said to no one, "What just happened?"

BALES WOULDN'T GET AN ANSWER until a week later, when the president of her rescue group received a letter in the mail, a donation tucked between its folds. It read:

"I hope this reaches the right group of rescuers. This is hard to do but must try, part of my therapy. I want to remain anonymous, but I was called John. On Sunday October 17, I went up my favourite trail, Jewell, to end my life. Weather was to be bad. Thought no one else would be there. I was dressed to go quickly. Next thing I knew this lady was talking to me, changing my clothes, giving me food, making me warmer. She just kept talking and calling me John and I let her. Finally learned her name was Pam.

“Conditions were horrible and I said to leave me and get going, but she wouldn’t. Got me up and had me stay right behind her, still talking. I followed, but I did think about running off – she couldn’t see me. But I wanted to only take my life, not anybody else’s, and I think she would’ve tried to find me.

“The entire time she treated me with compassion, authority, confidence and the impression that I mattered. With all that has been going wrong in my life, I didn’t matter to me, but I did to Pam. She probably thought I was the stupidest hiker dressed like I was, but I was never put down in any way – chewed out, yes, in a kind way. Maybe I wasn’t meant to die yet. I somehow still mattered in life.

“I became very embarrassed later on and never really thanked her properly. If she is an example of your organisation, you must be the best group around.

“Please accept this small offer of appreciation for her effort to save me way beyond the limits of safety. ‘No’ did not seem to be in her mind.

“I am getting help with my mental-health needs. They will also help me find a job and I have temporary housing. I have a new direction thanks to wonderful people like yourselves.

“I got your name from her pack patch and bumper sticker.

“My deepest thanks, John.”

IN THE NINE YEARS since she saved John, Bales has become something of a hiking legend. It’s a title she never wanted, but one she certainly has earned. All that matters to her is that she was moved deeply by the man’s gesture and that he said she made him feel that he mattered.

Some people have asked me whether I, in finally recounting this story for the public, tried to find John. The thought of searching for him felt wrong. As I’ve reflected more on this story and its relation to mental health, my response to that question has evolved. I have in fact found John, and he is very close by me. John is my neighbour; he is my good friend, a close colleague, a family member. John could be me.

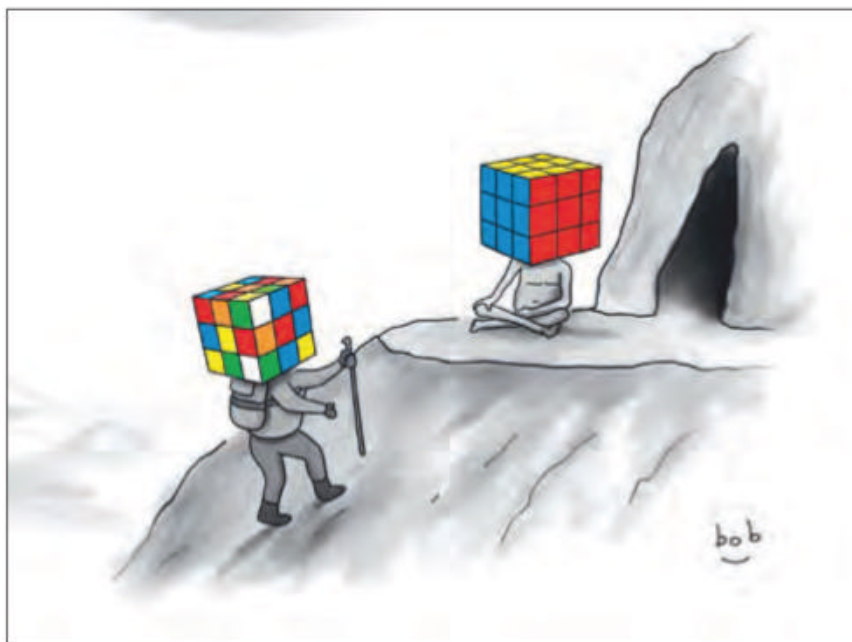
At some point in our lives, all of us have found ourselves walking with a sense of helplessness through a personal storm. Alone, devoid of a sense of emotional warmth and safety and smothered by the darkness of our emotions, we’ve sought that place just off trail where we hoped to find some way to break free of our struggles. Sadly, some do follow through. Many are able to quietly self-rescue. Others, like John, are rescued by people like Pam Bales. **R**

FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE UNION LEADER (JANUARY 5, 2019), © 2019 BY TY GAGNE, UNIONLEADER.COM

If you or someone you know has thoughts of self-harm or suicide, visit [lifeline.org.au](https://www.lifeline.org.au) or call their hotline on 13 11 14.

LAUGHTER

The Best Medicine



Plane Silly

Two hours into a flight, the pilot gets on the intercom. “We just lost an engine,” he announces. “It’s all right – we have three more. But the flight will take us an hour longer.”

A half hour later: “We just lost another engine. Don’t worry; we have two more. It’ll take us another two hours, though.”

In the back, a passenger rolls her eyes. “Great,” she says to her seatmate. “If we lose the last two engines, we’ll be up here all day.”

7THSPACE.COM

Stuff of Dreams

One morning, Emma woke up with a start. Her husband, Jim, asked what the matter was. “I had a dream that you gave me a pearl necklace for Valentine’s Day,” she said. “What could it mean?”

“You’ll know tonight,” Jim said slyly.

That evening, Jim came home with a small package for his wife. Emma ripped open the wrapping paper, tore into the box, and pulled out her gift – a book entitled *The Meaning of Dreams*.

THETRENDINSIGHTS.COM

CARTOON: BOB ECKSTEIN

Sales Pitch

I was in a job interview today. The interviewer handed me his laptop and said, "I want you to try to sell this to me."

So I put it under my arm, walked out of the building, and went home. Eventually he called and demanded, "Bring it back here right now!"

I said, "Three hundred bucks and it's yours." BLOG.ZOOMINFO.COM

By the Gross

A vegan said to me, "People who sell meat are gross!"

I said, "People who sell fruit and veg are grocer."

ADELE CLIFF, COMEDIAN

Not the Wurst Joke

What do you give a dog that has a high temperature?

Mustard, it's the best thing for a hot dog. [FROM THE INTERNET](#)



Milking It

- ◆ I bought a tin of evaporated milk. When I opened it, it was empty.
- ◆ Our kitchen is so small we only use condensed milk. [FROM THE INTERNET](#)



SHAKEN AND STIRRED

He's everyone's favourite suave spy, so we give you *Licence to Kill* with some James Bond jokes.

My dad told me to invest my money in bonds, so I bought 1000 copies of *Goldfinger*.

COMEDIAN NICK HALL

James Bond goes to a delicatessen and orders a club sandwich. The employee says to him, "Mr Bond, we have ham or turkey. How would you like it?" Bond replies, "Bacon, not bird."

What do you call James Bond in a jacuzzi? *Bubble-0-7*.

If James Bond movies were about food, these could be their titles:

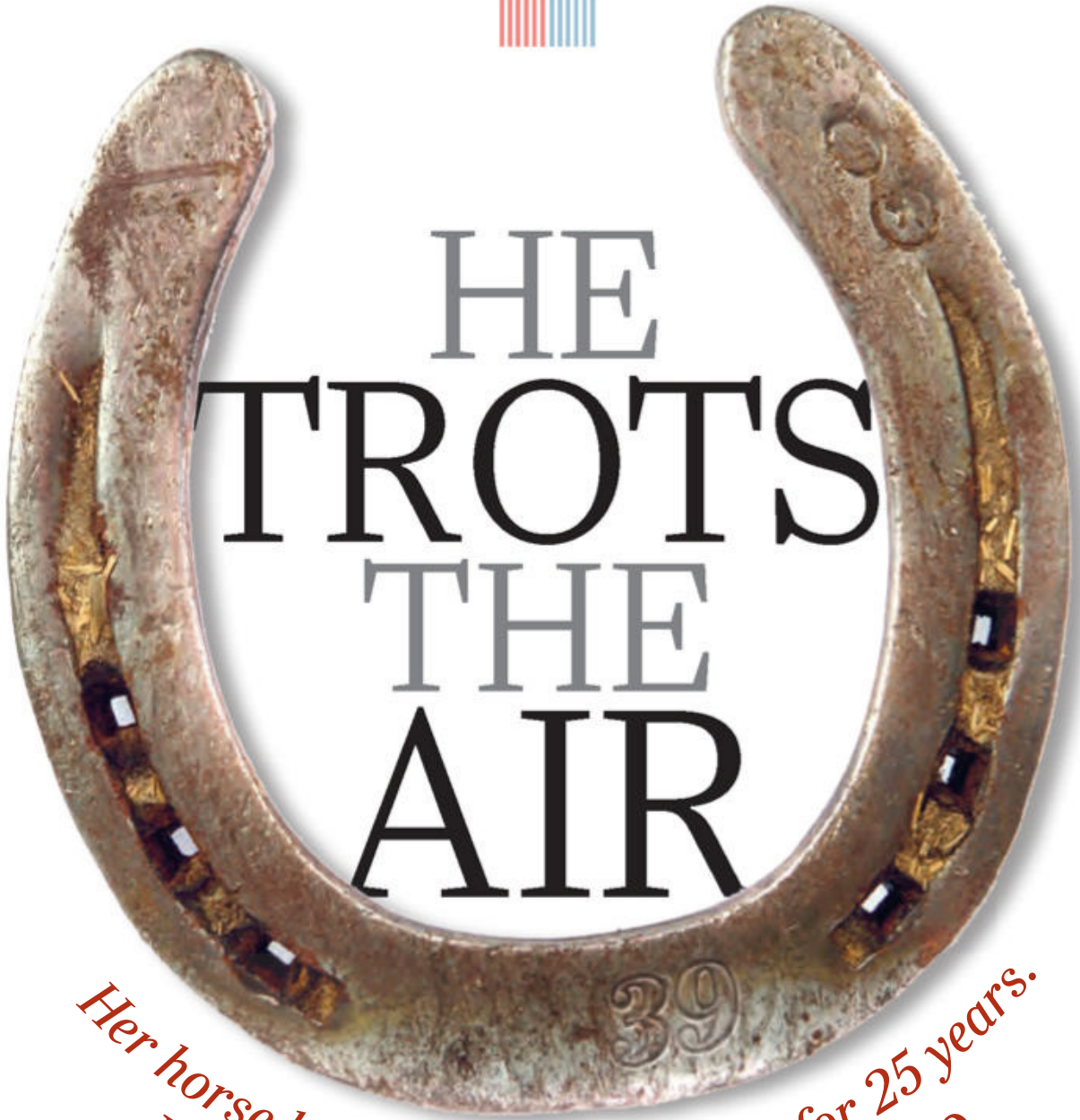
- ◆ *On Her Majesty's Secret Recipe*
 - ◆ *Doughnuts are Forever*
 - ◆ *Octopie*
 - ◆ *Moonbaker*
 - ◆ *The Spy Who Loved Meat*
 - ◆ *Licence to Grill*
 - ◆ *GoldenPie*
 - ◆ *Diet Another Day*

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ANIMAL KINGDOM



*Her horse had stayed by her side for 25 years.
Now it was time to let him go*

BY Pam Houston

FROM **OUTSIDE**

In 2019, I put my old roan horse in the ground. But there's way more to the story than that. Thirty-nine years on the planet, 25 of those with me.

The first thing I noticed about Roany was that he had a kind eye; the second was his size – just under 17 hands (1.7 metres) at the shoulder. The cowboy from Santa Fe, New Mexico, who sold him didn't tell me much apart from his age, which likely had a year or two shaved off. Within days, I came to understand Roany's intensely good nature. Each morning when I went out to feed him, he greeted me with a just-happy-to-be-here chortle.

He was as solid a trail horse as I've ever ridden, never flinching in strong winds, or while crossing water, or when mule deer twins – who'd been stashed by their mother in some willows – leaped in front of him. He was so bombproof that the county search-and-rescue team enlisted his help a few times a year to find and deliver a wayward hiker.

I bought Roany the same year I moved to a ranch in Creede, Colorado, because Deseo, my other horse, was deciding that Colorado was the scariest place he'd ever been. First off, there was snow – a whole lot of it.

The predator-to-livestock ratio was not to his liking, and the pasture was surrounded by 30-metre spruce trees that often sang in the wind.

I grew up in an unpredictably violent household, so my temperament ran a little closer to Deseo's. I counted on Roany to keep the whole farmyard calm, not just Deseo and the mini donkeys but also the ewes and lambs, the recalcitrant rams, the ageing chickens – and me.

I called Roany "the horse of a different colour". In the dead of winter, he was burgundy wine with tiny white flecks. In March, heading into spring, he would shed to a dappled grey with rust highlights.

By mid-summer he was red again, but not such a rich red as in wintertime. And when his heavy coat grew back in October, he was solid grey for almost a month.

For two and a half decades at the ranch, Roany's coat marked the changing of the seasons. I stopped riding him when he turned 33, because I thought he deserved a lengthy retirement, though he stayed well muscled and strong until a few months before his death.

He had a bout of lameness in April and a longer one in May. By late June, he was limping more often than not. When Dr Howard came for a ranch

He was as solid a trail horse as I've ever ridden, never flinching in strong winds



Roany's coat marked the changing of the seasons: burgundy with white flecks in the dead of winter, dappled grey in the spring, and red again in summer

call, he said, "There's a number associated with this lameness, Pam, and it's 39."

I did the things there are to do: supplements, an ice boot, DMSO gel to reduce swelling, Adequan shots, even anti-inflammatory medication on the most painful days. We'd had very little snow and no spring rain, and for the first time in my tenure the pasture stayed dormant all summer, the ground extra hard on sore hooves.

Roany loved nothing more than the return of the spring grass, and it seemed radically unfair that in what was looking to be his last year, there wouldn't be any. I watered, daily, a thin strip of ground between the corral and the chicken coop and named

it Roany's golf course. He had some good days there, but mostly he hung around the corral.

The downside of Roany having the best head on his shoulders of any animal I'd ever owned was that he never got the bulk of my attention. But that summer, between me, my fiancé Mike, and my ranch helpers Kyle and Emma, he hardly had a moment's peace. We iced his legs and groomed him twice daily, mixed canola oil into his grain to help keep weight on him, and hugged him constantly.

He seemed bemused, maybe even touched, by all the attention. Every time we set the water in front of him, he took a giant drink, and I suspect it was more for our sake than his.

READER'S DIGEST

One day, Kyle, not knowing I was out there, set a bucket down next to Roany not three minutes after he had drunk three-fourths of a fresh bucket for me. Roany looked at Kyle for a minute, glanced over at me, then lowered his head to drink again.

My biggest fear was that he would fall and break something during one of the weeks I was away from the ranch and would have to be put down immediately. This was accompanied by a lesser but still palpable fear that the same thing would happen on a day when I was there all alone.

As his condition deteriorated, I worried that we would pass the point when we could ask him to walk far enough across the pasture to a burial site where his grave wouldn't invite trouble to the remaining animals who lived in and around the barn.

I had made difficult decisions a dozen times in my life with beloved dogs, but the length of a horse's life and the sheer size of its body made the timing even trickier. I knew I didn't want Roany rendered with a chain saw. I knew that if we had to drag his body across the pasture behind a piece of heavy equipment, it would tear him all to hell.

Roany was stoicism defined. As his condition worsened, he learned to pivot on his good front leg – and would, for an apple or a carrot or to sneak into the barn to get at the winter's stash of alfalfa. He blew bubbles in his water bucket because it made

me laugh, and he would sometimes even give himself a bird bath by splashing his still-mighty head.

I also knew that just because he could handle the discomfort didn't mean he should. He had been so strong so recently, a force of nature thundering back and forth across the pasture. There was no chance I was going to ask him to make another winter, but as long as he was hobbling to his golf course and chortling to me each morning, it seemed too early to end his life.

That summer, I was getting ready to marry Mike, a Forest Service officer who was teaching me, in my 56th year, what it meant for a man to show up in a relationship. More than one of my friends suggested that Roany had held on so long to deliver me safely to Mike, and I had no reason to argue.

Among Mike's other gifts is a deep intuition about the suffering of people and animals, so I paid attention when he said, on a Monday night in mid-August less than two weeks before the wedding, "This is entirely your decision, but if you want to put Roany down this week, I could take Wednesday afternoon off."

I was not surprised, on Tuesday morning, to see a slight downturn in Roany's condition. He ate his food, drank his water, stood for his treatments, but there was something a little lost in that kind eye, in the way he held his body up over his aching feet. I

called Doc and made the appointment for Wednesday afternoon, with the caveat that I could cancel if Roany's condition improved or I lost my nerve.

By Tuesday night, Roany was swaying just slightly over his feet. He ate his gruel of Equine Senior horse food, anti-inflammatory powder and oil, but with a little less enthusiasm than usual. I went out to check on him at 8pm and then at ten. The moon was bright and the coyotes were singing; there was a tinge in the air that suggested a light morning frost. Even by moonlight I could see that Roany was holding his body like he didn't feel right inside of it.

I woke at 4.30 with the kind of start that always means something has happened. The moon had set by then, so I grabbed a torch and rushed to the corral, but Roany wasn't there, nor on his golf course, nor in the yard.

I called his name and heard hoofbeats coming hard across the pasture. I allowed myself to indulge the fantasy that after all these weeks of suffering he was miraculously cured. Then I heard Deseo's high whinny. My hot-blooded alarmist, my early-warning system, my tsunami siren. Deseo skidded to a stop in front of me and butted his head against my chest, seeming to say: *About time you got here.*

The torch batteries were already dying, but my eyes were adjusting to the dark. I started out across the pasture with Deseo beside me, heading for one of Roany's favourite spots – the wetland (though dry this year) at the back of the property. When I turned at the quarter pole, Deseo whinnied again: *Not that way, human.* By this time, Mike was crossing the pasture to meet me. Deseo whinnied again, and we followed him to another favourite

spot – a shady stand of blue spruce at the base of the hill where the ranch's original homesteaders are buried. It was the first time since last summer that Roany had been out that far.

He was still standing when I got there. But the minute he saw me, he went to the ground with relief. He curled up like a fawn, and I could hear that his breathing wasn't right. Mike and I sat beside him and petted his handsome neck.

Above us, stragglers from the Perseid meteor shower, which had peaked over the weekend, streaked the blackness. Pegasus, the biggest horse of all, galloped across the sky, carrying Princess Andromeda away from her mother, Queen Cassiopeia, with her future husband, Perseus, alongside.

Eventually, a lighter blue tinted the eastern horizon. Deseo stood nearby,

*Roany blew
bubbles in his
water bucket
because he knew it
made me laugh*



The author and Mike on their wedding day, with the excitable Deseo (right) and a donkey named Isaac serving as the four-legged members of the wedding party

head lowered. We listened to Roany's breathing and the coming of dawn. In the distance, the hoot of a great horned owl, the sheep stirring in their pen clear across the pasture; even further away, tyres crossing a cattle guard.

In the gathering light, Roany stretched out his long legs and put his head in my lap. I thanked him for taking good care of the ranch animals, including the humans, including me. I told him I'd be OK, that we'd all be OK, and he could go whenever he needed to, but he went on taking one slow breath after another.

On one of Roany's first bad days, a bank teller in town, a compassionate horsewoman named Debbie Lagan,

had quite innocently asked me how I was. My answer was no doubt more than she'd bargained for, but on that day she became my adviser and advocate in horse eldercare and pain relief. She also promised that, when the time came, she would send her husband out on his track hoe to dig the hole, never mind that they lived off the grid more than 32 kilometres away.

It was finally daylight, but the sun hadn't risen. Mike and I were shivering hard, so he slid into my place to hold Roany's head and I ran to get sleeping bags. I called Debbie to say I thought we were close and Doc to say I thought we might not need him. When I got back across the pasture, Roany's head was still

in Mike's lap, but now he was struggling for breath.

"Touch him," Mike said. I knelt and put my hand on his big red neck, and he took one breath and then another and then the last breath he would take forever. "I was helping him go," Mike said. "I was with him in that place, you know?" I nodded. I did know. I had been in that place with several dogs and more than one human. Mike said, "I think he was waiting until you got back."

A moment later, the first rays of sun came over the hill, turning the sky electric. I crossed the pasture one more time to get Roany's brushes to groom him up for burial. I grabbed some hay for Deseo so that if he wanted an excuse to stay near his old friend for a while, he would have one.

Debbie's husband, Billy Joe Dilley, had a dozen things to do that morning, but he arrived at the ranch before the first vulture (or even fly) made its appearance. I don't know Debbie very well, and Billy Joe hardly at all, but as much as anything else this is a story about them and about the way

people in my town care for one another. When I tried to pay Billy Joe for his time, or even for petrol, he shook his head and said, "An old cowboy doesn't take money to bury an old horse." He buried Roany respectfully and efficiently, the cowboy way, with his tail to the wind.

If there is such a thing in the world as a good death, Roany had one. It was almost as if he had heard Mike's offer, looked at his watch, and

said, *All right then, Wednesday, and how about in that stand of spruce on the other side of the hill?*

What I've always said about Roany is that he was a horse

who never wanted to cause anybody trouble. He remained that horse till the last second of his life and beyond.

That night, I watched the Perseids burn past my window and imagined my old Roany up there, muscles restored to their prime and shining, burgundy coat alongside the white of Pegasus, both of them with their heads held high, and galloping. **R**

FROM *OUTSIDE* (MAY 2019), © 2019 BY PAM HOUSTON, OUTSIDEONLINE.COM

*"An old cowboy
doesn't take
money to bury
an old horse"*



Gratitude Attitude

"None is more impoverished than the one who has no gratitude. Gratitude is a currency that we can mint for ourselves, and spend without fear of bankruptcy." FRED DE WITT VAN AMBURGH

WHO KNEW?

HISTORY FACTS

That Sound Fake But Aren't

They don't teach you the weird stuff at school

BY Emma Taubenfeld

THE USE OF FORKS WAS ONCE CONSIDERED SACRILEGIOUS

This widely used eating utensil was seen as offensive to God when it was first introduced to Italy in the 11th century. Oddly enough, people used to eat with their fingers and pointed knives. The number of fingers used for eating distinguished the upper class from other classes. Three fingers were considered to be good manners. The oldest forks were discovered in Turkey, dating back to the fourth millennium BCE, but it was likely that they were only used



as tools. The Catholic Church in Italy argued that God had created humans with fingers so that they could eat God's food, but this didn't stop the production of expensive forks made of gold for wealthy families.

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES, FROM RD.COM

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NAUGHTY PARROT

During US President Andrew Jackson's funeral in 1845, his pet parrot, Poll, began to speak obscenities and had to be removed. The parrot

became excited while the crowd was gathering and began to swear, disturbing the mourners. The bird was promptly escorted out as people were both in awe and horrified at its choice of words.



PEA-SIZED WAKE-UP CALL

Before alarm clocks, people were hired to wake up others by shooting dried peas at their window. Not your typical wake-up call. The 'knocker upper' was a common sight in Britain in the early 1900s. They would use long sticks like fishing poles or soft hammers to tap on windows as a wake-up call, or pea shooters in which they blew dried peas up at the window of the sleeper. One problem

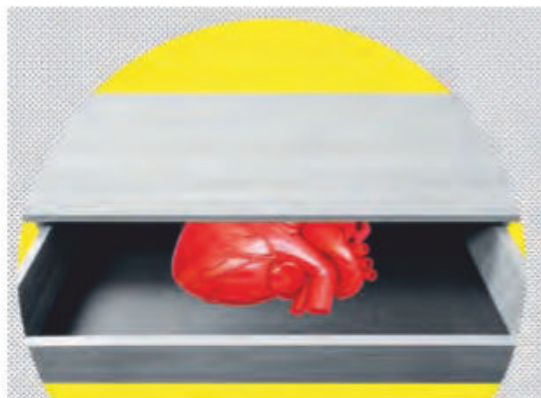


these employees faced was waking people up for free because the noise they made would inadvertently wake up the neighbours who did not pay.



A WAR ON CATS

In the 13th century, the pope believed that cats carried the spirit of Satan within them which sparked the notion that black cats symbolise bad luck. In response, the Catholic Church and all its followers initiated the extermination of cats. Some historians even believed that this massacre of cats contributed to the plague because of the abundance of rodents carrying the disease and the lack of their natural predator. The slaughters mostly stopped after the death of Pope Gregory IX.



AUTHOR'S HEART-FELT ATTACHMENT

Mary Shelley, who wrote *Frankenstein*, kept the heart of her dead husband in her desk drawer. Maybe the author intended for this to be some sort of metaphor. Everyone grieves differently. Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Shelley's husband, was 29 years old when he drowned while out on his boat during a storm. While his remains were buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome, Mary kept her husband's heart wrapped up and carried it with her almost everywhere.



UNUSUAL MOUTHWASH

Human urine was so valuable to ancient Romans that it was collected from public urinals and even taxed when sold. Urine was used for many purposes, but most amusingly, it was used for dental hygiene. Romans used the urine to clean and whiten their teeth. The active ingredient being ammonia, which is a proven stain remover.



MARY REALLY HAD A LITTLE LAMB

Mary was indeed a real person and she did in fact have a little lamb. Mary Sawyer was born in 1806 and her lamb followed her to school one day around 1816. When Mary arrived at school, she wrapped the lamb in a blanket that she placed at her feet until it made a noise, informing the teacher of its presence. John Roulstone had just arrived in town and witnessed Mary sneaking the animal into school, so he wrote a poem about the incident and delivered it to Mary.



ALBERT EINSTEIN ALMOST BECAME PRESIDENT

When Chaim Weizmann, Israel's first president, passed away in 1952, Albert Einstein was offered the role by Ambassador Abba Eban. The offer was upon the request of the Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. Einstein would have had to relocate to Israel and accept Israel as his nationality but would be free to pursue his scientific endeavours. He replied that due to his inexperience working with people, he wasn't qualified to fulfil a role in a high office. **R**



Lost and Found

A man who lost his wallet at a New Year's Eve party on the beach in Lennox Head, New South Wales, was reunited with his lost property 25 years later. Joseph Bewes, who found the wallet, posted on Facebook: "Paul G Davis. Found your wallet washed up on the beach. Sorry, all the cards expired in '95 but the 5 bucks might still be good. You just bought future you a coffee 25 years ago. Yew!"

A woman identified her husband's cousin as the person who had lost the wallet. The two men met up at the beach for a chat and to exchange the wallet. UPI.COM

BLACK ON WHITE

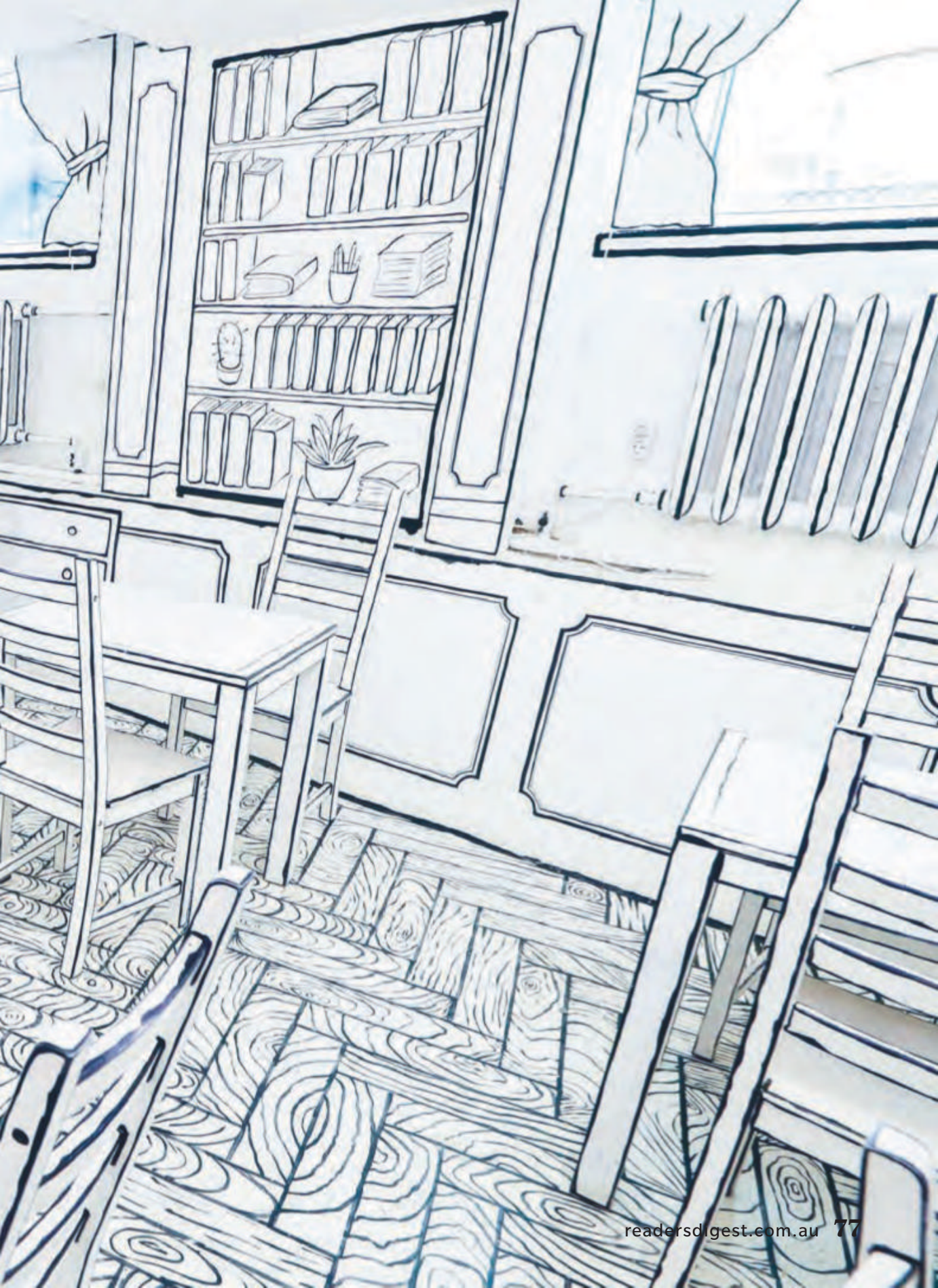
Colour is just so passé

BY *Cornelia Kumfert*

► **Like stepping into a comic book** is the way patrons of this St Petersburg cafe feel when they come through the door. Russian artist Anfisa Toshina transformed the complete interior of the B&W Cafe into a black and white sketch, which gives the room and its furnishings this stunning two-dimensional appearance. The colourful contrast is provided by faithful customers, who have been enjoying their coffee in the artful ambience near the famous State Hermitage Museum since 2019.

PHOTO: PICTURE ALLIANCE/ALEXANDER
DEMIANCHUK/TASS







◀ **With that bright pink skin** it is hard to believe that the inside of this juicy dragon fruit is black and white. The pitaya, actually a type of cactus, has white pulp and black seeds beneath its bright outer shell. Often used only as decoration because of its outward appearance, this sweet-sour fruit originating from Central America, and now grown all over the world, is full of vitamins, making it both healthy and tasty.

▶ **These famed stripes** seem to offer little help in camouflaging zebras from would-be predators at first glance, but the conspicuous pattern in fact does indeed offer protection. Africa is not only home to these beautiful wild equines but also tsetse fly species, which can carry fatal diseases. Scientists have found that the black-and-white pattern confuses flies when they try to land, meaning the zebras get bitten less frequently.

◀ **88 Keys – 52 white and 36 black**
The stark contrast between the different types of piano keys helps musicians quickly navigate. The white keys represent the musical tones and the black keys the half step intervals between those tones. In earlier times the white keys were made from polished ivory while the black keys were formed from ebony. Now that both elephants and ebony trees are protected, plastic-coated pine has replaced the materials for the keys – still in black and white, of course.



PHOTOS: (TOP) RICARDO RIBAS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; (BOTTOM) GETTY IMAGES/SERGII IAREMENKO/
SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY; (RIGHT) GETTY IMAGES/SEN LIN PHOTOGRAPHY



READER'S DIGEST



◀ **Hand in hand against racism**

Since African-American hip-hop artist George Floyd was killed by a white police officer in Minneapolis in May last year, people around the globe have joined in solidarity against systematic racism and its effects on society.

▼ **The characteristic reflective**

white bark of the birch tree is breathtaking to look at, but also protects the broad-leaved tree from



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

mid-winter warming by the sun. Such warming can crack the tree's bark and stems when it rapidly cools at night.

► **A black hat**, a chalk-white face, plus characteristic moustache and cane – Charlie Chaplin's style was unmistakable and made him one of the largest Hollywood stars of all time. The legendary actor, born in London, worked on about 80 films – only one of which was in colour.







HEALTH

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS!

Inflammation is behind so many health issues. Here's how to stop it

BY *Mike Zimmerman*

FROM **AARP**

Cancer, heart disease, dementia, diabetes: in the lexicon of ageing and disease, these are some worrisome words. But researchers have suspected for years that all of these health issues, and more, have at their heart one common trigger: chronic low-grade inflammation. And now they may finally have proof.

In 2017 researchers in Boston reported on a clinical trial with more than 10,000 patients (mean age: 61) from 39 countries that tested whether an anti-inflammatory drug, canakinumab, could lower rates of heart disease. They discovered that it could, but they also found that it reduced lung cancer mortality by more than 67 per cent. Reports of gout and arthritis, which are conditions linked to inflammation, also fell.

"Inflammation plays a role in everyone's health," says rheumatologist Dr Dana DiRenzo. When inflammation levels increase, so does the risk of disease. But understanding inflammation can be tricky because, when you get a disease, inflammation levels naturally increase as your body fights the condition. Inflammation, in other words, is both good and bad.

WHEN IS INFLAMMATION A PROBLEM?

When you catch the flu and your body temperature rises to fight the virus, that's a form of acute inflammation. So is the redness and swelling that occur when you sprain your ankle. The process is a temporary, helpful response to an injury or illness. It provides the healing chemicals and nutrients your body needs to repair the damage. Once the danger goes away, so does the inflammation.

Chronic low-grade inflammation, on the other hand, is a slow, creeping condition sustained by a misfiring of the immune system that keeps your body in a constant, long-term state of alert, says rheumatologist

Dr Robert H. Shmerling.

Over time, inflammation damages healthy cells. Here's why: when cells are in distress, they release chemicals that alert the immune system.

White blood cells then flood the scene, where they work to eat up bacteria, viruses, damaged cells and debris from an infection or injury. If the damage is too great, they call in backup cells known as neutrophils, which are the hand grenades of the immune system – they blow up everything in sight, healthy or not. Each neutrophil has a short life span, but in chronic inflammation, they

**IT'S SLOW,
IT'S CREEPING –
AND IT KEEPS
YOUR BODY ON
CONSTANT
ALERT**

continue to be sent in long after the real threat is gone, causing damage to the healthy tissue that remains. The inflammation can start attacking the linings of your arteries or intestines, the cells in your liver and brain or the tissues of your muscles and joints.

This inflammation-caused cellular damage can trigger conditions such as diabetes, cancer, dementia, heart disease, arthritis and depression. And because it's low grade, "its slow and secret nature makes it hard to diagnose in day-to-day life," says Roma Pahwa, a researcher for the US National Institutes of Health who specialises in the inflammatory response. "You have no idea it's even happening until those conditions show symptoms."

CAUSES OF CHRONIC INFLAMMATION

When you contract a chronic infection, such as hepatitis C, your body responds with inflammation that also lingers for a long time. In fact, it's often the chronic inflammation, not the viruses themselves, that causes much of the long-term damage related to these diseases.

Genetics can be a factor. In some cases, the genes related to these health issues can be turned on by inflammation: diabetes and cancer are two genetically related diseases that can be triggered by it. In other cases, the gene itself leads to a misfiring of the immune system that causes the inflammation in rheumatoid arthritis,

Hidden & Dangerous



multiple sclerosis, lupus and other diseases.

The environment plays a role, too; pollution, air and water quality, environmental allergies and a host of other environmental factors can trigger and sustain inflammation. And then there's lifestyle: obesity, unregulated stress, tobacco use, drinking too much, lack of physical activity, lousy sleep and, of course, poor diet are all linked to chronic inflammation.

Plus, the older we are, the more exposure we've had to environmental toxins, stress, alcohol, bad foods and chronic diseases. Ageing also makes it more difficult for our bodies to properly manage our immune systems, to extract nutrients from food and to shed extra kilograms.

SOME OF THE KEY AGGRAVATING FACTORS

BELLY FAT Having a big belly means you have an excess of visceral fat, which builds up near your intestines and other internal organs. Every day, your belly fat is creating and releasing inflammatory compounds with Bond-villain names such as interleukin 6 and tumour necrosis factor-alpha. Remember, inflammation is a response to cell damage. Fat cells are bloated with triglycerides and as a result, they are very fragile and can easily rupture. When they do, they trigger an inflammatory response as the immune system sends white blood cells to clean up the spilled fuel.

CHRONIC STRESS If you handle stress poorly, or feel helpless or put-upon, your body goes into fight-or-flight mode, causing an increase in hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline - which directly trigger a rise in inflammation. If you have an auto-immunity-based skin condition like psoriasis, you've probably witnessed flare-ups at times of stress. Mindfulness techniques such as prayer and meditation have been shown to reduce some markers of inflammation and can help people suffering from chronic inflammatory conditions.

NOT ENOUGH EXERCISE Research has shown that you don't have to be a marathon runner to lower inflammation. In fact, a US study found that just 20 minutes of moderate exercise



suppresses the inflammatory response. One reason, says Thomas Buford, a professor of gerontology, is that exercise can positively affect your gut health.

"The difference between someone feeling OK and feeling great is exercise," says Dr DiRenzo. Even if you have physical limitations - bad knees, for example - exercise will most likely improve them. To get started, she suggests picking an activity you can do for five minutes a day. Next week, do it for seven minutes. It could be as simple as a brisk walk. "Yeah, you're going to be sore," she says, "but this is a good sore. Build and build and you will start to feel better."

POOR SLEEP If you have to pick one lifestyle area to improve, focus on sleep, both the quantity and quality.

It not only lowers your inflammation levels, it also helps you do everything else better. “I find when people give their body time to rest and lower stress, they have an easier time making smart food choices and getting exercise the next day,” says Dr Elizabeth Boham, a functional medicine specialist.

FOODS PLAY A MAJOR ROLE

Foods high in sugar or unhealthy fats, and low in fibre, top the list of ‘pro-inflammatory’ foods. They feed the ‘unhealthy’ bacteria in our digestive tract. We naturally have a balance of good and bad bacteria in our gut, but when the bad bacteria become too numerous, they can damage the lining of the digestive tract.

“The intestinal barrier that separates the microorganisms from the rest of your body can become permeable, allowing particles to escape into the body’s circulation,” says Professor Buford. This is a condition known as leaky gut. The immune system recognises these particles as foreign invaders and attacks. But since the gut keeps leaking, the immune system keeps attacking, which leads to chronic inflammation.

High-fibre foods like whole grains, fruit and vegetables help to restore gut

balance. They feed the good microbes in your gut during digestion, helping to correct dysbiosis (a lack of good bacteria). “There’s a lot of evidence that a high-fibre diet provides a positive balance of microbes and can potentially down-regulate inflammation,” Professor Buford says. Also important: avoid unhealthy fats because, he says, “even one high-fat meal can change the microenvironment.”

Red and processed meats can cause inflammation, but you don’t have to banish meat from your diet, Dr Boham says. This is particularly important for older adults because protein consumption may help prevent age-related muscle loss. “I recommend a balance between plant protein – nuts, seeds, beans, grains – and animal protein,” she says. She recommends organic, grass-fed meats and wild-caught fish, which have a lower inflammation factor. Try to eat one food from every colour of the rainbow every day.

IS THERE A TEST AND A CURE FOR CHRONIC INFLAMMATION?

The problem with testing is that we all have a certain amount of inflammation in our bodies, and levels fluctuate constantly, so a reading at 8am



**FOODS HIGH
IN SUGAR OR
UNHEALTHY FATS
ARE ‘PRO-
INFLAMMATORY’**

GOOD FOODS // BAD FOODS

What causes inflammation – and what soothes it?

CAUSES IT:

White bread

A diet low in fibre can allow unhealthy bacteria to gain the upper hand in your digestive system, contributing to a leaky gut, in which toxins are allowed to pass through into your body rather than being swept away by the digestive system.

SOOTHES IT:

Wholegrain bread

As the body digests fibre, like that found in whole grains, it creates butyrate, a beneficial fatty acid with anti-inflammatory powers. Butyrate may help prevent neurological decline.

CAUSES IT:

Deep-fried foods

Advanced glycation end products (AGEs) are inflammation-causing compounds produced when meats and grains are cooked at high heat – think doughnuts, french fries and fried chicken.

SOOTHES IT:

Healthy fats

Monounsaturated fats (olive oil, avocado, nuts) have been shown to lower the risk of heart disease, while polyunsaturated fats (fish, linseed) include an inflammation-busting mix of omega-6 and omega-3.

CAUSES IT:

Processed sweets

Most processed foods, especially desserts, are low in fibre, high in sugar and packed with chemicals, all of which are bad for the gut.

SOOTHES IT:

Fruit bowls and yoghurt

Certain fruit, vegetables and beans contain polyphenols, plant compounds with antioxidants that help mitigate the cell damage created by inflammation. Examples include resveratrol (wine, grapes) and catechins (tea, apples, berries). Live culture yoghurts contain healthy bacteria called probiotics.

CAUSES IT:

Bottled salad dressings

Look at the label of your favourite dressing. It's probably high in fat, salt and sugar. Make your own salad dressings with inflammation-fighting olive oil, lemon or vinegar, and spices.

SOOTHES IT:

Big, colourful salads

The vitamins and minerals that are found in fruit and vegetables help prevent oxidative stress – in other words, they fight inflammation. They have hundreds of antioxidants, such as vitamins A, C and E, as well as lycopene and selenium.

will be different from one at 8pm. Also, something harmless like the common cold will spike levels of disease-fighting chemicals in our blood, Dr DiRenzo says, so doctors don't routinely test for inflammation. "Testing should come as a result of certain symptoms like swollen joints."

For example, if you have heart disease, your doctor may test for C-reactive protein (C-RP), an inflammation marker that's been linked to cardiac issues. But just chasing inflammation itself, without specific indicators, can open a Pandora's box of unnecessary testing for patients, Dr DiRenzo says. "Instead of trying to pin down this nebulous term 'chronic inflammation', work closely with your doctor to identify specific-enough symptoms that may lead to a diagnosis of an inflammatory issue."

While researchers continue to experiment with anti-inflammatory drugs beyond ibuprofen, which has side effects such as stomach bleeding and increased blood pressure, none has been approved for use in

fighting chronic low-grade inflammation.

By a certain age, we all have some degree of inflammation in our bodies. The key is to keep it at a flickering ember and not let it erupt into a forest fire. If you smoke, drink a lot, carry a lot of extra weight, never exercise, eat poorly or are constantly stressed, your chances of having some level of chronic elevated inflammation are high. If you are lean, healthy, lead a balanced lifestyle, stay up to date on your vaccinations and wash your hands regularly - because infections trigger inflammation - Dr Shmerling says, you should have less of it.

Lifestyle is the thing you can change fastest and the one thing you can control. Maybe you dread that changes like adding exercise and improving your diet will be unpleasant. But heart surgery is probably much more unpleasant. And isn't attacking one enemy - inflammation - a lot easier than worrying about dozens of them? **R**

FROM AARP (NOVEMBER 1, 2019), © 2019 BY AARP, AARP.ORG

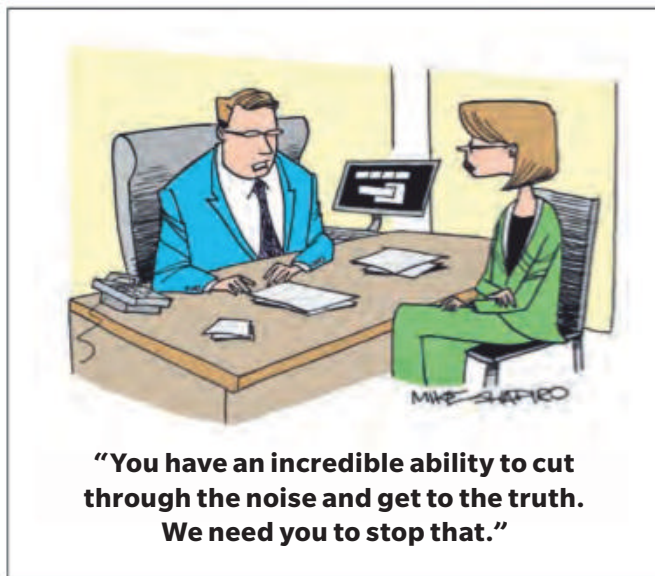


Delivery Macho

A sushi restaurant in central Japan boosted sluggish demand during the coronavirus pandemic by sending shirtless bodybuilders to deliver food to its customers. The service, dubbed Delivery Macho, has become a sensation on Instagram and social media. The couriers will flex their muscles on request. It was established by 41-year-old Imazushi chef Masanori Sugiura who is also a bodybuilding competitor. REUTERS

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Humour on the Job



Right Click

I was asking my kindergarten class about the noises animals make, which they all got correct until we got to a mouse.

“Click,” they kept repeating. It took me a while to figure it out – even four year olds use computers these days!

SUBMITTED BY SHERYL SCOTT-COOPER

In Order

A woman came to our funeral home asking for help finding a family member's burial site. It took me a few minutes to look up the information and even longer to walk to and locate the actual plot.

The woman, now tired and winded,

scolded, “You know, this would be a whole lot easier if you just put them in alphabetical order.”

SUBMITTED BY SANDY MOFFETT

Quite Dotty

Client: There are four dots above the word ‘sensitivities’ in this design.

What are they doing there?

Me: Those are the dots on the i's.

CLIENTSFROMHELL.NET

Taxing Job

My brother worked as a tax auditor for the government. He was dispatched to perform an audit at a nudist colony, but he didn't uncover anything.

SUBMITTED BY HELEN VAN ZUTPHEN

One Born Every Minute

A university student was visiting my farm and noticed the ring in our bull's nose. Intrigued, she asked, "Did you put that ring in his nose or was he born that way?"

SUBMITTED BY DONNA HATCH

Chunk of Change

Tip-jar humour in our local coffee shop: 'Afraid of Change? Leave It Here.'

SUBMITTED BY PAULA HASSLER

Red Letter Day

A letter arrived at our post office with the address crossed out and this message scribbled in red next to it: "Addressee doesn't live here anymore (THANK GOODNESS!!!)."

SUBMITTED BY ANNETTE CLARKSTON

Taking the Initiative

My boss told me to have a good day... so I went home.

SUBMITTED BY DEREK YOUNG

THE CUSTOMER IS (NOT) ALWAYS RIGHT

The Outside-the-Box Thinker award goes to the customer who called a travel agency asking about legal requirements while travelling in Europe. "If I register my car in France and then take it to England, do I have to change the steering wheel to the other side of the car?"

CUSTOMERTHINK.COM

DOUBLE MEANINGS

The Columbia University School of Journalism often points out the best in the news business. Here, they point out the not-so-best:

Advertisement:

'One of the greatest gifts you'll ever give your family may be your funeral.'

Headlines:

- ◆ 'City Manager Tapes Head to District Attorney'
- ◆ 'Netflix Misses Subscriber Mark'

**WE'RE
HIRING**

UNUSUAL INTERVIEW STORIES

Multitasking Snacker:

I'm not a recruiter but a restaurant manager. We were opening a new location and doing interviews. A woman came in for a management position. During the interview,

she reached into her handbag and pulled out a packet and started eating. The other manager told her to put it away and she told him it was OK, she could multi-task.

Needy Napper:

I recently interviewed a

university graduate who asked if we had a nap room. He said his doctor advised him to take an hour nap a day. If he was hired he would provide the appropriate medical records, but he required a special nap room.

Daily Mail



TRUE CRIME



THE BANK ROBBER ON THE BICYCLE

*Tom Justice chased Olympic gold on his bike.
Then he used it as a getaway vehicle*



BY *Steven Leckart*

FROM **CHICAGO**, PUBLISHED IN
PARTNERSHIP WITH EPIC MAGAZINE

PHOTOS: JOLEEN ZUBEK (MONEY); ILLUSTRATION BY WAYNE BREZINKA



Start your account number here

Bank Teller will fill out this part **711**



Check No. **203**
Date **9-15** 19__
Payable to
James Dept of Revenue
for Long-Distance Tax
AMOUNT OF CHECK **14**
665

PLEASE DO NOT CUT BAG WHEN OPENING

2002
9-15
Payable to
James Dept. of Revenue
67937
AMOUNT OF CHECK **27 69**
BALANCE
Amt. of Deposit
BALANCE



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

F8184506

WASHINGTON, D.C.

THE MAN IN THE BASEBALL CAP

and sunglasses waited for the teller to notice him. The morning of May 26, 2000, was quiet inside the LaSalle Bank in Highland Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago.

"May I help you?" said the young woman behind the counter. The man reached to the back of his khaki pants as if to fish out a wallet. Instead, he presented her with an index card. The teller's smile wilted as she stared at the words: 'THIS IS A ROBBERY. PUT ALL OF YOUR MONEY IN THE BAG.'

The robber, a slender man wearing a smart blue oxford shirt, returned the card to his pocket. "Nice and easy," he said coolly, handing over a plastic shopping bag. While the teller anxiously transferred bundles of cash, the man gently pressed his palms together as if he were about to whisper "Namaste".

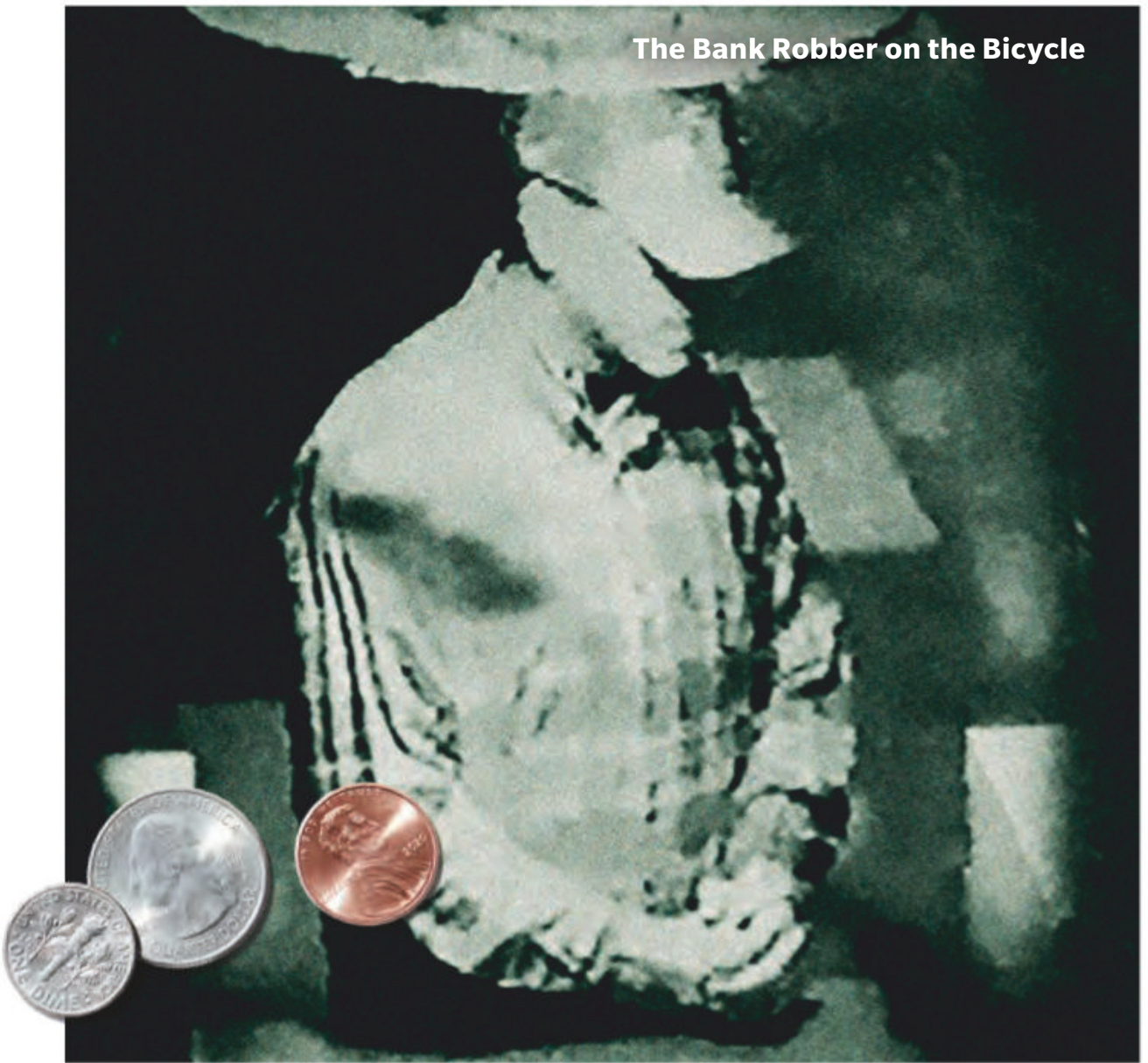
"Thank you," he said, and walked out the front door. Less than two minutes later, he emerged from an underground carpark carrying a bicycle on one shoulder, a messenger bag over the other and wearing a red, white and blue spandex bodysuit. He climbed onto the bike and cruised up to a rubbish bin. After fishing two crisp \$20 banknotes out of the plastic bag, he held it upside down over the bin. Several bundles of cash - \$4009 in all - tumbled into the bin. The man then slowly pedalled away.

SEATED IN THE STANDS, 13-year-old Tom Justice watched in awe as the cyclists careened around the outdoor track of the Ed Rudolph Velodrome, outside Chicago. Before 1983, Tom had never seen a bicycle race, let alone a velodrome. But from the moment he entered the stadium, he was transfixed.

He returned a week later with his maroon Schwinn bike. As the stadium lights buzzed, a dozen suburban kids gathered on the track. Everyone was wearing T-shirts and gym shorts except for Tom, who stood out in the professional-grade jersey and padded cycling shorts his father had just bought him.

Tom won the 12-to-14-year-old heat easily. Straddling his bike, his chest still heaving, he felt a surge of adrenaline. He had finally found something at which he excelled. His father, Jay Justice, was thrilled. In 1987, just four years after his first velodrome victory, Tom was selected to attend the Olympic training camp in Colorado Springs.

But after finishing high school, Tom's commitment to cycling - and everything else - lapsed. Instead of



Tom often stood before the tellers with his hands pressed together

training, he broke into empty houses to smoke cigarettes and drink beer with his friends.

Somehow Tom still harboured grandiose expectations. And since nothing else ever clicked for him the way cycling had, after graduating from university, he moved to Los Angeles to train alongside the US Olympic team. He did little

to distinguish himself. The other sprinters could tell he lacked discipline. “Tom’s fast, but he doesn’t train right,” one noted. “He needs to apply himself.” He soon dropped out, returned to Chicago and found a job as a social worker. Helping people was a welcome distraction from his own issues. But after a while, it felt like a pointless slog.



Tom's fascination with bikes started early. He had this one when he was four

AS TOM'S OLYMPIC DREAM slipped away, he fantasised about identities he could substitute for the thrilling instant gratification of cycling. He made a list, and then wandered from interview to interview, growing increasingly unhappy with his mundane life. Late one night in 1998, Tom revisited the list he'd added to over the years. Under 'helicopter pilot' and 'lock picker', he'd scrawled two letters: 'B.R'. Bank robber.

Several notorious bank robbers had spent time in Chicago. That history added to the allure for Tom. At a wig shop in the same neighbourhood where gangster John Dillinger hid out, Tom considered his options. Ultimately, he settled on black plaits that made him look like 'Super Freak' singer Rick James.

On October 23, 1998, Tom entered his parents' garage, grabbed his messenger bag and Fuji AX-500 bike, and pedalled towards Libertyville. He coasted up to a tree-lined fence between two houses and slid on a pair of khakis pants and a blue oxford shirt over his cycling spandex. He slipped on his wig and dark over-size sunglasses, reminiscent of Jackie Onassis Kennedy's, and then continued on foot to the American National Bank branch.

When Tom approached the teller, she perked up immediately. Halloween had apparently come early this year. Then the love child of Rick James and Jackie O handed her an index card but wouldn't let go of it. As an awkward tug-of-war ensued, the teller leaned in and read the message. Tom

slid his plastic bag across the counter, and she loaded it up with cash.

Tom strode outside, bag in hand. His heartbeat surged. His legs tingled. Two minutes later, he was beside his bike, feverishly stripping down. He shoved his disguise and the money into his messenger bag.

Then he casually cycled back to his parents' house. He parked his bike in the garage and tiptoed into the basement. Kneeling on the shagpile carpet, he looked at the money and began to weep. It had been a long time since Tom had felt this alive – or this important.

For months, that \$5580 he'd stolen sat in a gym bag inside the wardrobe of his old room at his parents' house. Tom assumed the banknotes were traceable, so he kept only two \$20s as souvenirs. Late one night, he tossed the remaining cash into a few rubbish bins.

Nearly one year after his first robbery, Tom committed his second. This time, he discarded the banknotes in laneways where he knew homeless people would find them. Robbing banks, and giving away the money, was intoxicating. Tom saw himself as both mischievous and righteous.

But that feeling faded. Tom's real life seemed mediocre and unfulfilling. He

wrestled with depression and brooded over the realisation that at 29, his window of opportunity to become a world-class cyclist had nearly passed. If he wanted to pursue his Olympic dream, he had to do it now. He told his girlfriend, Laura, he was moving to Southern California to train for the Olympic trials. He had retained his classification as a Category 1 cyclist, so he would automatically qualify for the trials.

When he arrived in California, Tom looked in the mirror and told himself, "I'm not going to rob any more banks."

"How's it going?" asked Laura, calling from Chicago.

"Well!" replied Tom. His skin was tan from his time at the San Diego Outdoor Velodrome. Every morning, he worked through the Olympic strength-training regime to build muscle mass. His already explosive dead start was getting deadlier. As the weeks passed in early 2000, Tom rounded into the best shape of his life.

But the monotony of training was setting in. The day after Valentine's Day, he hit a bank in Encinitas. On February 29, one in Solana Beach. The next day, another in Encinitas. Two weeks later, one in San Diego. On March 24, Tom robbed two banks,

**TOM'S
HEARTBEAT
SURGED.
IT HAD BEEN
A LONG TIME
SINCE HE'D
FELT THIS
ALIVE**



nabbing his biggest score yet: \$10,274.

Then one morning, an intense pain surged through Tom's lower back. He'd thrown it out overtraining. It would take weeks before he could pedal without waking up in agony the day after. His plan to race in the Olympic trials was over.

Soon after he returned to Chicago, Laura dumped him. He moved into an apartment with George, a 104-kilogram hulk who worked nights.

"What do you do?" asked Tom. "I'm a cop," said George.

Once his lower back recovered, Tom robbed the La-Salle Bank in Highland Park – the heist in which he dumped his \$4009 haul in a garbage bin. The next week, he hit three banks in three days. George had no clue his roommate had just knocked over his 13th bank.

IN 2001, TOM JOINED A CLUB CYCLING TEAM run by Higher Gear, a bike shop. One day, the shop's manager mentioned to Tom that a local rider was selling a used Steelman. Steelman bicycles are exceptional. Tom, whose own bike had recently been stolen, was looking for a replacement. As soon as he saw the Steelman, he was torn. It was painted a garish Day-Glo orange. But he knew that a used Steelman didn't just magically

appear every day, so he bought it.

By this point, Tom had stopped giving away the cash from his robberies. He was becoming dependent on drugs. He had no job, but he had pockets full of cash and cocaine. As he increased dosages, his post-high depression deepened.

Tom started attending Narcotics Anonymous meetings. When it was his turn to share, he talked about merely experimenting with drugs. He was in denial. "This is going to be my last meeting," he announced after just six weeks. He said he was moving

back to California. He was planning to study further there. Everybody in the room wished him luck.

"TWO-ELEVEN IN PROGRESS." The voice crackled through the radio in Officer Greg Thompson's squad car. Someone had just robbed a Union Bank

in Walnut Creek, California. It was March 7, 2002, a drizzly day. Thompson was passing a parking garage when a cyclist shot out of the driveway and flew behind the police car. The cyclist looked like every other weekend warrior, except for one detail: the messenger bag draped over his shoulder.

An 18-year police veteran, Thompson taught new recruits to thrive

BY THIS POINT, TOM HAD STOPPED GIVING AWAY THE CASH FROM HIS ROBBERIES



on instinct. This was one of those moments. But before he could flash his lights, the cyclist pulled over, hopped off his bike, and started fidgeting with his back wheel. Thompson parked a few metres ahead and walked back to the cyclist. Tom pretended to adjust his brakes before climbing onto the bike and clicking his left foot into the pedal.

“Do you mind if I take a look in your bag?” Thompson asked.

“Yeah, no problem. I just have to unclip,” replied Tom. “These pedals are actually counterbalanced, so I need to click into both in order to get out at the same time.”

There’s no such thing as counterbalanced pedals. But Thompson didn’t know that. He watched as the cyclist lifted his right foot, clicked down into the pedal, and – *whoosh!* – bolted into the street in a dead start as exceptional as any Tom had ever mustered on a velodrome.

A few blocks away, Officer Sean Dexter was sitting in a squad car when he spotted a cyclist on an orange bike charging through traffic towards a red light. Dexter pulled into the intersection, but the cyclist didn’t stop.

Tom swerved around the police car, crossed two lanes, and hopped the footpath. He headed towards a tall fence bordering a thicket of



As a teenager, Tom qualified to compete in the Olympic trials as a track cyclist

4.5-metre-high bamboo. Dexter reached for his radio, but before he could even open his mouth, another cop hopped on the channel. “A guy on a bicycle just ran from me!”

“I’ve got him right here!” Dexter shouted into the radio.

Dexter got out of his car and paced towards the fence. He slowly cracked the gate and peered into the jumbled mess of vegetation. A creek flowed nine metres below, amid fallen tree branches and piles of wet leaves.

Sirens blared as officers secured the perimeter. While Dexter and Thompson walked the upper banks, police dogs combed the creek. After about 15 minutes, a detective spotted something in the leaves: an orange



Left: Tom while he was living with a cop – and robbing banks. Right: the Steelman bike

bicycle. Then a German shepherd from the K-9 unit led them to a pair of cycling shoes hidden under a concrete wall beneath a bridge.

As the sky grew bleaker, the search was called off. They had one good clue, though: the orange bicycle.

Tom was lying facedown in a cold, damp dirt tunnel. Hours earlier, as the orange Steelman tumbled through the brush, Tom had slid down the embankment. He trudged 15 metres upstream and took cover underneath a bridge, where he discovered a 60-centimetre-wide hole at the water's edge. He crawled in and squirmed 3.5 metres to the tunnel's narrow end. Panting in the dark, he heard sirens, then faint voices and the jingling of a dog's tags. Tom assumed that was the end. But then – a miracle. The cops gave up the search.

IT WAS DARK WHEN TOM EMERGED. He had parked his 1983 Mercedes-Benz about three kilometres away.

He found it and drove home. "Is everything OK?" asked Tom's roommate at the time, Marty.

"Yeah, just a rough couple of days," Tom replied.

A 1.9-metre-tall opera singer, Marty wasn't looking for a new friend, but he'd found one in Tom. Marty knew Tom was snorting cocaine, but he was unaware of his other vices.

"What's going on?" asked Marty.

"I can't say," Tom said.

"Tom, you can tell me anything."

Eventually, Tom reluctantly told Marty everything.

"What are you going to do?" Marty asked.

"I need to buy a ticket home," Tom said. He wanted to see his parents before the cops found him.

Although he didn't know anything about bikes, Officer Dexter had a hunch that the orange 12-speed was special. He walked it from the station to a nearby bike shop. A guy behind the counter said the frame

The Bank Robber on the Bicycle

was custom-made by a man named Steelman. Dexter called the company and spoke to Steelman's wife, who handled the bookkeeping. She told Dexter that the serial number he had might be for a 1996 orange bicycle sold at a shop called Higher Gear in Chicago.

Dexter called Higher Gear, but the guy who answered said they didn't keep records that far back.

Meanwhile, the FBI was doing its own investigating. A month later, the manager of a bicycle shop in Chicago called the Walnut Creek police. In 1996, he'd assembled the orange bike. He knew the original owner and the guy who'd bought it second-hand.

TOM AND HIS FATHER sat in the kitchen. It was less than a week since Tom had confessed to Marty.

"How's that job of yours?" Jay asked his son. "What's your plan for the future?" As far as he knew, Tom was working as a bike messenger.

Tom replied that he planned to apply for some study programmes.

Jay nodded. Sounds familiar.

Tom headed out the door. "See you guys later," he called as he drove off in his car.

When the first police car appeared

behind him, Tom didn't think much of it. Then there were three more. Red lights were now flashing. Tom pulled over and glanced back. Five cops were aiming their guns at him.

As the handcuffs tightened around his wrists, Tom wanted to cry, not out of despair or fear but out of a much heavier sense of something he wasn't expecting: relief. After four years, his self-destructive cross-country loop was finally coming to an end.

In the interrogation room, an FBI agent placed a photograph on the table. It was a security-cam shot of Tom. The orange Steelman had led them right to him. Riding an average bicycle, Tom might never have been caught.

He gave a full confession. In all, he had robbed 26 banks and stolen \$129,338. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 11 years in jail.

After being released, Tom returned to cycling at his local velodrome. He also eventually found a job at a doughnut shop. Little do the cops know that the 49 year old handing them their chocolate glazed doughnut is one of the most prodigious bank robbers in history. **R**

CHICAGO (JANUARY 29, 2019) IN PARTNERSHIP WITH EPIC MAGAZINE. © 2019 BY VOX MEDIA, LLC



Bad Timing

Honestly, my worst purchase of 2020 was a 2020 planner.

@LAURENROSAAA

It's Just a Little
Tradition
We Have...



Europe enjoys a rich heritage of offbeat rituals and ceremonies

BY *Tim Hulse*

THE SWIM FOR THE HOLY CROSS, EASTERN EUROPE

Each year on January 19 – right in the middle of winter with temperatures close to freezing – the brave gather for an outdoor swimming race. The Swim for the Holy Cross is an event held in freezing bodies of water across Eastern Europe, from Serbia to the former Soviet Union and from the Black Sea to the Bosphorus, as the Orthodox Church celebrates Jesus's baptism in the River Jordan. A priest in full ceremonial regalia tosses a wooden cross into the icy water and, cheered on by watching crowds, swimmers race to retrieve it. It's said the winner will be blessed and have a prosperous year.

THORRABLOT, ICELAND

What better way to help you get through the Icelandic winter than a meal of pickled ram's testicles, fermented shark meat and boiled

**The Swim for the Holy
Cross in Romania**

READER'S DIGEST

sheep's head? And would sir or madam perhaps like some dung-smoked lamb to accompany that? This is the hearty traditional fare of the Icelandic celebration of Thorrablot, an annual festival from mid-January to mid-February that dates back to pre-Christian times. And it's all washed down with Brennivin, a potent, herb-scented liquor fondly known as 'Black Death'. *Skál!*

BURNS SUPPER, SCOTLAND

Not to be outdone by the Icelanders, the Scots celebrate the birthday of their national poet, Robert Burns, on January 25 by eating a giant sausage of minced sheep's heart, liver and lungs wrapped, by tradition, in the animal's stomach lining. This is the famous haggis, which is the centrepiece of a Burns Supper. Burns's poem 'Address to a Haggis' is recited when the haggis is brought to the table, and a knife is plunged into its "gushing entrails", as Burns (pictured above) put it.

The Burns Night format dictates that a toast be given by a man expounding humorously on the role of women. A female guest then replies, giving her views on men. "You have to be reasonably thick-skinned as it's an



opportunity for each sex to take shots at the other's failings," says Burns Night veteran Jennie Landels. "But, as the woman, you also get the last word, so you can add in a few clever quips!"

MARTIS, GREECE

On the last day of February Greeks make or buy a red and white woven bracelet, which they wear during March to celebrate the coming of spring and – in theory – prevent their cheeks being burnt by the sun. The tradition, also practised in Balkan countries, is known as *Martis*, after the Greek word for March.

"This simple bracelet had a magic power on my spirits. As soon as I wore it, I felt as if the depressing winter period of the year had ended,"

Below: On March 8 Italians recognise International Women's Day with mimosa flowers



says Angelica Papastamati, who remembers weaving the bracelets as a child. In rural areas it's also traditional for wearers to tie their bracelet to the first flowering tree they see – or to a rose bush if they see a swallow.

LA FESTA DELLA DONNA, ITALY

For more than a century International Women's Day has been celebrated around the world, and in many countries a public holiday is held to recognise the struggles and achievements of women.

In Italy, La Festa della Donna, which is celebrated on March 8, has perhaps a little more in common with Valentine's Day or Mother's Day, with women receiving bouquets of mimosa flowers from the men in their lives. Yellow, mimosa-themed foods are also part of the celebrations, including linguine mimosa, made with curry powder. In the evening, many women head out in groups for a Girls Night Out.

POISSON D'AVRIL, FRANCE

As in many countries, April 1 in France is a time for elaborate hoaxes. But for French schoolchildren, there's some extra fun involved, in the shape of *Poisson d'Avril* (April Fish), which involves sticking paper fish on to unsuspecting people's backs (pictured),

a tradition that dates back at least to the 16th century.

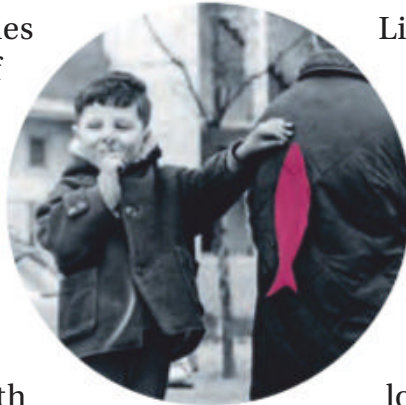
"I remember I used to love to catch my parents, grandparents, uncles and so on. And especially the teacher," says Mathieu Doyen, recalling his upbringing in northeast France. "And it still continues today. My eight-year-old son Martin loves it, it makes him laugh a lot!"

PÅSKEKRIM, NORWAY

Little did two young Norwegian authors know what they were starting back in 1923. To publicise their new crime novel, they launched an advertising campaign on the Sunday before Easter with what looked like a true story on the front page of the *Aftenposten* newspaper.

'Bergen Train Looted in the Night' ran the headline, and many believed it was true. From this grew a tradition for Norwegians to enjoy *Påskekrim* (Easter crime) over the Easter break, a time that is often spent in their rural ski cabins.

"When I was young, the cabins were very primitive with no electricity and we would listen to the battery-operated radio every evening over the course of the long weekend and get our fix of a crime series," says Oslo native Katrina Swift. "Today, they still do a special radio series and also a TV series."





Helsinki youngsters get carried away on Vappu day

In addition, Tine, Norway's largest collective of dairy farmers, puts a Påskekrim cartoon on its milk cartons in the run-up to Easter. Prizes go to lucky winners for guessing 'who-dunnit'.

EASTER WHIPPINGS, CZECH REPUBLIC

Easter Monday involves Easter Whippings in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and parts of Hungary. A long-held tradition involves the weaving of a stick from several willow rods, with a ribbon tied to the end, called a *pomlázka* in the Czech Republic. This is then used to whip women, ensuring

(allegedly) that they will remain beautiful, fertile and healthy for the rest of the year.

Fortunately, these days nothing more serious than a light tap is administered to the legs or buttocks. "I live in Prague, where *pomlázka* whipping is seen as old-fashioned by many people, but I've spent past Easter Mondays in my cottage in the country, where it's still a very popular tradition," says Petra Kostalka. "My grandparents, aunts and cousins who live there do all the traditions - *pomlázka* whipping, egg painting and baking special cakes. Me, I just do the egg painting."

VAPPU, FINLAND, SWEDEN, CZECH REPUBLIC

For Finnish students, Vappu day on May 1 signifies not only the beginning of summer but also the end of the college year. Donning colourful overalls and white caps, they throw themselves into the kind of celebrations at which students generally excel. "When I was a student it was mostly an excuse to get drunk with your friends and be out in the warm weather," confirms Peter Granfors, who grew up in the Finnish city of Vaasa. Vappu isn't just for students, there's a carnival atmosphere throughout the country.

SANKT HANS AFTEN, DENMARK

Things can get quite weird when the summer solstice comes around.

It's Just A Little Tradition We Have...

There's a long tradition in several European countries of lighting a bonfire to celebrate both the shortest night and St John's Eve, when the birth of John the Baptist is remembered.

But in Denmark, Sankt Hans Aften takes things a little further on June 23 by adding an effigy of a witch to the bonfire recipe. As it burns, those gathered together sing a patriotic song. The witch is said to symbolise all the misery that Denmark as a nation wants to avoid, and the song celebrates hope that peace will prevail.

Meanwhile, on the opposite shore of the Baltic, Latvians have their own way of celebrating midsummer. On Ligo night, people head outdoors and spend the night around an open fire and wait for the sun to come up. Women pick flowers to garland their hair, while men are supposed to

strip naked and jump into the nearest lake or river.

GUY FAWKES NIGHT, UNITED KINGDOM

Most Brits are probably unaware that Guy Fawkes Night on November 5, has its roots in anti-Catholic sentiment. While they all know that Fawkes plotted to blow up the House of Lords during the state opening of Parliament in 1605, they're generally less aware that Fawkes and his fellow plotters were aiming to assassinate King James I and to install the king's nine-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, as a Catholic head of state. Fortunately for the king, Guy Fawkes was arrested (pictured on the next page) before he could light the fuse. As a result, effigies of the Pope were regularly burned on bonfires on 'Gunpowder

Campfire fun on Ligo night in Latvia





Treason Day' in the 17th century. Today, all symbolism is mostly forgotten and Bonfire Night, as it's generally called, is a social occasion marked by spectacular firework displays.

CAGA TIÓ, SPAIN

Enter a Spanish family home in the regions of Catalonia and Aragon around December 8, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and you're likely to encounter a strange creature with a smiley face and a body made from a log, covered in a blanket. This is *Caga Tió*, whose name literally means 'pooping log'.

As Christmas Day approaches, children 'feed' their log with bread, orange peel or beans, and on Christmas Eve they beat him with a stick and demand that he 'poops' presents. Lo and behold, the presents are duly revealed under *Caga Tió*'s blanket. Their parents may have something to do with ensuring this occurs.

SAINT LUCIA'S DAY, SCANDINAVIA

Saint Lucia was a fourth-century Christian martyr. In one version of her story, her eyes were removed by her torturers, and she is now the patron saint of the blind (and other things,

too). Because her name derives from *lux*, the Latin word for light, she is also seen as the bearer of light in winter.

In Sweden, Norway, Denmark and parts of Finland, Saint Lucia's Day on December 13 is marked by processions in which young girls wear lighted wreaths on their heads, and boys in pyjama-like costumes sing traditional songs. At home, the eldest daughter serves coffee and saffron buns to the rest of the family.

Meanwhile, in Hungary, wheat is planted in a small pot on Saint Lucia's Day, and any green shoots that appear by Christmas are seen as signs of life coming from death.

WREN DAY, IRELAND

Until the middle of the last century, almost all of Ireland celebrated December 26 with a boisterous custom in which groups of boys painted their faces, dressed in old clothes and went from door to door singing, dancing and playing music. They would carry with them a dead wren, giving the celebration the name Wren Day, and they would demand money from householders to 'bury the wren'.

The good news for wrens is that the practice has all but died out, and now usually takes the form of a colourful street parade, sometimes with participants dressed in straw. No wrens are harmed. **R**

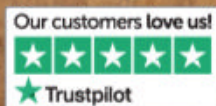
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DID YOU KNOW?

10 Surprising Facts About the Red Cross

BY Diane Godley



Henry Dunant founded the Red Cross after witnessing the horrors of war

1 THE EMBLEM We see the red cross emblem everywhere: first aid kits, pharmacy signs, children's toys and fancy dress costumes. Many people mistakenly believe that a red cross on a white background means medical assistance or healthcare. But during times of war, the Red Cross – as well as its associated emblems, the Red Crescent and Red Crystal – saves lives in a different way. The emblem worn by people and displayed on buildings and transport indicates that neutral humanitarian assistance is being provided, and signals to all parties in the conflict 'don't shoot'

2 FAR MORE THAN A LOGO Misuse of the Red Cross emblem in peacetime, even unintentionally, weakens its effectiveness should a conflict break out. It is also a breach of the law and can attract a hefty fine. The producers of Australian TV drama *Doctor Blake* found this out a few years ago when a bloodied red cross was used in its promotional material. Like many people, the producers had no idea the use of the symbol was protected until the Australian Red Cross explained its importance in conflicts.

3 FOUNDER While travelling in 1859 in what is now northern Italy, Swiss humanitarian Henry Dunant came across the Battle of Solferino and witnessed tens of thousands of injured and dying

soldiers on the battlefield without medical assistance. At that time, medical personnel were not distinguished from regular soldiers and would have been shot.

4 GENEVA CONVENTION On returning to Switzerland, Dunant advocated for a neutral organisation that could provide non-partisan care to wounded soldiers.

5 THE CROSS In 1864, the First Geneva Convention was attended by 12 countries. They adopted the distinctive symbol of a red cross on a white background (the opposite to the Swiss flag) into international law to provide protection to medical services in the armed forces during conflict as well as to the wounded.

6 RED CRESCENT Although no religious significance was intended, the Red Cross was rejected by the Turks in 1876 as it was seen as a symbol of Christianity. As a result, a red crescent moon on a white background, derived from the Ottoman Empire's flag, was used as its protective emblem, although it wasn't sanctioned as a second symbol until 1929 by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Since 2007, a third emblem has been recognised by the ICRC for nations not comfortable with either a cross or crescent: a red crystal on a white background.


7 WORLDWIDE MOVEMENT

Every member nation of the United Nations has agreed to be bound by the four Geneva Conventions. The first Geneva Convention protects wounded and sick soldiers on land during war; the second protects wounded, sick and shipwrecked military personnel at sea during war; the third applies to prisoners of war; and the fourth affords protection to civilians, including in occupied territory.

8 KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY

Unfortunately, this provision of protection is not always forthcoming during periods of unrest, and many Red Cross and Red Crescent workers have paid the ultimate price. In 2019 alone, 483 humanitarian aid workers were killed, kidnapped or wounded.

9 HOSPITAL SHIP In May, 1943, the AHS *Centaur*, an Australian hospital ship, was on its way to New Guinea from Sydney when it was torpedoed by Japanese naval forces off Queensland, claiming 268 lives. Underwater images of the sunken ship taken in 2009 clearly show large red crosses painted on its hull.

10 NOBEL PEACE PRIZE For his role in founding the International Red Cross and initiating the Geneva Convention, Dunant received the first-ever Nobel Peace Prize in 1901. 

The Pecking Order

*Two new residents of the Mann household
have a surprisingly soothing effect*

BY *Olly Mann*

We have purchased some chickens. As pets. This was not my idea. But, when it became apparent we were going to be spending a lot of time confined to our garden, with two kids to entertain, and the added benefit of fresh eggs, it seemed churlish to object.

They are called Skye and Flower. That wasn't my idea, either. Harvey, our four year old, initially christened them Skye and Rubble, after his two favourite characters on *Paw Patrol*; then changed Rubble's name to Flower once he realised that 'he' was a girl. He could have re-named her

Everest, after the other female puppy in *Paw Patrol*, or even Chickaletta, after the character who is an actual chicken, but *que sera*.

I knew nothing about chickens, so my first fear was that our cat, Alvin, might try to eat them. My wife – who was raised in the country with a veritable petting zoo in the garden – reassured me that cats and chickens happily co-exist and rarely bother each other. This turned out to be half-true. In fact, Alvin spends perhaps a third of his waking hours prowling up and down their fence, growling and occasionally even taking a spirited sprint across the

Skye

RUBBLE
FLOWER



garden to charge at them. But they just keep their heads down and ignore him. Moreover, when he's had opportunities to truly take advantage – when the door to their pen has been accidentally left open, for example – he has not helped himself to a paw-lick-in' chicken bucket, but, rather, sheepishly retreated to the kitchen. Our chickens are crossbreds – a hybrid variety called Black Rock. This tickles me because it's a hilariously macho, powerful term for such a patently idiotic, flappy pair of hens.

However, while they may not be especially stately creatures, I do think they're attractive: with their thick plumage, soft black feathers and fiery orange chests, their appearance is understated and autumnal.

If you think that sounds like I've spent a bit too long looking at them, you'd be correct. Perhaps the biggest surprise of welcoming these two birds to our family has been how soothing it is to simply watch them pecking and strutting about.

As every cat-owner knows, one of the pleasures of feline companionship is to witness them luxuriating in decadent selfishness. Sitting aside a well-fed, sleepy cat

encourages relaxation, because their life is so wholeheartedly, unembarrassedly devoted to self-pleasure. Our hens couldn't be more different – they spend every waking minute hunting, and seem to be continuously preoccupied – but their existence is so straightforward, so uncomplicated, that the effect of their presence is comparable. When I turn my deck chair to face the chicken pen, suddenly 15 minutes has gone by. I've done nothing more than get lost in their lives as they groom each other, co-operate to unearth a worm, or cluck and coo as the sun goes down. It's meditative.

Plus, the eggs! The eggs are great. For the first five weeks, Skye and Flower were alarmingly barren, but then one day in June they started laying and they haven't stopped since – two eggs, sometimes three, per day. They're not special or speckly or gooey, just your standard supermarket-style free range eggs – but because they are so fresh, they definitely taste better, with bright yellow yolks and still-warm shells.

We've been making more quiches and cakes than we're used to, and still have plenty of eggs left over, so we've also started gifting them



to visitors. It's amazing how appreciated a 'home-made' egg gift can be: had I bought them from a service station, presenting my grandma with a box of three eggs rather than a bunch of tulips would not go down very well.

So, I'm something of a convert, but a few steps short of an evangelist. For one thing, there's the cost. Our 'free' eggs are pretty pricey, by the time you factor in the hutch, fence, chicken feed and grit, and of course buying the chickens themselves. Then there's the obligation – when we go on holiday, we are going to have to recruit a chicken-sitter. Absurd. And am I really going to take a hen to the vet when it gets a gammy leg (answer: yes I am.

“I FEEL A FAINT SENSE OF GUILT THAT I OCCASIONALLY *munch wings* IN VIEW OF THE CHICKENS”

on barbecued buffalo wings within full view of the chickens. Then I remember that they have absolutely no interest in or awareness of anything I'm doing. And I feel relaxed again.

As life around us has sputtered and stopped and started again this last 12 months, they've provided a welcome distraction, a great education for my kids, and, best of all, some fabulous eggs Florentine. I'm drawing the line at a dog, though. For now. **R**



Ig Nobel Winners

The Ig Nobel Prize is a satiric prize awarded annually to celebrate unusual or amusing achievements in scientific research. Here are some of our favourites from 2020.

PSYCHOLOGY PRIZE (Canada, US): Miranda Giacomini and Nicholas Rule for devising a method to identify narcissists by examining their eyebrows.

ECONOMICS PRIZE (UK, Poland, France, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Australia, Italy, Norway, Italy): A group of scientists for trying to quantify the relationship between different countries' national income inequality and the average amount of mouth-to-mouth kissing. WWW.IMPROBABLE.COM

QUOTABLE QUOTES



Food showed me how much somebody can care about you – without actually having to say anything or having to make grand big gestures.

MARY BERG,
TV COOKING SHOW HOST

YOU'VE GOT TO TRY YOUR LUCK AT LEAST ONCE A DAY, BECAUSE YOU COULD BE GOING AROUND LUCKY ALL DAY AND NOT EVEN KNOW IT.

JIMMY DEAN, SINGER

It is a funny thing about life – if you refuse to accept anything but the best, you very often get it.

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM,
WRITER



The rules, like streets, can only take you to known places.

OCEAN VUONG, WRITER



A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you the less you know.

DIANE ARBUS,
PHOTOGRAPHER

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The Fairview Inn pub in Talkeetna, population 876. Right: The aurora borealis glows over scenic Glenn Highway



TRAVEL



SUPER NATURAL ALASKA

The land of the midnight sun remains as epic as ever

BY *Harry Pearson*

FROM **CONDE NAST TRAVELER**

It's between Anchorage and the vast, frozen farmland around Palmer that the sheer immensity of Alaska hits us. The Glenn Highway, pointing northeast from the city, curves around the glacier-fed waterway of the Knik Arm before entering the wide delta of Eklutna Flats. Beyond lie the Chugach Mountains, as white as fine china. The Alaska Railroad runs parallel to us, crossing the Matanuska River on a steel bridge so dwarfed by its surroundings it could be part of an old model train set. I already know the facts: the Last Frontier, as Alaska is sometimes called, has more coastline than the 48 US continental states put together, the tallest peak in North America, active volcanoes and glaciers, and three million lakes. But statistics can't prepare you for its almost planetary scale.

My girlfriend, Deryn, and I pull off the road and step out into the frigid silence. A yellow-and-blue train engine towing a long line of freight cars rumbles into view from the north, the harmonica wail of its whistle warning a few wandering moose. It's as if I'm on a film set; any moment the director will yell "Cut!" and the vast, snowy scenery will be carted off to reveal a studio lot.

A few years ago, my childhood friend Maggie from industrial north-east England improbably married an Alaskan bush pilot and moved to the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, less than

an hour north of Anchorage and en route to Denali National Park. "Don't come in the summer," she said. "There are swarms of flies and hordes of tourists. Come at the start of March, when there's tons of snow, the nights are lighter, and the cold won't kill you. That's when you'll see the real Alaska."

One day in early March, Deryn and I find ourselves in Anchorage, next to a bronze statue of the explorer Captain James Cook. We're looking across the glimmering inlet he charted in 1778, now named in his honour, towards North America's tallest peak. At 6190 metres, Denali is visible 200 kilometres away. Cook came here seeking the Northwest Passage, and the generous bonus the British Admiralty promised to any Royal Navy captain who could find it. He was not the first to seek fortune here, nor the last. Like so many others, he was turned back by freezing seas, his crew close to mutiny.

This morning there's a rumble ofutes bringing in teams of huskies for the ceremonial start of the famous Iditarod dog-sled race, a gruelling 1500-kilometre trek following an Inupiaq trail that was later used by coal and gold miners. On the advice of an affable Native Alaskan taxi driver, we breakfast at Gwennie's, where there's a wealth of frontier kitsch - gold-and-black eagle-print wallpaper; stuffed moose, muskox and bear heads; and photos of bygone mushing teams. We feast

PHOTOS: (ANCHORAGE) KEVIN G. SMITH/DESIGN PICS/GETTY; (JUMPING) SCOTT DICKERSON/DESIGN PICS/GETTY; (ROADHOUSE) COURTESY OF THE TALKETNA ROADHOUSE; (MOOSE) ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS; (HOMER) JAY YUAN/SHUTTERSTOCK



Clockwise from above: A small shop at Homer Spit, at the tip of the Kenai Peninsula; outdoor fun isn't hard to find in Homer, where there's plenty of snow; Talkeetna Roadhouse was built of timber in 1917; it's not uncommon to see moose in populated areas of Alaska – even on the streets of Anchorage, as seen here. Main picture: sunset over Mt Susitna, viewed from Anchorage, Alaska's largest city



READER'S DIGEST

on pancakes with birch syrup, surrounded by men in checked shirts, whose flap-eared hats look like they might jump down and run off with our bacon.

It's also the final weekend of the annual Anchorage Fur Rondy (as in rendezvous), a ten-day festival that once marked the fur trappers' return from their lonely winter in the wilderness, and the state's biggest city is feeling festive. There's a giant Texas Hold 'Em [poker] tournament, a miners-and-trappers ball, and something called the Cornhole Ice Breaker Tourney, not to mention Native Alaskan blanket-tossing and a herd of reindeer running down the main shopping street.

"Come in! I'm in the kitchen cooking a bear," Maggie calls when we knock on her front door. She's always had a whimsical sense of humour, but she's not joking; her neighbour shot and butchered a black bear. We eat braised bear fillet with purple-skinned potatoes and red cabbage. The meat is lean and flaky, with a flavour like wild boar.

The next day my friend's husband takes me out in his two-seat single-engine plane, a red-and-yellow 1944 Aeronca Chief. We fly north over the Susitna Valley for 50 kilometres to the town of Talkeetna, where we loop around the extraordinary Goose Creek Tower. Built by an eccentric Alaskan

attorney, it's a 57-metre stack of log cabins, each of diminishing size, that rises above the pine and spruce like a tower of cuckoo clocks. Then we fly over Hatcher Pass before plunging low over the frozen Susitna River as herds of moose tilt their antlers and glance lugubriously up at us from the snowy undergrowth.

Talkeetna (population 876) has a frontier feel and a cheerful familiarity. There's a sign outside the Fairview Inn listing the house rules: no drugs, weapons, fighting or arguing about closing time. We sip Bulleit bourbon while trying to predict the date and time the ice on the Tanana River will break up, an annual pastime of Alaskans, who submit their guesses in the Nenana Ice Classic. The 2020 winner took home \$125,000; the ice broke on April 27. But in 2019, it broke on April 14, the earliest since the Nenana began in 1917.

Soon we fall into conversation with Grog, a bearded giant and former gold prospector whose laughter thunders like an underground explosion. His spirited partner, Elaine, tells us she came to Talkeetna from Michigan a decade ago for the town's Wilderness Woman Contest, during which she impressed the judges with her ability to keep a perimeter fire of driftwood burning through the night to ward off bears. Later, at the Bachelor Auction, Grog caught her eye and romance blossomed.

We stay at the Talkeetna Roadhouse,

a 1917 timber building. In the dining room, white plank walls are hung with mountaineering charts and multicoloured flags from various expeditions that have used the hotel as a base for tackling Denali and Mount Foraker. There are two blackboard menus: 'Breakfast' and 'Not Breakfast'.

"The only bad thing about the Roadhouse," the bartender at the Fairview had warned us, "is that bakery. When the smell of that fresh sourdough comes wafting up the stairs at 4am, it wakes you up and makes it damn hard to get back to sleep."

She wasn't wrong. On our first morning we gorge on just-baked cinnamon rolls, sourdough hotcakes and crispy maple-cured bacon. Everything in Alaska comes with bacon; the Spenard Roadhouse in Anchorage, which serves high-quality American comfort food, even has a Bacon of the Month.

A few guests are here to follow the Iditarod; others are young, rangy cross-country skiers or middle-aged snowmobilers. An elderly Dutchman tells us he's been coming to the Roadhouse for nearly 40 years. He no longer climbs or skis, but returns

Main picture: Stilt houses in the old Russian trading settlement of Seldovia; (inset) fresh oysters from the Jakolof Bay Oyster truck



"just to catch up with all the friends I made." As I nurse a third mug of coffee in the cosy dining room, breathing the scent of fresh bread and pitch pine as the snow falls softly outside, I can see why. The place has a sense of being cut off from the world, and yet firmly entrenched in it.

On our final evening in Talkeetna, we dine at the Denali Brewpub on reindeer meatloaf, followed by a slice of peanut-butter pie. Later I walk alone to the end of Main Street, away from the squat, red-timber frontages of Nagley's Store and the West Rib

READER'S DIGEST

Pub & Grill, and out onto the frozen river for a view of Denali by moonlight. I take a path alongside birch trees bowed with snow and soon find myself on the ice. The silence wraps me like a fleece. The distant mountains are a wide stripe of glowing white between pale grey panels of plains and sky. Put a frame around it all and you have a Rothko.

The view of Denali appears unchanged and unchangeable, yet things are more unstable than they appear. "Bears, moose, earthquakes, lightning, snowstorms, wildfires - Alaska is always gonna find some way to kill you," a gnarled young man wearing a feed-store baseball cap had remarked cheerily to us in the Fairview. The last threat is increasingly significant. Alaska is heating up much faster than the rest of the states, thanks to the loss of polar ice and increased deforestation.

The next day Deryn and I go to Homer, at the tip of the Kenai Peninsula. It's a sprawling seaside town with weatherboard galleries and bookstores, and a narrow spit that rolls like a serpent's tongue into the bay towards the peaks of Kachemak Bay State Park.

In summer, cruise ships dock here, the caravan parks are bursting, and restaurants and bars race to meet demand. But off-season, it's quiet. We take walks along snow-covered Bishop's Beach, and at Two Sisters

Bakery we have a breakfast of chocolate bread and coffee.

Homer is a hub of Alaska's local-food movement, which is characterised by the state's brief growing season, indigenous game, and, of course, seafood. The town bills itself as the Halibut Fishing Capital of the World. The red, snow and king crabs are enormous and tender; the weathervane scallops, razor and geoduck clams, spot prawns and wild salmon are ubiquitous. Chinook and sockeye are the most prized of the five salmon species that thrive in these waters. A thick fillet of the latter, grilled over alder chips at Anchorage's thrummingly busy Glacier Brewhouse, is one of the best slabs of fish I've ever tasted. Another gastronomic highlight is the Jakolof Bay Oyster truck, which serves tinglingly fresh oysters.

We booked a cabin for its views across Kachemak Bay to Grewingk Glacier, yet the snow falls so heavily for two days we can't see very far. But being shut in is equally stirring. One morning we're awakened by a small earthquake. Then, as we're eating breakfast, a moose calf strolls past our window on its long, skinny legs.

Sometimes the only way to get a clear view of things in Alaska is from the air - and often, it is the only way to get where you want to go. When the snow stops, we catch the 11.20 Smokey Bay Air flight to the old Russian trading settlement of Seldovia.

We fly over the Homer Spit and south down the coast before dropping down onto the narrow airstrip by the waters of the Seldovia Slough, which winds between stands of pine like a strip of grey-blue silk. “Turn right – it’s not a far walk into town,” the pilot says after we disembark, as he offloads boxes of fresh produce.

Crossing a steel bridge, we pause at the sight of colourful cabins jutting out on stilts over the water. They were home to fishermen during a short-lived herring boom in the 1920s. Woodsmoke curls from burnished stovepipes. Seldovia is silent, save for the throaty cawing of a raven.

We walk up snowy steps to the white-and-turquoise clapboard St Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church. From the mid-18th century, Russian fur traders, lured by sea otter, seal, mink, marmot, beaver and bear populations, set up outposts defended by Russian garrisons. Today, communities of Old Believers (who split with the church over doctrinal differences in the 1600s) can be found in villages such as Nikolaevsk and Voznesenka. You’ll spot them shopping in Homer, the women in long skirts and colourful headscarves.

The czars clung to Alaska until 1867, when they sold it to the United States for \$7.2 million. The deal was thought to be ludicrous, but after the discovery of gold here starting in the 1870s and oil (which now generates 80 per cent of Alaska’s revenue) in the 1960s, it became clear it had been staggeringly cheap. Native Alaskans were never consulted, of course. A series of legal actions culminated

with the Alaskan Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, which granted them 18 million hectares and nearly a billion dollars – arguably small compensation for having your land sold out from under you.

After returning to Seldovia, we take a taxi to

Jakolof Bay, where we wait on a jetty surrounded by oyster beds to board a small boat to Homer. We stop at a tiny island to pick up a family from Anchorage that is building a cabin. We help the mother, father and two kids with their bags. “Going to be peaceful out there, no doubt,” the skipper says. “Only thing’ll wake you is the noise of humpback whales slapping their tails on the water.” **R**

TRAVEL TIPS

Alaska Airlines operates nonstop daily flights to Anchorage from several American cities, including Seattle, Los Angeles and Chicago. Check operating times of restaurants and status of accommodations on their websites, or visit:

www.travelalaska.com

FROM CONDÉ NAST TRAVELER (JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2020), © 2020 BY HARRY PEARSON





BONUS READ



**Large numbers
of tigers are being
farmed, killed and
trafficked in Laos.
KARL AMMANN
pursues those
responsible**

TRACKING THE

TIGER

BUTCHER

BY *Terrence McCoy* FROM THE WASHINGTON POST

He was up there somewhere, at the top of the hill, the man Karl Ammann had come to see. It would soon be night. The forest was all shadows and sounds. Ammann had driven across Laos to reach Tha Bak, a remote river village, to confront the person he believed had murdered more tigers than anyone in the country. In the distance, he could hear dozens of tigers roaring.

For nearly five years, Ammann, a Swiss counter-trafficking conservationist, had tracked Nikhom Keovised. He had placed hidden cameras inside what had once been the largest tiger farm in Southeast Asia, an illegal operation where tigers had been raised for one purpose – slaughter. And he had listened to the man doing the slaughtering describe it in his own words: “Use the anaesthetic,” Keovised had said. “Then just cut the neck.” Then “peel its skin.”

Now Keovised had just opened in Tha Bak what his boss – considered one of the nation’s biggest wildlife traffickers – described as a zoo, but what Ammann suspected was a front for selling tigers.

Ammann, 71, knew the risks. He was in the country without permission to investigate its wildlife practices. He was unarmed. Neither Keovised nor his boss had ever been charged with anything, let alone arrested. If discovered, the equipment Ammann had with him – the drone, the hidden cameras, the satellite images of the

country’s tiger farms – would immediately unravel his cover story, that he was a tourist.

But he could already feel the familiar intensity. It had driven him to undertake dozens of risky, self-funded investigations, pushed him to the fringes of the conservation community and caused even friends to describe him as obsessive, if not a little crazy. He couldn’t stop. Those responsible had to be held to account.

A RISK TAKER

For ten days in late 2018, I joined Ammann on an undercover journey to determine whether Laos, a global hub of wildlife trafficking, had fulfilled its promises since 2016 to stamp out the wildlife trade. Now we’d arrived at this hill, where, above, the tigers were becoming louder.

They were hungry, Ammann announced. It would soon be time to feed them. He slung his camera over his shoulder and started up the hill, in search of tigers and their warden.

The tiger, whose captive population

now dwarfs its numbers in the wild, is on the verge of becoming a fully industrialised commodity. Over the past century or so, the population in the wild has plunged from an estimated 100,000 to fewer than 4000, while the number in captivity has exploded to more than 12,500.

Nowhere else was the animal's commodification more complete than in tiger farming, where it is raised, butchered for parts and sold for tens of thousands of dollars. And nowhere else had these farms operated with greater impunity than in Laos, a nation whose own wild tigers have nearly all been killed. Ammann

and conservation centres. No new facilities breeding endangered wildlife for commercial purposes would open.

But Ammann was neither optimistic nor hopeful. He cited operational tiger farms in Laos and how we were being taken for "bloody fools".

"They all want hope and happy endings," he said of producers and audiences who ignored his documentaries. "And I don't see any happy endings."

Almost every conservationist I asked said Ammann's findings were sound. He could be trusted, but...

But what?

"He takes a lot of risks," Steve Galster, a counter-trafficking expert in

THE TIGER IS ON THE VERGE OF BECOMING A FULLY INDUSTRIALISED COMMODITY

was one of the few people who'd seen inside the country's farms.

When I'd first spoken to him in June 2018, I'd expected to find someone who was, if not optimistic, then at least hopeful. Since 2016, international authorities and some conservationists had applauded Laos, home to some of Asia's biggest wildlife traffickers, as it announced overhauls to clean up the trade.

Shops trading in bones and wildlife merchandise were to cease. All three of the country's illegal tiger farms, which stored 700 tigers, were ordered to stop farming and convert into zoos

Bangkok, said after a long pause.

He had been kicked out of an international conservation meeting for aggressively confronting officials.

"A bit of a kook who gets results," a law enforcement consultant in Laos called him.

Ammann sent me some of those results, photographs of a diseased tiger in a claustrophobic cage - mangy, eyes desperate. The next showed seven tigers in cramped cages eating raw chicken off the ground, and, from high above, drone images of two massive tiger farms, showing animals in cage after cage.

READER'S DIGEST

He included a 3700-word missive he'd dispatched to CITES, the UN commission charged with regulating the wildlife trade, accusing it of being "a big part of the problem". He'd sent the same letter to a European Parliament official, attaching this comment: "So you cannot say you did not know. My motto for doing this."

I called Ammann at his estate at the base of Mount Kenya. He was going to Laos again, before year's end, he said. This time, he hoped to personally meet those who'd profited from the death of the tiger. "Why don't you come," he asked, "and see for yourself?"

So in late 2018, I joined Ammann on an undercover journey to determine whether Laos had fulfilled its promises since 2016 to stamp out the wildlife trade.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

I arrived at my hotel in northern Thailand past midnight. We'd planned to meet at 8am but a note waiting for me from Ammann said we had to meet at 7am. A long day was ahead. After a handshake and a few quick words, we were inside a van, bumping towards the Laos border.

Ammann wanted to cross into the country by nightfall, where he said the real journey would begin. Landlocked and mountainous, Laos has nearly 2600 kilometres of borders with Vietnam and China, whose appetite for illicit wildlife products had both

decimated numerous species and transformed Laos into a global epicentre of wildlife trade. A 2017 CITES report was blunt: "Everyone can buy everything and cross the border."

Over the next ten days, Ammann planned to traverse much of the country, investigating rumours of a never-before-identified tiger enclosure, buying tiger products from merchants, and flying drones over tiger farms. Lastly, he'd venture to a new resort and 'zoo' named Say Namthurn at Tha Bak, where Ammann hoped to finally meet Keovised, the tiger butcher, and his boss, Sakhone Keosouvanh, who helped bring tiger farming to Laos.

Inside the van, along with Ammann, were his cameraman, Phil Hattingh, a towering South African, and a young Hong Kong Chinese woman named Grace Chan.

"They'll think you're a customer," Ammann said to Chan, explaining that his plan for her on this trip was to visit shops while wearing a hidden camera to buy tiger products. Ammann met Chan in 2017 after she'd contacted him to discuss elephant trafficking.

To bolster her expertise on the tiger economy, Ammann handed her a tattered book. It showed pictures of a tiger skull, femur, tibia and hip, and described the bones as a "precious crude medicine", whose medicinal use in China traced back more than 1400 years. As China's economy grew, the animal's mythical qualities – none of which are

substantiated by modern medicine – ignited a market for tiger products.

With only a few dozen tigers left, the Chinese government banned killing endangered species in the wild while encouraging their ‘domestication’ and breeding to sate demand for tiger products while protecting those in the wild. Instead, demand exploded further, said Vanda Felbab-Brown, a Brookings Institution senior fellow who’s studied the industry, inciting rampant poaching of wild tigers all over Asia.

In 1993, Chinese officials prohibited domestic trade in tiger bone but didn’t close the country’s many farms. That year, CITES, which has few enforcement tools, banned tiger farming for commercial purposes. China chafed against the restrictions then, and now. In 2018, it legalised trade in tiger parts for medicinal purposes but, under international pressure, quickly reinstated its ban.

To bypass it, some customers from China flock to border towns in the Golden Triangle area, where the countries of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand converge. That was exactly what Ammann wanted to investigate first.

GRIM REVELATIONS

We drove into the night until a city sprang out of the blackness. Known as the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone, this sliver of Bokeo Province is controlled by a transnational criminal operation that “engages in an array of

Tracking the Tiger Butcher

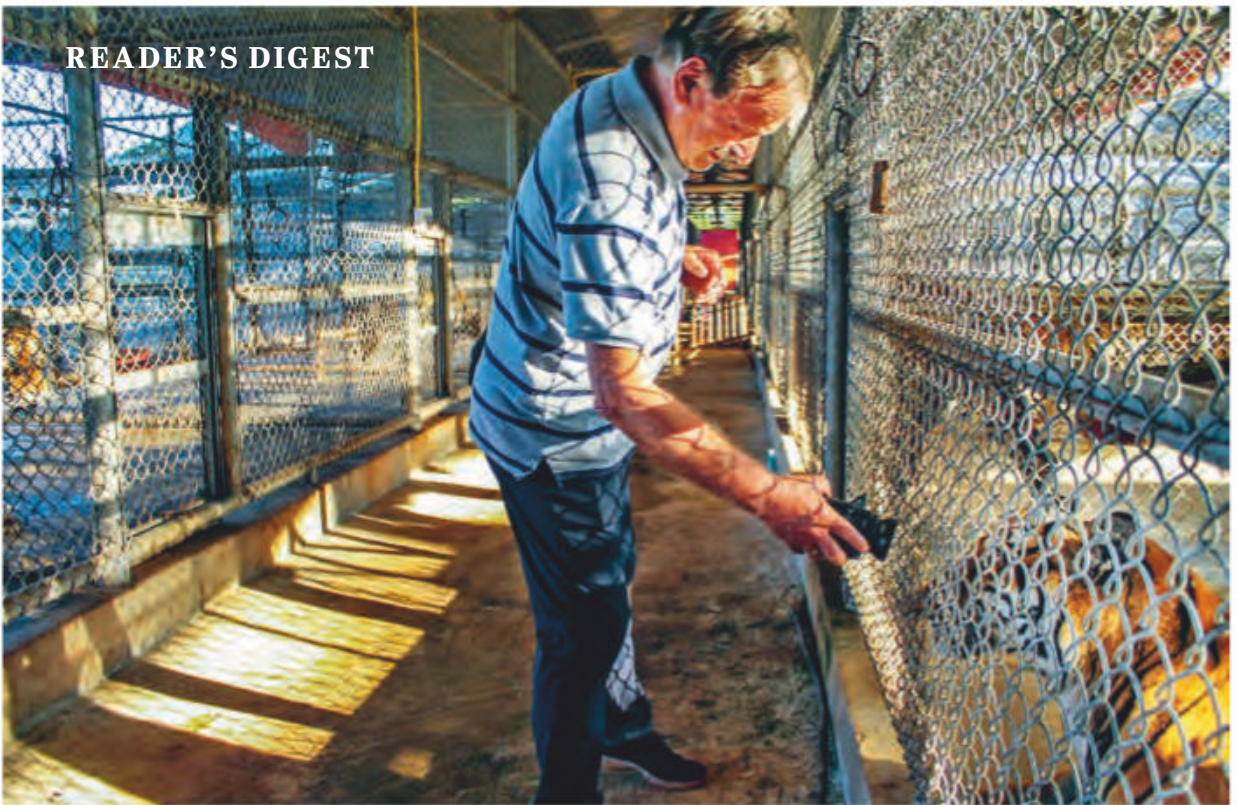


Amman's combative exterior hides a deep regard for the animals he is trying to help. He is pictured here in the mid-1990s with a gorilla orphan he found in Gabon

horrendous illicit activities”, including child prostitution and human, drug and wildlife trafficking, according to the US Treasury Department, which imposed sanctions on the network.

On our first morning here, Ammann was already exasperated. His driver was not going fast enough, his computer had stopped working, and the hotel where we’d spent the night before – the only one that still took Western guests following the US sanctions – had just told us to clear out.

Ammann knew how he sometimes sounded, but there was no time for niceties. In conversations, he frequently



Ammann believes this 'zoo' in the eastern Lao town of Tha Bak, which he visited in December 2018, is really a front for selling tigers

brought up environmental studies he'd just read, all of them apparently grim. The planet could soon lose 60 per cent of primate species, according to the peer-reviewed journal, *Science Advances*, noting how bushmeat hunting had sped their demise – a revelation that, to Ammann, wasn't a revelation at all. It was his origin story.

In 1988, Ammann was in a boat chugging up the Congo River in what was then Zaire. By then, he'd already spent 20 years in Africa, where he had worked as a hotelier and photographer, eventually becoming wealthy opening and selling an eco-tourism camp in Kenya's Maasai Mara National Reserve. But along the river's banks, he saw hundreds of slaughtered

primates awaiting transport to nearby markets. Deforestation had provided hunters with access to animals once protected by dense jungle.

The outrage he'd felt soon consumed him. In the early 1990s, he went to remote merchants and logging encampments and returned with gruesome images. He published books, lobbied governments, led petitions against wildlife slaughter.

He described it all graphically, hoping to shock people into action. "Up to their elbows in blood," he said of bushmeat hunters in one 1995 newspaper interview. "Maybe I've become too extreme," he confessed in another, and many conservationists agreed.

PHOTO: WASHINGTON POST/BY TERENCE MCCOY

Jane Goodall, the renowned chimpanzee conservationist, said he was too aggressive, and he said she wasn't aggressive enough. Other conservationists accused him of 'cultural imperialism', and he countered that they worried more about fundraising than truth.

"He won't stop," says his wife, Kathy, even after he was named a *Time* magazine Hero of the Environment in 2007 for "almost single-handedly raising awareness of the issue of bush meat", and was told to slow down.

Two personalities jostle inside him, said Dale Peterson, a former collaborator. He was one person around

She was dressed in black. Black hat. Black sunglasses. Black blouse, the top button of which concealed the camera. Ammann wanted us to keep our distance from her at first. Sellers these days store their jewellery and medicine in backrooms and hidden drawers that open only for wealthy Chinese customers - which was how Ammann hoped Chan would appear.

We met her at the counter of an store named Exotic Family. There, a thin salesman was saying, yes, he had tiger parts to sell. Out came a small, hollowed tiger bone with intricate carvings: US\$223. Also a tiger claw: US\$223. And two tiger fangs: US\$1340.

AT AN OPEN-AIR STORE, A SALESMAN SAID HE HAD TIGER PARTS TO SELL

people - combative, cynical, "miserable", as Peterson put it - and another around animals. That was the Ammann who'd stop and discuss even a small bird, he said, "in the most affectionate way." He was "driven by something larger."

TRADE CONTINUES

That intensity building within, he pulled up to the market along the Mekong River, straddling the Lao-Thai border. The door opened, out Chan went, and from the market entrance, Ammann watched her disappear into the stalls.

Ammann asked to see more. The man pulled out his phone and sent a contact request on the messaging app WeChat to Chan. All she needed to do was enter keywords - 'jelly' for ivory, 'king' for tiger products - to thwart a blanket prohibition on the trade on China's leading commerce sites.

But one rare product didn't appear on the seller's WeChat profile. Did he have any tiger skin for sale?

"No tiger skins anymore," he said in Chinese. "Tigers in Laos are now protected."

Ammann knew Laos had vowed to stop the trade in wildlife products, but

yet here this merchant was doing just that. So how likely was it that much had changed?

A promised “full audit” and phase-out plan by the government of the country’s captive tigers had faced numerous delays. The same tiger breeders were still involved in the operations, where the tiger population has been fluctuating dramatically, indicating possible trade.

A farm called Vinasakhone – where Keovised had worked – reported a sudden loss of 300 tigers in 2017 without ever explaining how that happened. Then a new and massive farm was disclosed by a Vietnamese

walls, from which hung signs praising the facility’s supposed role in conservation. “Caring rare animals, protect the blue planet,” said one in English.

“This must be it,” he said, walking up to the metal gates of a compound said to be controlled by the local criminal syndicate. He started banging. A young shirtless man came to see what was going on. Ammann decided to bluff his way in.

“Tell him Mr He sent us here,” Ammann directed Chan, who had no idea what he was talking about, but decided to do it anyway.

The gate was slightly ajar. Ammann vanished beyond the wall. Chan and

EVEN AFTER ALL THIS TIME, SEEING TIGERS UP CLOSE STUNNED AMMANN

news outlet in April 2017 in the central Laos town of Lak Sao and said to house 106 tigers.

“MR HE SENT US”

Ammann believed there were even more tiger enclosures now in Laos, which hadn’t yet been identified. One was rumoured to be right here in the Golden Triangle: he had to find out whether it was true.

We drove several kilometres, coming to a stop on a desolate dirt road wedged between thatched-roof huts and jungle. Ammann got out, reached for his camera and approached the

I followed. A sound of joy and wonder came into Ammann’s voice. In the darkness of one of the structures, stripes were moving. Even after all this time, seeing tigers up close stunned him. They were so big, moving with the latent energy of coiled springs.

The worker wanted us out. He was staring at Ammann, who continued to film. He was calling his boss again. One more look, and Ammann was in the car, and it was pulling away, and he couldn’t help but shake his head.

“Yeah, but Laos is closing down the tiger farms, isn’t it?” he said.

Days later, after Chan had bought

and filmed tiger parts being sold in shops all over Laos, and after we'd left her in the capital of Vientiane with her job complete, we headed across the country to the Vietnam border.

Ammann was in a darker mood than usual. "It's frustrating to care about something this much," he said. "Am I wasting my time?"

Several times during the trip, I'd asked him why continue if he thought the work was futile. "The real challenge starts when you know, 'I'm never going to win,' but you keep going," he answered once. "If I've had a few bad nights' sleep over what I've seen, well, let me give a few others a bad night's sleep."

The van now crossed a muddy river, continuing along Highway 8. The town of Lak Sao soon came into view. We bounced off the main highway, forked into a quiet village and rolled onto an unmarked dirt path.

"This is it," Ammann said. Just down this road was the Lak Sao tiger farm, with around 100 tigers inside, if not more. Hattingh, the cameraman, was reaching into his bag. Out came the drone. They had five minutes to get what they needed and get out.

"If you see people running, bring it home and get out of there," Ammann said. "If they catch you with a drone and no licence, they can throw the book at you."



Ammann's team found these tiger fangs selling for US\$1340 in a Lao border market

Hattingh walked into the bush behind the back of the compound's tall concrete walls. The drone, the size of a hawk and buzzing like the world's loudest cicada, levitated into the air.

The video was beamed back into a handheld screen, showing tigers pacing in their cages, appearing as small as insects.

This operation wasn't like the last one, not another small tiger enclosure hidden away in the hills. This was industrial.

The drone came down. Hattingh hurried back. We got in the van, and Ammann told the driver to hit it.

ARRIVING IN THA BAK

Deeper into the countryside we went, until there came the river village of Tha Bak. A sign announced the resort of Say Namthurn, listing its offerings: golf course, drinking water, zoo. Tigers roared atop a hill shrouded by forest. Ammann reached for his camera.

READER'S DIGEST

That is where he hoped to find Keovised.

Ammann first heard that name in early 2014. His investigation had brought him to central Laos, where Vinasakhone, the country's biggest farm, stored hundreds of tigers behind concrete walls.

Its co-owner at the time was a short man named Sakhone Keosouvanh. Equipped with government connections, he helped craft Laos's failed plan to save the country's last tigers and represented tiger farmers at an international tiger preservation meeting. His farm promoted itself as helping to preserve the tiger population.

Meanwhile, tiger breeding, killing and selling were going on inside those walls, according to Laos government reports, and the man who oversaw much of it was Keovised. Neither Keosouvanh nor Keovised responded to numerous requests for comment.

Keovised was the one who met with an investigator Ammann had sent into the farm equipped with a hidden camera and the cover story that he was there to inquire about four tigers for a farm that his 'millionaire' Chinese boss wanted to build.

Over months, the two men developed a friendship. The investigator would take Keovised out for drinks, then secretly record their conversations. Soon Keovised was delving into how tigers were illegally bred, killed and harvested for parts at a level that staggered Ammann.

During the first ten months of 2014 alone, Vinasakhone and another farm traded nearly eight tonnes of lion and tiger bone, the former of which is sometimes passed off as tiger bone, according to one government document by the Lao Division of Forest Inspection that I obtained. The report, first reported by the *Guardian*, accused the farm of breaking international and local law.

But no action could be taken against it. The farm had 'approval from government', which imposed an extra tax of two per cent on all wildlife exports, according to a 2003 Laos customs document. A 2016 confidential survey of the country's wildlife farms by the Lao Department of Forest Resource Management said the farm wasn't breeding tigers for "scientific research" – as its permit stated – but for slaughter. One corpse was believed to go for US\$30,000.

"We use this anaesthetic" was how Keovised described the process in a conversation with Ammann's investigator. "They fall down."

"How do you kill it?" the investigator asked.

Some have their throats cut. But many clients refuse to buy pierced skin, so "we use the elastic string to tighten its neck ... until it died."

Some buyers want the meat, others the bones, and others only want a dense block of hardened resin known as tiger glue made by boiling the bones.

In 2016, a new Lao administration, yielding to international demands, announced that the farms would close, accusing them of illegally “trading tiger products to international buyers”. Soon after, 300 of Vinasakhone’s 400 tigers vanished. Then Keosouvanh, the co-owner, abandoned the farm, beginning a new tiger operation out here. And with him, Ammann had heard, he had brought along his farm manager, Keovised.

MEETING THE BOSS

“If Sakhone Keosouvanh is here, we have to be careful,” Ammann said. The tiger farmer had been so

and looked us over. Beers arrived. Ammann, playing the role of tourist, did the talking. Through an interpreter, he asked Keosouvanh how he’d made his money.

“An import-export company,” Keosouvanh said.

Ammann asked what he exported.

“Mainly coal,” Keosouvanh said.

Ammann later told me he’d had the urge to turn on his camera and confront him. He wanted to tell him that he’d actually exported tigers – and accuse him of still doing it. “We breed them to get their babies” to sell, Keovised had recently told Ammann’s investigator, illegal trade an

THE VINASAKHONE FARM SAID IT WAS HELPING TO PRESERVE THE TIGER POPULATION

well protected that he’d never faced charges. Ammann worried about that power. Our intentions for being there couldn’t be discovered.

We walked through a tourist attraction bereft of tourists to the restaurant patio along the river. “There he is,” Ammann said softly. Keosouvanh was coming our way, wearing a blue button-down, gold ring and watch.

For so long, Ammann had known Keosouvanh only as a name on investigative reports and translated transcripts. But now he was gripping Ammann’s hand and smiling broadly.

Keosouvanh took a seat at our table

investigative Vietnamese agency has discovered as well.

Then there was something else: Ammann had learned what he believed was the truth of the missing 300 tigers from Keosouvanh’s farm. Many had been killed, frozen and trafficked, according to Keovised and interviews I’ve had with two other people with knowledge of the missing tigers. But Ammann could say none of this, not here.

“What animals are left in this forest?” Ammann asked, waving a hand towards the trees on the other side of the river. “Are there any tigers left?”

Keosouvanh looked at him for a moment, his face blank. "No," he finally said. "None of those."

THE FARM MANAGER

The tigers weren't in the forest, but up the hill, on the other side of the resort. The next afternoon, Ammann went past the gates, the river far below him. He kept his gaze fixed on the ramshackle structure – chain-link fencing, anchored by poles and patched with blue tarp. The sound of groaning tigers was all around.

He went inside. Behind two lines of fencing, on either side of the narrow hallway, were flashes of teeth and

just outside the front entrance, on the gravel, he saw him. Keovised.

He was sitting at a table strewn with beer bottles – a short man with yellowing teeth, wearing dusty black pants and flip-flops. Ammann walked over to him.

How many hours had he listened to the farm manager in the recordings describe the most macabre of details in the most perfunctory of ways? And now here Keovised was, sitting outside a small concrete house, doing nothing more than drinking and smoking after a day of work.

Ammann and I sat at his table. Keovised smiled at the unexpected guests,

BEHIND TWO LINES OF FENCING WERE FLASHES OF TEETH AND SLATE GREEN EYES

slate green eyes. Thirty-five tigers, some weighing over 180 kilograms, stalked back and forth, housed separately in 2.7-by-3.5-metre cages.

Every now and then, a worker pulled open a side door connecting the cages, and in came another tiger. The two would mate, then separate, an act that Ammann and I witnessed three times in less than an hour.

"You couldn't license a zoo like this anywhere in the world," Ammann said. After spending hours here – during which we saw only one group of local tourists pay the admission fee of \$2 – he turned to leave. Then,

pouring us beers. This time, however, Ammann did flip on his camera. Then, as his Lao guide interpreted, he started in with it.

"What is going to happen to these tigers?; How often do they get tourists? We saw three tiger pairs mating, so in three and a half months, how many babies?"

Keovised laughed and offered Ammann more beer. He said he'd worked with tigers since 2007, and this enclosure, which he'd taken over seven months before, was just getting started. These tigers would never leave. Few tourists came, but soon there

would be more cages filled with tiger cubs. What he didn't tell Ammann, but what he'd told Ammann's informant was, the tigers were profoundly inbred, and few cubs were surviving, only 18 so far.

"So much work needs to be done?" Ammann said, motioning towards the construction, where more cages were being built. Keovised only laughed again.

In the morning, Ammann directed his driver to take him to the capital to present his findings to the local office of CITES. Soon he was walking inside an expansive building carrying a briefcase where he'd stored evidence of his findings. Two new tiger enclosures that didn't look to him like conservation parks or zoos. Ongoing illegal trade in tiger

parts. Signs of expansion at several farms. Allegations that many of the missing 300 tigers had been killed. And proof that the same people who had illegally butchered and sold tigers were still acting as keepers of the animals.

Facing a CITES bureaucrat, Ammann said, "We know there are two more tiger farms. You said you're closing them down?" On and on he went - but it was no use.

Take it up with the bosses in Geneva, he was told. There wasn't anything the office could do.

Ammann thanked the official for his time, picked up his briefcase with the proof he'd never been asked to show, and walked out. **R**

FROM *THE WASHINGTON POST* (MAY 9, 2019), © 2019 BY WASHINGTON POST

Puzzle Answers

From pages 150-152

PIPE DOWN

The lower right. B, flipped and rotated, goes on the BASE, and A, flipped and rotated, goes on top of B.



HOW ABOUT A DATE?

It's February 5th.



BALANCE THE BOOKS

There are four books and three children.

SUDOKU

1	8	6	2	5	4	7	9	3
7	5	4	9	3	1	8	2	6
3	9	2	6	8	7	4	1	5
2	6	7	5	4	3	1	8	9
4	1	5	8	9	6	3	7	2
8	3	9	7	1	2	5	6	4
9	4	3	1	6	8	2	5	7
6	7	8	4	2	5	9	3	1
5	2	1	3	7	9	6	4	8

CROSSED LETTERS

A	C	A	D	B
C	D	C	A	C
B	C	D	C	D
A	B	A	B	A
C	D	B	D	B

TAKE FIVE

3	3	3
4	4	4
5	5	4
2	5	1
2	5	5

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RD RECOMMENDS



Non
Fiction

Killing Time Jimmy Barnes HARPER COLLINS

Author of best-selling biographies *Working Class Boy* and *Working Class Man*, everyone's favourite gravel-voiced rockstar Jimmy Barnes has written yet a third book about his life. Writing these books has been like therapy, according to an interview I listened to with him. His first two books unpack a troubled childhood, and growing up in a dysfunctional family in Glasgow before moving to Australia, which turned out to be no less dysfunctional. His latest memoir is a collection of stories about what happened in between – adventures, mishaps, fun times and the occasional misbehaviour. One for fans of the man.

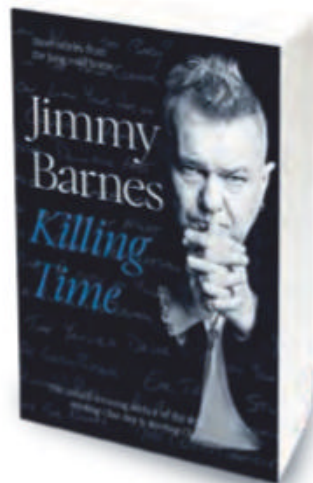


PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

COMPILED BY DIANE GODLEY



Son of Escobar: First Born

Roberto Sendoya Escobar

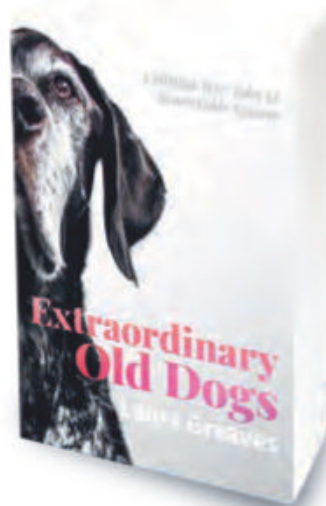
NEW SOUTH BOOKS

If you were one of those people who binge-watched *Narcos* on Netflix, I can guarantee you'll be just as engrossed with *Son of Escobar*. A baby is the only person alive after a secret mission in the Colombian countryside. The boy is rescued and adopted by an MI16 agent. Documents reveal his real father is a 15-year-old Pablo Escobar, who makes numerous attempts to kidnap him. An eye-opener and real-life James Bond thriller about the global cocaine trade.

Gourmet Trails: Australia & New Zealand

LONELY PLANET

With borders opening and travel between Australia and New Zealand a reality, those hungry for adventure and a gourmand experience will want to take a look at *Gourmet Trails*. Taking you on a tour of 40 of Australia's and New Zealand's best epicurean regions, from the Atherton Tablelands to the Tamar Valley, and the Bay of Islands to Central Otago, this book features itineraries such as cocktail bars in city laneways and old wineries on rural estates. A trans-Tasman tapestry of gourmet hot spots.



Extraordinary Old Dogs

Laura Greaves

PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE

From multi-award-winning journalist and author Laura Greaves comes her latest book about dogs. In *Extraordinary Old Dogs*, she showcases the incredible lives of a group of older canines, challenging the notion that senior dogs are a burden rather than a reward. One such hound is Haole, a four-legged surfer who changes the life of young children with disabilities. Another is Maya, a detection dog who sniffs out koala habitat. A must-read for animal lovers.



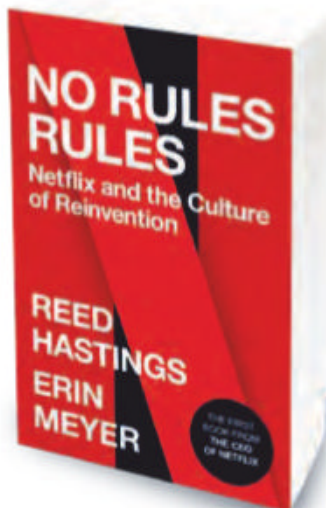
Fiction

No Rules Rules

**Reed Hastings
& Erin Meyer**

VIRGIN BOOKS

With series like *The Crown* and *Stranger Things*, streaming superpower Netflix revolutionised the entertainment and tech industries and now has just over 195 million subscribers worldwide. Behind the business is the Netflix culture of innovation and CEO Reed Hastings' philosophy of hiring the best people and letting them get on with it. And its nearly 8000 employees are paid handsomely. This book is a must-read for those interested in corporate culture and company values. *M.Egan*



Olga

Bernhard Schlink

HACHETTE

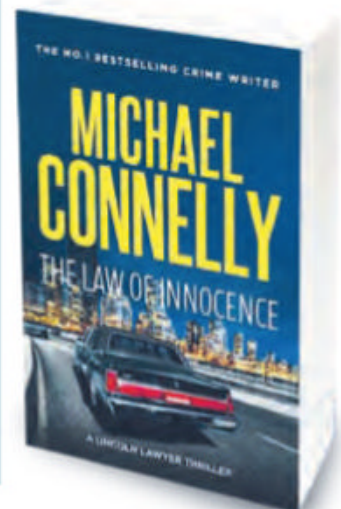
Starting at the turn of the 20th century, this novel follows the life of Olga, an orphan brought up by an unloving grandmother in a Prussian village. Smart and precocious, Olga fights against prejudice to find her place in the world. Then she and a young local aristocrat fall in love, and her life is irrevocably changed. The backdrop to the story is the growing unrest and nationalism in Germany. A love story from the author of *The Reader* that tells the historical account of this era from a female perspective.

The Law of Innocence

Michael Connelly

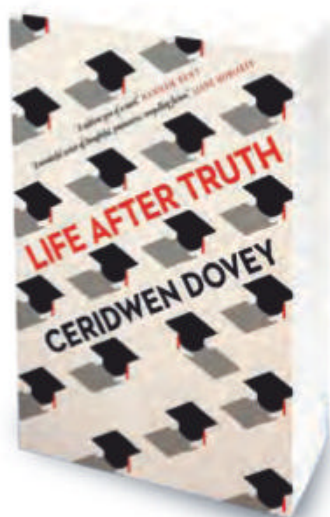
ALLEN & UNWIN

Mounting a good defence has just become harder for fast-talking 'Lincoln Lawyer' Mickey Haller – he's the one slapped behind bars and charged with murder. Pulled over by police, who find the body of a client in his boot, Haller knows that he has been framed. The \$5 million question is by whom? Set at the beginning of 2020, with rumours of a virus spreading, this legal thriller is highly contemporary with plenty of cut-and-thrust courtroom action. *M.Egan*





Young Adult
Fiction



Life After Truth

Ceridwen Dovey

PENGUIN RANDOM
HOUSE

If the name seems familiar, you'd be right. A semi-regular contributor to Reader's Digest, Ceridwen Dovey is also the author of several fiction and non-fiction books. Dovey once studied at Harvard, and the emotional resonance of returning to that campus for college reunions was the inspiration for this novel. A group of friends, who are still pursuing an elusive happiness, are reunited at the 15th anniversary reunion. But the soul searching begins in earnest when a despised former classmate ends up dead.

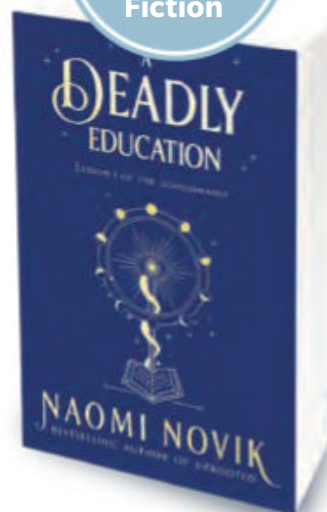
The Charleston Scandal

Pamela Hart

HACHETTE AUSTRALIA

It's the Roaring 20s in London and aspiring actress Kit Scott is determined to make her name on the stage. Instead, she is splashed all over the newspapers as having a secret affair with the Prince of Wales, after they are photographed dancing the Charleston. Like the dance, the book is an exuberant romp through the high society of the time, with well-known characters such as a toe-tapping Fred Astaire, playwright Noël Coward and socialite Edwina Mountbatten all making an entrance.

M. Egan



A Deadly Education

Naomi Novik

PENGUIN RANDOM
HOUSE

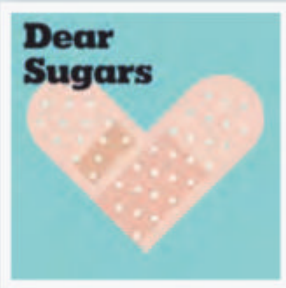
The antipathy of Hogwarts, this school for the magically gifted is dangerous. No teachers, no holidays, and friendships that are strategic. Failure to control your gifts and hide them from the beasts who lurk nearby means certain death. But the novel's anti-hero, El Higgins – who like Eleven from *Stranger Things* possesses a power that can wipe out whole mountains – starts to rewrite the rule book. My 15-year-old daughter loved this novel, the first instalment in this magical coming-of-age trilogy.



Podcasts

**Collared!**

A schoolgirl, a masked intruder, a terrifying threat ... When a man in a ski mask invaded Maddie Pulver's home and attached a bomb collar to her neck, it triggered an international manhunt. Award-winning journalist Simon Bouda goes behind the scenes of a shocking Sydney attack.

**Dear Sugars**

As February is the month of love, whether you are single, in a relationship or married, a little advice from two agony aunts about building better relationships probably won't go amiss. Matters of the heart have included love affairs, stepchildren, infidelity and platonic friendships.

**David Tennant Does a Podcast With...**

The former star of *Doctor Who* and *Broadchurch* enjoys a jolly good chat. His guests, from the world of TV, movies and comedy, have included Whoopi Goldberg, *The Crown*'s Olivia Colman and Judi Dench. With humour and insight, Tennant get his guests to open up about their professional and personal lives.

**Water Margin Podcast: Outlaws of the Marsh**

Listening to this is a long-term project, with over 70 30-minute episodes already recorded. It's an English retelling of the 14th-century classic Chinese novel *Water Margin* (aka *Outlaws of the Marsh*) about the adventures of a band of outlaw soldiers.



Audio Book

HOW TO GET PODCASTS To listen on the web: Google the website for 'Dear Sugars', for example, and click on the play button. **To download:** Download an app such as Podcatchers or iTunes on your phone or tablet and simply search by title.

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THE GENIUS SECTION

*Sharpen Your
Mind*



OLDIES BUT FEEL- GOODIES

*Why our brains prefer
music from our youth
that we already know*

BY *Jeremy D. Larson*

FROM **PITCHFORK.COM**

Listening to new music is hard. Not hard compared to going to space or war, but hard compared to listening to music we already know.

Those of us who have settled into the groove of adult life often don't listen to new music because it's easy to forgo the act of discovery when work, bills, children and life come into play. Eventually, we bow our heads and cross a threshold where most music becomes something to remember rather than something to experience.

Most people have all the songs they could ever need by the time they turn 30. And thanks to Spotify and Apple Music, we can easily whisk ourselves back to our youth, when life was simpler. Why leap off a cliff hoping you'll be rescued by your new favourite album on the way down when you can lie supine on the *terra firma* of your 'Summer Rewind' playlist? Why spend time on something you might not like?

One of my favourite pieces of arts criticism is a 2016 article from *The Onion* titled 'Nation Affirms Commitment to Things They Recognise'. From music to clothing brands, the joke is self-explanatory: we love the things we know because we know them and therefore we love them.

But there is a physiological explanation in our desire to seek comfort in the familiar. It can help us understand why listening to new music is so hard, and why it can make us feel uneasy, angry or even riotous.

It has to do with the plasticity of our brains. Our brains change as they recognise new patterns in the world, which is what makes brains useful.

When it comes to listening to music, a network of nerves in the auditory cortex called the corticofugal network helps catalogue the different patterns of music. When a specific sound maps onto a pattern, our brains release a corresponding amount of dopamine, the main chemical source of some of our most intense emotions. This is the essential reason why music triggers such powerful emotional reactions.

Take the chorus of a song by Adele or Bruce Springsteen, many of which have very recognisable chord progressions. The majority of our brains have memorised these progressions and know exactly what to expect when each comes around.

When the corticofugal network registers that Springsteen chorus, our brains release just the right amount of dopamine. Like a needle tracing the grooves of a record, our brains trace these patterns. The more 'records' we own, the more patterns we can recall to send out that perfect dopamine hit.

In his book *Proust Was a Neuroscientist*, Jonah Lehrer writes about how the essential joy of music comes in how songs subtly toy with patterns in our brains, spiking the dopamine

more and more without sending it off the charts. This is the entire neuroscientific marketing plan behind pop music. But when we hear something that hasn't already been mapped onto the brain, the corticofugal network goes a bit haywire, and our brains release too much dopamine as a response. When there is no map or pattern to anchor to, music can register as unpleasant or, in layperson's terms, bad. "If the dopamine neurons can't correlate their firing with outside events," Lehrer writes, "the brain is unable to make cogent associations."

That's what happened one night in Paris in 1913, in what is perhaps the most infamous musical debut in history. The piece that premiered at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées that night was Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, an orchestral ballet inspired

SONGS SUBTLY TOY WITH PATTERNS IN OUR BRAINS

by the Russian composer's dream about a young girl dancing herself to death. Stravinsky blackened his score with rhythmic and harmonic tension, stretching phrases to their outer limits and never bothering to resolve them. The harmonies were difficult to name and his rhythms impossible to follow.

The Rite began with a solo bassoon squeezing out a riff so high in its register that it sounded like a broken English horn. This alien sound was - apparently and unintentionally

READER'S DIGEST

– so strange that chuckles erupted from the bourgeoisie in the mezzanine boxes and rippled through the crowd below. The dissonant opening gave way to the martial assault of the second movement, ‘The Augurs of Spring’, and the dancers bounded on stage, moving squeamishly and at jagged angles. As recounted in the daily newspaper *Le Figaro*, the chuckles turned into jeers, then shouting, and soon the audience was whipped into a frenzy.

Many in the audience could not fathom this new music; their brains – figuratively, but to a certain extent, literally – broke. A brawl ensued, vegetables were thrown, and 40 people were ejected from the theatre. It was a fiasco cognisant with Stravinsky’s full-bore attack on classical music and thus every delicate sense in the room. *Le Figaro* called the piece a “laborious and puerile barbarity”.

Laborious and puerile as it may have seemed, did *The Rite* really necessitate a riot? Maybe. The way the corticofugal system learns new patterns makes everything we already know far more pleasurable than everything we don’t. We experience the strange allure of wanting to go back to that time in high school driving down country roads with the radio on. Plus our brains actually fight against the unfamiliarity of life. “We are built to abhor the uncertainty of newness,” writes Lehrer.

The coda to the famous *The Rite*

“WE ARE BUILT
TO ABHOR THE
UNCERTAINTY
OF NEWNESS”



of Spring riot is not often told. After the melee of that evening, the ballet continued running at the theatre for many months. Alex Ross wrote in his book *The Rest Is Noise*, “Subsequent performances were packed, and at each one the opposition dwindled. At the second, there was noise only during the latter part of the ballet; at the third, ‘vigorous applause’ and little protest. At a concert performance one year later, ‘unprecedented exaltation’ and a ‘fever of adoration’ swept over the crowd, and admirers mobbed Stravinsky in the street afterwards, in a riot of delight.”

The act of listening to new music is hard, but it’s necessary. After all, what is unheard could define history – might as well come for the show.

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PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES



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Infopack

RINGING IN YOUR EARS?

ENT DOCTOR DEVELOPED

Tinnitus specialists are now recommending a new medically based program which can offer genuine relief for tinnitus – **Sound Therapy!**

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"I suddenly realised I didn't have tinnitus anymore!"

*Kelvin Fleming,
panel beater*



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Every year millions of people visit their doctors complaining of tinnitus (ringing in the ears), and most are told that they just have to learn to live with it. Affecting approximately 20% of the population, tinnitus is a stressful condition that can cause sleeplessness, anxiety and social isolation. It is often accompanied by dizziness, sound sensitivity, blocked-ear or hearing loss.

Now there is a home-based treatment which comes from new research on the ear and brain. It uses high frequency stimulation, through music, to re-build and organise brain connections. The result, for most listeners, is relief or reduction of tinnitus and related conditions.

Benefits can also include better sleep, clearer hearing, better memory, relief of dizziness and vertigo and a general feeling that the brain is sharper and communication is easier.

For a free DVD and information pack call the Sound Therapy national enquiry line on 1300 55 77 96.

PUZZLES

Challenge yourself by solving these puzzles and mind stretchers, then check your answers on page 139.

Crossed Letters

Moderately Difficult

Place either A, B, C or D into each of the 25 empty cells so that the number of times each letter appears in a given row or column is as indicated by the numbers beside or above that row or column. Identical letters cannot be next to each other in the grid, either horizontally or vertically. Can you complete the grid?

					A	2	0	2	1	1
					B	1	1	1	1	2
					C	2	2	1	1	1
					D	0	2	1	2	1
A	B	C	D							
2	1	1	1							
1	0	3	1							
0	1	2	2							
3	2	0	0							
0	2	1	2							



How About a Date?

Moderately Difficult

We're in the month of February. Based on the following statements, what is today's date?

- Tomorrow's day of the month is a factor of the day of the month a week before tomorrow. [Factors are numbers we can multiply together to get another number.]
- Yesterday's day of the month is a factor of the day of the month a week before yesterday.
- February 3rd has passed.

(CROSSED LETTERS) FRASER SIMPSON; (HOW ABOUT A DATE?) DARREN RIGBY

1			5	7	9		
	4	9	1				
		6					
2	6					8	
	3					6	4
			6	8			
		4		5	9		
2	1		7				8

Sudoku To Solve This Puzzle

Put a number from 1 to 9 in each empty square so that: every horizontal row and vertical column contains all nine numbers (1-9) without repeating any of them; each of the outlined 3 x 3 boxes has all nine numbers, none repeated.



Balance the Books Easy

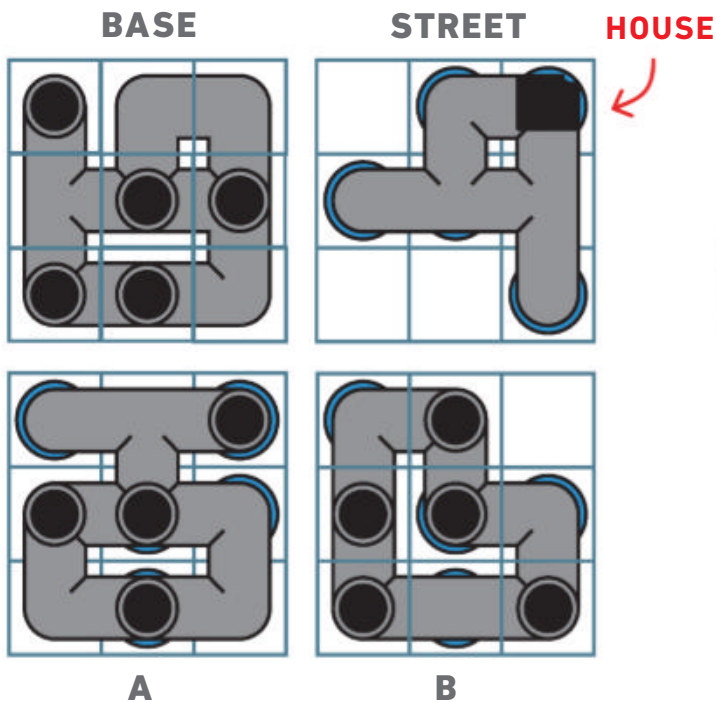
Eli is distributing some donated books to a small group of children. He sees that if he gives a book to each child, then he'll have a book left over. He also sees that if he were to give two books to each kid, then one of them wouldn't get any (so he won't do that). How many books are there, and how many children?

BRAIN POWER
brought to you by



ジュースアップ
Juice up





**Puzzle
Answers**
PAGE 139

Pipe Down Difficult

Build your own water-supply system. The BASE level is on the bottom, and the STREET level is on the top. Your job is to figure out how to place the other two levels in between them so that all the pipes connect. The black and grey circles are where pipes extend upward, and the blue circles indicate where they extend downward. Levels A and B may need to be flipped over, rotated or both before they'll fit. If the BASE is oriented correctly as drawn, which corner of the diagram will the house be in?

4		
		4
		1
2		

Take Five Moderately Difficult

This grid, when completed, contains one 1, two 2s, three 3s, four 4s and five 5s. All the cells marked with the same numeral are in a connected group where each of them has at least one full side – not just a corner – touching another. (This doesn't apply to the 1, of course, since it is alone.) There is never a two-by-two square of cells with the same numeral. Some numerals have been given. Can you fill in the rest?

(TAKE FIVE, PIPE DOWN) DARREN RIGBY

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ROY
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TRIVIA

Test Your General Knowledge

BY Beth Shillibeer

- 1.** Moraines, eskers and drumlins are all landforms that were created by what phenomenon? **2 points**
- 2.** Hg is the chemical symbol of which element? **1 point**
- 3.** At the start of a chess game, how many pieces are there in total on a chess board? **1 point**
- 4.** Which scientist was awarded the 1921 Nobel Prize in Physics? **2 points**
- 5.** About how many taste buds does the average human tongue have? a) 1000. b) 1000,000. c) 10,000. **1 point**
- 6.** Where would you find what is widely considered to be the world's most ancient forest? **2 points**
- 7.** Han van Meegeren was a Dutch art forger. One of his successes, *The Supper at Emmaus*, was proclaimed by scholars to be a masterpiece by whom? **2 points**
- 8.** How many bones do sharks have in their bodies? **1 point**
- 9.** What was Britney Spears' first single? **1 point**
- 10.** What is the name of the thin but long country that spans more than half of the west coast of South America? **1 point**
- 11.** What did the graffiti artist Banksy paint on his own bathroom walls during the COVID-19 lockdown? **2 points**
- 12.** The glow called St Elmo's Fire appears when electrical voltage affects gases in the sky. What do we call it when we purposely make the same thing happen inside glass tubes? **1 point**
- 13.** A childhood job tasting sweets for market research inspired what book by Roald Dahl? **1 point**
- 14.** Which is the only vowel on a standard keyboard that is not on the top line of letters? **1 point**
- 15.** Now identified with Valentine's Day, which Roman god was depicted as a plump cherub with a bow and arrow? **1 point**



16-20 Gold medal **11-15** Silver medal **6-10** Bronze medal **0-5** Wooden spoon

Answers: **1.** Retreating glaciers. **2.** Mercury. **3.** 32. **4.** Albert Einstein. **5.** c) 10,000. **6.** Daintree Forest, North Queensland, Australia. **7.** Johannes Vermeer. **8.** None. Their skeletons are made of cartilage. **9.** *Baby One More Time*. **10.** Chile. **11.** Rats. **12.** Neon lights. **13.** *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. **14.** A. **15.** Cupid.

ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES

WORD POWER

Spiritual Matters

This contemplative quiz is full of words that refer to religious, soulful or meditative practices. After you've pondered the meanings, go to the next page for answers.

BY *Emily Cox* AND *Henry Rathvon*

1. canticle – A: sacred flame.
B: small chapel. C: biblical song.

2. asana – A: sweat lodge.
B: yoga pose. C: spiritual guide on parchment.

3. halal – A: in a trance. B: on a pilgrimage. C: fit or lawful.

4. mezuzah – A: scroll hung by a door. B: golden halo.
C: organ composition.

5. vespers – A: evening service.
B: silent worship. C: winged cherubs.

6. genuflect – A: donate time to a religious organisation.
B: ponder. C: kneel.

7. lama – A: prayer shawl made of soft wool. B: humble offering.
C: Buddhist monk.

8. halcyon – A: awesome.
B: peaceful. C: mythical.

9. atone – A: begin fasting.
B: bow down to a higher power.
C: make up for.

10. ashram – A: burial mound containing religious artefacts.
B: nativity scene.
C: religious retreat.

11. homily – A: sermon.
B: hymn sung only at Easter.
C: parish church in a small village.

12. hajj – A: miracle worker.
B: congregation member.
C: annual pilgrimage to Mecca.

13. supplicate – A: pray.
B: long, white gown worn at mass by priests. C: consume.

14. shanti – A: peace. B: set of seven candles placed on an altar.
C: scripture.

15. psyche – A: individual's soul, spirit or mind. B: guide. C: rite.

Answers

- 1. canticle** – (C) biblical song. The church choir sang a canticle to begin Sunday's service.
- 2. asana** – (B) yoga pose. Barbara's favourite asana is the downward-facing dog while Jane prefers shoulder stands.
- 3. halal** – (C) fit or lawful. My family is Muslim, so we've always followed a halal diet.
- 4. mezuzah** – (A) scroll hung by a door. The Rosens bought that pretty mezuzah on a family trip to Israel.
- 5. vespers** – (A) evening service. If we don't eat dinner soon, we'll be late to Christmas Eve vespers.
- 6. genuflect** – (C) kneel. After my knee surgery, I couldn't genuflect for a month.
- 7. lama** – (C) Buddhist monk. Historically used for venerated spiritual masters, today lama is more honorific and used for monks, nuns and tantric practitioners.
- 8. halcyon** – (B) peaceful. I'm an early riser because I adore those halcyon moments that happen just as the sun comes up.
- 9. atone** – (C) make up for. Ellen broke her mother's expensive

camera, and she will be atoning for that for years.

- 10. ashram** – (C) religious retreat. On entering the ashram at the very top of the mountain, Rishi came across Menaka in deep contemplation.
- 11. homily** – (A) sermon. "Can I just borrow the car without all the usual homilies?" said Joe.
- 12. hajj** – (C) annual pilgrimage to Mecca. The great hajj pilgrimage is a rite of passage for millions of Muslims around the world.
- 13. supplicate** – (A) pray. Every Sunday, my sister goes to church to supplicate for the forgiveness of her sins.
- 14. shanti** – (A) peace. In Buddhist and Hindu traditions you chant shanti three times to represent peace in body, mind and spirit.
- 15. psyche** – (A) individual's soul, spirit or mind. After the maths professor lost his job to a much younger person, his psyche took a serious blow and he never quite recovered.

VOCABULARY RATINGS

5-9: Fair

10-12: Good

13-15: Word Power Wizard

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Plants can lift our spirits, and the realistic decorative grass filling in this natural wood planter will always look its lushest, greenest best. You can brighten up dark corners where real plants don't thrive. And, after dark, you can enjoy the magical effect of 10 miniature LEDs powered by 2 x AAA batteries (not supplied). 37H x 45W x 17D cm. Perfect for your home or office.

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A pocket-sized 9.7H x 7.4W x 2.4D cm. Easy to charge using a wireless charging station or a USB cable. You'll also be impressed by the look and feel of the fine, quality leather.

Folds flat to slip into your pocket

LED Lite Wallet • LEDLW \$99 or \$24.75 x 4 mths

Versatile Adjustable Caddy – complete relaxation

If you love to relax in the bath, this caddy will keep your oils, creams and exfoliators handy – or even a book and a glass of wine! Cleverly designed to expand from 56 to 78 cm, it not only fits most tubs, you can also position it over the kitchen sink for washing and draining vegetables, fruit and salads. Made from tough, easy-clean plastic, it would be handy in the laundry, too.

Versatile Extendable Caddy

• VSECD \$19.95



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– an elegant way to stay safe

With its classical scrolled metal vines and leaves this lock makes a very decorative edging for your sliding door. It will also hold it firmly closed, or open to your preferred position. You can keep intruders out, children safely inside or even let your pets come and go as they please. It extends from 66 - 111 cm with multiple adjustment intervals. Simply tighten the two wingnuts to secure it in place.

Decorative Sliding Door Lock

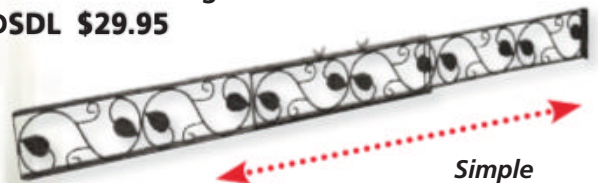
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SAVE \$10

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Sliding door can be set in an open position for pets



Simple to adjust

Holds your door firmly closed



A Town Like Alice (1981)

An Emmy Award-winning series chronicling the lives of Jean Paget (Helen Morse) and Joe Harmon (Bryan Brown) from their first meeting in the jungles of Malaya as prisoners during World War II to the Australian outback, where years apart threaten to shatter their reunion.

3
DVDs

3 DVDs, 318 mins.

• MALICG \$34.95



SLIM&I

(2020)

1
DVD



The King and Queen of Australian Country Music. This unforgettable film gives an elegant and intimate portrait of Slim Dusty and his wife, Joy McKean, and their musical legacy that continues to entertain and inspire to this day. 1 DVD, 102 mins. **SUBTITLES**



• MSLIMD Price \$29.95

Birds of a Feather (1989)

– Complete Collection

North London-born sisters Sharon and Tracey are left to fend for themselves when their husbands are jailed for armed robbery. The girls try numerous ways to bolster their dwindling finances. They also enjoy regular visits from their man-eating neighbour. Includes Series 1-9. 19 DVDs, 51 hrs.



19
DVDs

• MFEATL \$149 or \$37.25 x 4 mths

Little House on the Prairie (1974)

– Complete Collection

The beloved television series based on Laura Ingalls Wilder's novels. Follow the fortunes of Charles, his young wife, and their three daughters as they pack their belongings into a wagon, leaving friends and family behind for a new life in Plum Creek, on the plains of Minnesota. 50 DVDs, 76 hrs. **SUBTITLES**



50
DVDs

• MLHPP \$179 or \$44.75 x 4 mths



8
DVDs

THE RANDOLPH SCOTT

COLLECTION (8 Films)

Relive some of Randolph Scott's greatest performances with this ultimate Western collection featuring: *The Texans* (1938), *When the Daltons Rode* (1940), *Corvette K-225* (1943), *Gunfighters* (1947), *Coroner Creek* (1948), *The Doolins of Oklahoma* (1949), *The Walking Hills* (1949), *Santa Fe* (1951). 8 DVDs, 694 mins.

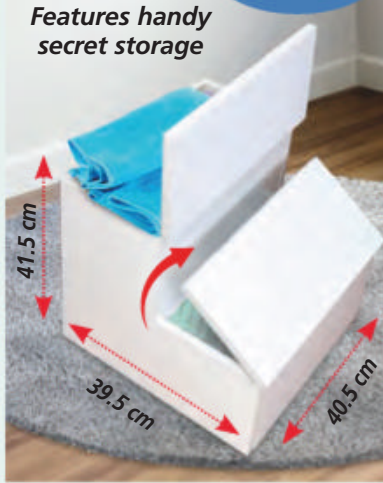
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You'll feel much safer reaching up to a high shelf when you're standing on these sturdy steps. They provide an extra 41.5 cm in height, have a secure 40.5 x 39.5 cm base and both steps have a non-slip surface. Easy to assemble and made from hardy MDF and melamine, they also provide handy extra storage. And, for even greater safety, the lids open towards you so there's no overhang to catch your foot.

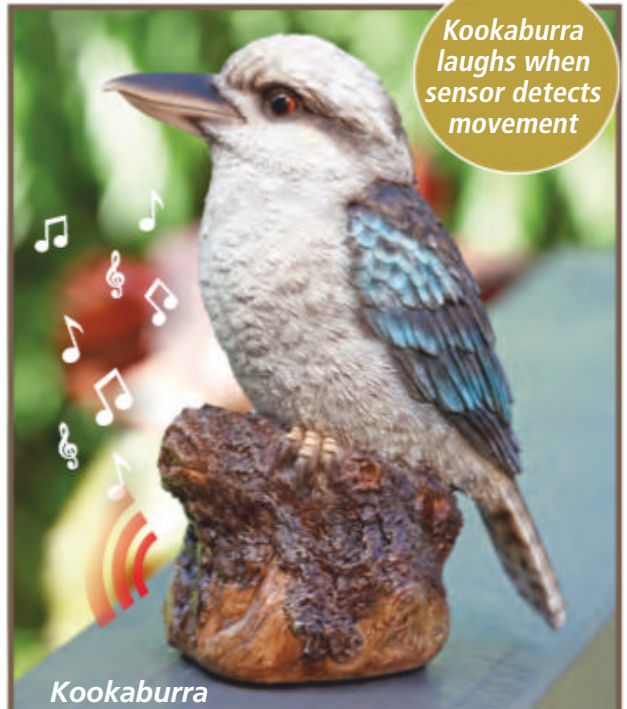


Sturdy Step and Storage • STURS
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Perfect for the kitchen, laundry, bedroom or home office!



Step up to reach high shelves safely



Kookaburra

Beautiful Singing Birds

– a very Australian welcome!

Now you can enjoy the calls of these iconic Australian birds whenever you want. Any movement within a metre range triggers the kookaburra's unmistakable laugh or the musical notes of the crimson rosella, both captured in high-quality sound. Crafted from polyresin, beautifully detailed and incredibly realistic, the birds stand approximately 18.5 cm tall.

Slip-resistant non-scratch dots on the base makes them ideal for a porch, indoors, as well as the garden.

Singing Bird Collection

Rosella

• SBCC0001

Kookaburra

• SBCC0002

\$39.95 each

Rosella

Incredibly realistic detail to brighten your balcony



Versatile Folding Trolley – roomy with all-terrain wheels

Here's the easy way to move up to 100 kilos across just about any surface. This robust trolley has a steel frame with large wheels and removable lining with pockets made from tough, double layer 600 denier polyester. Perfect for the garden, it's also handy when you're shopping or camping.

A spacious 52H x 50W x 117D cm, it folds to just 77H x 50W x 21D cm with a handle for easy storage.

All-Terrain Folding Wagon • ALLT
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Large wheels

Easy to carry all your gardening essentials

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▼ Blue Gold Bead Embroidery

Create a three-dimensional masterpiece with this exquisite bead embroidery kit from the Ukraine. The robust canvas used is designed to bear the weight of beads and will keep its shape over time. Your Bead Embroidery kit includes design printed in full colour on art canvas, glass beads, beading needles and instructions. 27 x 39 cm.



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▲ European Travels Jigsaw Puzzle: Paris Oasis

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Beautiful purple flowers spilling out of their basket make a gorgeous hanging decoration. And, even though it looks so realistic, this one will delight you all year round without watering, dead-heading or any other tedious maintenance. The 25 cm long conical rattan basket enhances the natural appearance, as does the 35 cm hook and chains. The attractive wrought metal wall mounting included completes a very eye-catching effect.

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Eye-catching arrangement you can hang anywhere

No need to water!



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Digital display keeps track of your progress

Easy to use - simply sit on a chair and pedal your arms and legs

Compact, Adjustable Exercise Bike – great for both legs and arms

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Height adjusts easily

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This decorative pine and metal wagon comes with interchangeable magnetic messages in a set of 2 for each side of the wagon. You can wish your guests Merry Christmas, Happy Valentine's Day and Happy Easter and, for the rest of the year, you can show they're Welcome.



Four interchangeable magnetic designs!



It's a wonderful way to celebrate every day of the year

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Five years after the death of Chief Inspector Morse, Robert Lewis (Kevin Whately) is promoted to Inspector, but with the new position comes renewed responsibility – not only to fill the void left by the passing of his previous partner, but to face the same evils with an increased personal investment. Includes Series 1-5.

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21 DVDs

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or \$37.25 x 4 mths



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Incredibly soft with 2 cm pile

Luxurious in your bathroom

Fits all you need for a weekend or a visit to the gym!

Very Useful 2-in-1 Faux Leather Bag – the base compartment is the secret!

Perfect for the gym or a night or two away, this smart bag has a zipped compartment at the base to keep your shoes, wet bag and laundry separate from dry clothes, and a zipped outside pocket for your phone and wallet. The top opens up wide for easy access then zips and clips neatly closed. 44W x 35H x 20D cm. Made from attractive faux leather, it's easy to carry using the handles or the adjustable shoulder strap.

Weekend Bag • WEBAG \$49 or \$24.50 x 2 mths

Keep shoes, wet items and laundry in the separate compartment

Luís Santini



Basket with Folding Legs

– makes doing your laundry so much easier on the back

There's so much to love about line-dried laundry. Now you don't even need to worry about all that bending and stretching. Push the buttons on the sides of this tough plastic laundry basket, and strong legs pop into place. Retract them and it's easy to carry and store. 65H x 43W x 30D cm, it extends to a convenient 65 cm high, a perfect height for next to the ironing board.

Made in Germany.

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Simple to operate



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Brown



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Patchwork Bag Set Brown • PTCBS Black • PTCBU
\$39.95 each set of 3

Fashionable
and practical
bag set



Black



Perfect for everyday use

Handy Portable Vacuum Cleaner – perfect for home, office and car

Compact, light and powerful, this rechargeable vacuum cleaner makes it easy to keep your keyboard, car dashboard, blinds and other awkward corners free from dust, crumbs and hair. You can even choose the 'blow' function to drive out hidden dirt! It's also easy to empty and clean by simply twisting the cylinder open. The nozzles, brush and a USB cable for charging the built-in battery all fit neatly in the carry bag supplied.

Portable Vacuum Cleaner

• PTVC \$59 or
\$29.50 x 2 mths

*Interchangeable
heads, storage
bag and charging
cord included*



So many uses
around the home
or in the car

Makes cleaning
up crumbs
effortless!

Elegant Slim Watch – matching mesh strap

Slim and sophisticated, this watch will look good on any occasion from a casual weekend to a black tie event. The gleaming stainless steel case is 40mm in diameter and the white face, which carries the Luis Santini logo, is elegantly simple in design – while the metallic mesh strap perfectly complements the look. Complete with an accurate Japanese movement and supplied in an attractive presentation box it would make a wonderful gift.

Slim Mesh Watch

• MESHW

\$79 or \$19.75 x 4 mths



Comes in an attractive box



Big, easy-to-read dial

Perfect gift idea

Minimalist slim design - perfect for everyday wear

\$2

Postage on your entire order!

Only \$2 Postage! – Quote code RM13S when ordering

THE KENNY EVERETT VIDEO SHOW

COMPLETE SERIES (1978)



6 DVDs

Erupting onto television in the summer of 1978, The Kenny Everett Video Show was an instant ratings grabber propelling the subversive, impish DJ to the stardom he had always deserved! Kenny's anarchic mix of manic sketches, musical guests and dance routines courtesy of raunchy booty-shakers Hot Gossip created must-see TV. Includes Series 1-4. 6 DVDs, 15 hrs.

• MKENNY \$59.95 or \$19.98 x 3 mths



BLESS THIS HOUSE

(1971)

The Complete Series



The incomparable *Sid James* stars as successful travelling salesman and average family man Sid Abbott in this much-loved comedy. Sid is a man who would give anything for a quiet life – his position as head of the chaotic Abbott household is constantly being eroded by the harassment and seemingly unreasonable demands made by his family. Includes Series 1-6. 12 DVDs, 28 hrs.



12 DVDs

• MBLESW \$99 or \$24.75 x 4 mths

Step up your strength

– feel healthier and fitter!

Exercise safely in all weather with this low-impact stepper. It features wide, slip-resistant pedals and comfort-grip handles. The digital display, powered by a AA battery (not supplied), tracks your steps and energy burned, and provides a low-impact workout for your abdominal, lower back, arm, thigh and calf muscles. Easy to assemble and store at just 120H x 30W x 33D cm.

The strong steel frame supports up to 100 kg.

Compact Stepper Exerciser • CSTEMX
\$119 or \$29.75 x 4 mths



Digital readout tracks your time, steps and calories



Large foot plates for a smooth stepping motion

Adjustable resistance control



Compact stepper exerciser

Colourful Paper Napkins – with Australian birds and exotic flowers

Brighten up your parties and barbecues with these decorative paper napkins. The birds are all native Australian favourites – kookaburras, superb fairywrens, cockatoos and rainbow lorikeets – plus exotic flowers – poppies, lavender and gorgeous roses in two shades of pink. You'll receive one packet of 20 in each colourful design, 160 in total. Handy, attractive and practical, they're also great value.

Aussie Birds and Flowers Serviettes
• AUBFS \$19.95
Set of 8

Feature your favourites



Set of 8



Celebrating love

in all of its forms...



Valentine's 2021

michael hill

we're for love