

Reader's digest

DECEMBER 2021

ALED JONES

On Singing,
Setbacks And
The Snowman

GUT HEALTH

What Your Gut
Bacteria Say
About You

Reinventing CHRISTMAS

5 New Traditions
We're Bringing
Back From
Lockdown



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ALJAY'S NEW SMILE

Anita is a mother who clearly adores her son. From the moment she found out that she was to give birth to a son with a cleft, she protected him, loved him, and dreamed of the day his lip would be healed.

Anita lives in a small village about two hours from Cagayan de Oro in the Philippines. She already had six children when they found out she would have Aljay, her seventh.

When the doctor performed an ultrasound in Anita's seventh month of pregnancy, he saw that her unborn child had a cleft. "He told me to get rid of him" Anita said, tears pouring down her cheeks. "I told him that you don't just give birth and then give it up. I told him I want this child."

When Anita showed her new baby to her neighbours, they were horrified. "'Your son looks like a vampire monster" they told me, and to "get rid of him"'. In many places around the world there is widespread and severe social stigma associated with cleft conditions and families are often forced to hide newborns from their family members and communities.

Hearing her son being ridiculed was not the worst of it. "When I tried to feed him, the milk came out of his nose. I was worried that he could die."

Aljay survived and loved school, but the torment he endured from the other children was hard to bear. They teased him, laughed at him, and called him a monster.

When the teasing became too much, Anita would take Aljay to the cornfields so he was



hidden from view and nobody could tease him anymore.

When the family heard that

Operation Smile was coming to Cagayan de Oro they began saving money to afford transport to get to the city. At the medical mission Anita finally received the news she was waiting for: Aljay was healthy enough to receive surgery. After just over 45 minutes his lip was repaired and his life was transformed.

Today Aljay is a happy and cheerful boy who loves going to school and playing with other children.

ABOUT OPERATION SMILE

Operation Smile has provided hundreds of thousands of safe surgeries for those born with cleft conditions worldwide.

If you would like additional information about treating children with cleft lip and cleft palate, and to find out how you can help, please visit: www.operationssmile.org.uk/ **ReadersDigest** or call **020 3475 5126**.

Contents

DECEMBER 2021

Features

14 IT'S A MANN'S WORLD

All I want for Christmas is cereal: this month, Olly pens a letter to Santa

18 ENTERTAINMENT

INTERVIEW: ALED JONES

The Welsh singer on early fame, career setbacks and *The Snowman*

26 "I REMEMBER": PAUL NICHOLAS

The all-round British entertainer looks back on working with Bowie and playing Jesus

HEALTH

34 GUT HEALTH

You'll be amazed to find out just how much your gut bacteria can reveal about you

INSPIRE

52 REINVENTING CHRISTMAS

Meet the people who are bringing new traditions back from lockdown



p18



p84

68 REUNITED WITH HER RESCUERS

A moving story of survival and a remarkable reunion years later

76 ELECTRIC CARS

Experts reveal what we can expect from the cars of the future

TRAVEL

84 NORTHERN LIGHTS

Chasing the elusive aurora borealis in Northern Canada



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- Helping loved ones
- Clearing an existing mortgage

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*Mortgage Strategy, 'Equity release rates plummet 41% in five years: Responsible Life'

Contents

DECEMBER 2021

In every issue

- 8 Over to You
10 See the World Differently
- HEALTH**
42 Advice: Susannah Hickling
46 Column: Dr Max Pemberton
- INSPIRE**
66 If I Ruled the World:
Justin Hawkins
- TRAVEL & ADVENTURE**
92 My Great Escape
94 Hidden Gems: Los Angeles
- MONEY**
104 Column: Andy Webb
- DIY**
108 Column: Mike Aspinall
- FASHION & BEAUTY**
110 Column: Bec Oakes' Fashion Tips
112 Beauty

p127



- FOOD & DRINK**
114 World Kitchen: Ukraine
116 A Taste Of Home
- ENTERTAINMENT**
118 December's Cultural Highlights
- BOOKS**
122 December Fiction: James
Walton's Recommended Reads
127 Books That Changed
My Life: Renée Ahdieh
- TECHNOLOGY**
128 Column: James O'Malley
- FUN & GAMES**
130 You Couldn't Make It Up
133 Word Power
136 Brainteasers
140 Laugh!
143 Beat the Cartoonist
144 Good News

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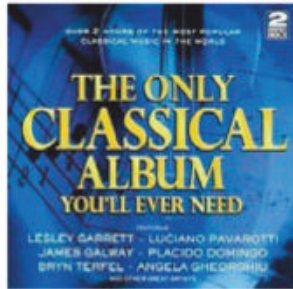
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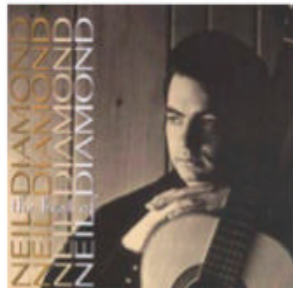
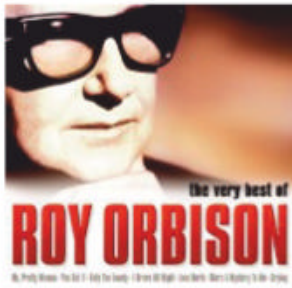
Neil Diamond *The Best Of*

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Glenn Miller *The Very Best Of*

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Elvis Presley *Love Songs*

Jim Reeves *The Very Best Of*

The Righteous Brother *The Essential Collection*

The Shadows *20 Golden Greats*

Frank Sinatra *Songs For Swingin' Lovers*

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Various *The Only Classical Album You'll Ever Need*

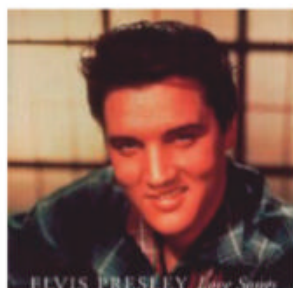
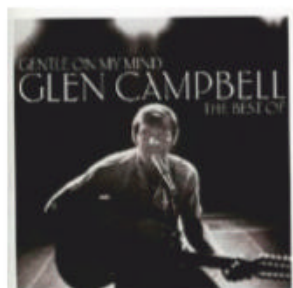
Various *The Only Jazz Album You'll Ever Need*

Various *The Only Opera Album You'll Ever Need*

Roger Whittaker *The Very Best Of*

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In This Issue...




THE CHRISTMAS OF 2020 was a cold and lonesome time for many of us; unable to spend it with our loved ones, we sought joy in the small things, and looked for consolation in the prospect of a December 2021 filled with loud Christmas parties, kisses and embraces—all without the fear of catching the deadly virus. Fast forward a year, and we're still knee-deep in the battle with this microscopic menace. Yet despite the widespread pain and suffering that the pandemic has brought, many of us keep finding reasons to be happy, kind and... inventive.

On p52, for example, we speak to the people who found unique ways to celebrate Christmas in lockdown last year, and are intending to keep these newfound traditions alive. From giving toys away to the local children, to creating activity advent calendars, these people made the best of holidays at home. Is there anything you're bringing back from Christmas 2020? Email us at readersletters@readersdigest.co.uk and let us know! In the meantime, we're sending you our warmest wishes from team *Reader's Digest* and thank you for allowing us the pleasure of keeping you company for another year.

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Anna and Eva

Over To You

LETTERS ON THE *October* ISSUE

We pay **£50** for Letter of the Month and **£30** for all others

LETTER OF THE MONTH

In the early hours of this morning I read Lisa Fields' article, "How Insomnia And Depression Are Linked". After waking yet again at 3am it resonated with me.

I've been suffering with breathing issues since contracting COVID twice on duty and I am still struggling with fatigue and loss of concentration. As a police officer, like many of my colleagues, I put myself on the frontline of the pandemic with little protection in the early stages. I think we've only just scratched the surface regarding the impact this virus has had on our physical and mental wellbeing.



Thankfully I am receiving help from my GP, but I found Lisa's comments about older adults' symptoms were very similar to my own; I am 51 and pre-COVID I was reasonably

fit. Now, some days I feel 81 and the inability to train due to severe tiredness and muscle soreness has impacted my mental health.

It's so important for men particularly, to have an opportunity to talk about these issues. So next time you ask someone if they are alright and they say, "Yes", ask them again—but be ready for some off-loading.

— PAUL PERRY, *Dudley*

PROTECTING PENSIONS

I'm so glad I read "Is Your Pension Safe From Scammers?". It's upsetting to learn that people over 55 are being targeted by criminals. Fraudsters will clearly try many ways to persuade pensioners to

part with their cash—from promising opportunities that are too good to be true, to giving them false information.

My parents are planning to take their pension early and I've shown them your article—forewarned is

forearmed. It's a cruel world that allows criminals to make money off vulnerable pensioners, but pension scams are serious. Thank you so much for bringing them to your readers' attention.

— KENDRA SEVILLE,
Merseyside

WILD FOR KIM

I was only 12 when Kim Wilde's "Kids in America" hit the UK charts and I vividly remember the appearance on *Top of the Pops* that she described in the I Remember article in October's issue. At that age it never occurred to me that she was only nine years older than me, or that she could be terrified when she looked so cool.

Nineteen-eighty-one is the year that I look back on as the time when my interest in music really blossomed, so I can pinpoint songs that were released at that time with an alarming degree of accuracy and there are some real classics to choose from. The Human League's "Don't You Want Me", Soft Cell's "Tainted Love" and Ultravox's "Vienna" all come to mind, not to mention "Kids in America", and they all still sound fresh and energetic.

I think it's the talent within songs like these that draws people to the retro 1980s tours that Kim Wilde has been a part of, as well as memories of a time when we were all much more energetic!

— LISA BEST, *Cheshire*

Your Kim Wilde interview brought back happy memories of my teenage years, in particular of Saturday afternoons spent with friends at the skating rink. I'd be sporting a stripey T-shirt, tight jeans and my treasured roller skates: deep blue with chunky red wheels and long white laces.

We skated in wide circles on the polished wooden floor, arms outstretched, grabbing for each other's hands. We gathered around the DJ to repeatedly request our favourite song. Oh, what joy when it came on. For those heady few minutes as we sang along with Kim, the drab weather and algebra homework were completely forgotten. We were no longer in an Essex town. We were cool. We were wild. We were the Kids in America.

— MARY ROSS,
Essex

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SEE THE WORLD...
turn the page →



...DIFFERENTLY

Mountains are rare in Denmark. That's unfortunate for skiers, who usually have to travel to neighbouring countries for their sport. Since 2019, however, winter sports enthusiasts have also been able to get their money's worth in Copenhagen. In the Danish capital, a 450-metre-long artificial ski slope opened—on the roof of a waste incineration plant! Those who don't want to race down the slope of *CopenHill* on the green plastic mats can try their hand at the 85-metre-high climbing wall or scale the "summit" on foot.





PHOTO: © GONZALES PHOTO/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

PHOTO: © ANNETTE RIEDL/DPA

Letters To Santa

This month, Olly Mann takes a leaf from his son's book and writes his own letter to Jolly Old Saint Nick...

DEAR SANTA,
I suspect you're not too fond of me these days. I'm sorry I always drink the sherry we leave out for you. I'm sorry I strong-armed our kids into better behaviour by convincing them you're monitoring us 24/7 via the burglar alarm. And I do regret that I sometimes stream "Santa Baby". It *is* objectifying.

The thing is, my son wrote you a letter recently; a task set by his teacher, as handwriting homework. I hope you received it? Apologies that he appears to confuse you with Jesus. I reckon you get that a lot.



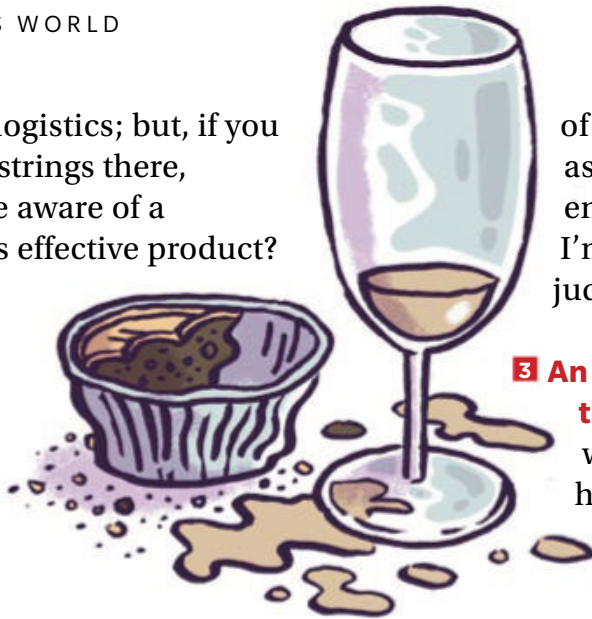
Olly Mann presents *Four Thought* for BBC Radio 4, and the podcasts *The Modern Mann*, *The Week Unwrapped* and *The Retrospectors*

Anyway, it made me think: it must be—what?—33 years since I've written you a letter myself? So, here are five things that I want for Christmas. To be honest, it's been a release just to write them all down. You probably get that a lot, too.

1 A smart speaker that can't identify children. I used to be a bit, "Jeff Bezos is spying on us!" about smart speakers. But lockdown helped me accept humanity's future as AI-hominid hybrids, and conclude that I am in fact willing to trade my privacy for the ability to set an egg timer with my voice and achieve perfectly browned onions. However, each morning, while I'm listening to *The Today Programme*, my kids get Alexa to play "Baby Shark". This is a design flaw. I imagine you've got good contacts at Amazon, given your experience in



supply-chain logistics; but, if you can't pull any strings there, perhaps you're aware of a marginally less effective product? I need a smart speaker that's unable to interpret the high-pitched squawking of my sprogs, please.



of my feasting. Santa, as a man who evidently enjoys a roast dinner, I'm sure you won't judge me. Help!

2 A gadget to scrape burnt bits off baking trays. To be clear: the device I desire is *not* for washing up. For that, I'm content to use the tried-and-tested technique of filling my used baking trays with a layer of washing up liquid "to soak overnight" until they become a fatberg swamp. No, what I require is a trinket that can help me eat more of the burnt-on bits first.

You see, I've come to realise that my favourite meal—literally, my favourite, more than lobster Thermidor or eggs Royale or steak and chips—is "the burnt bits from the bottom of the baking tray". Typically, I'll wait until after dinner, offer to do the washing up, then quietly gorge on what remains of the roast veg, chicken bits, and garlic skins, all mashed together in a charred stack, sprinkled with salt. Delish! But a spatula only accesses the top layer, and scraping it with a metal spoon leaves revealing clues

3 An upgrade to "towel tier". We felt smug, when we joined the health club on the cheapest membership package. "Why would

anyone stump up an extra £20 per month for a guest pass and a slightly nicer steam room?", we snorted. After a few months of damp car journeys and endless laundry cycles, the answer became very clear: *because the top tier comes with free towels.*

Every time I swim, I must lug my water-logged towel through the car park, drape it over my shopping in a fruitless attempt at air drying, and then cruise around with it for the whole day, stinking out my boot, and exposing my penny-pinching for the world to see. Yet I simply can't justify shelling out an additional £240 per year, just for a fresh towel to be handed to me at each visit. That feels like opulent indulgence; the last days of Rome. Something I would never buy myself. Which is why it would make a perfect Christmas present...

4 A dreamcatcher. Not the Native American pendant, thanks (if I'm

going to appropriate a traditional craft from another culture, it should, at least, match my wallpaper). I want a tech solution (a smart pillow, perhaps?) for automatically transcribing my dreams. I have a lot of great ideas when I'm asleep. Or at least, I think I do. Then I wake up and immediately forget them. If they were captured for posterity, at least I'd know that they were terrible.

📺 A new favourite cereal. You know my tastes, Santa. I've always loved Cinnamon Toast Crunch, for my sins. I've eaten it at least once per week since the age of ten, cherishing the reassuring childhood nostalgia each sugary mouthful provides.

I stuck with it through the

Cinnamon Grahams years (seriously, who at Nestlé thought it was cool to name a kid's cereal "Graham"?), and have persisted, under its current guise as Curiously Cinnamon, but the packaging is just *killing me*. "Seven Vits & Iron", it claims. Nobody, but nobody, uses the abbreviation "vits". Every day, the packaging is a micro-aggression. I desperately need a new favourite cereal, Santa.

I hope that my list is not asking too much. And best of luck with our chimney. I promise we'll get it cleaned next year.

Merry Christmas.
Olly x

A Fiendishly Festive Christmas Quiz

1. Which Christmas song did astronauts broadcast from space in 1965?

2. Mistletoe literally translates from Anglo Saxon as what on a stick?

3. According to the folklore of Austria, what horned figure punishes naughty children at Christmas time?

4. In which modern-day country was Saint Nicholas born?

5. In 2020 Prime Minister Boris Johnson described Christmas as the season to be jolly and...?

6. What does Noel mean in Latin?

Answers: 1. Jingle Bells 2. Dung 3. Krampus 4. Turkey 5. Jolly careful 6. Birth.

Aled Jones

On Singing, Setbacks And *The Snowman*

By Nicola Venning

The singer, TV and radio presenter recalls becoming the soundtrack to everyone's Christmas as a 14-year-old soprano, and releasing a children's book

ALED HIMSELF WAS still a child when he joined Bangor Cathedral choir as a cherubic Welsh boy soprano. The outstanding quality of his voice was soon recognised and before you could say "rising star", he was singing "Walking in The Air", the song from the animated film, *The Snowman*. He was 14 when it catapulted him to stardom and worldwide success.

"It was only meant to be an ad for Toys 'R' Us [a now defunct children's toy store]", says Aled. But when the song was released in 1985 as a single, it became a hit, reaching number five. "No one had ever followed that

path before. I was one of the first to make that kind of music popular. Little did I know it would become part of everyone's Christmas for years to come."

However, Aled insists he was not a child star. "I was just a singer who was given great opportunities," he says. "Monday to Friday I was a normal, football-playing comprehensive schoolboy, then the weekend would come and I would be jetting here, there and everywhere meeting my heroes. I had the best of both worlds."

Despite being a shy person and hating the spotlight (he admits he still gets stage fright), Aled sang



US music
composer
Leonard
Bernstein and
a young
Aled Jones



at rock star Bob Geldof's wedding to presenter Paula Yates, and was snapped in one of their wedding photographs standing next to David Bowie. Eighties icons such as George Michael and pop groups Ultravox, and Duran Duran, also share the picture. "I was there with my mum and dad. They had never seen anything like it in their lives," says Aled. "I went around with this autograph book asking all these legends to sign it." Though most did, apparently "the guys from Spandau Ballet" told him "to leave them alone", he relates.

Other performances included singing for the Prince and Princess of Wales, appearing on the Royal Variety Show and at the Hollywood Bowl (LA), where he shared the

stage with conductor/composer Leonard Bernstein. He "had more impact on me than almost any other of countless great talents I was privileged to meet as a boy", he adds.

School, homework, and family life must have been very tricky, I venture. Aled agrees. "It was a mad, mad year. Probably the busiest I have ever been. And I was trying to do my O levels! I look back and think, *It would have been a lot easier for my parents, if their son had been a normal kid.* My father is very shy; I think he would have much rather been in the garden than have to come to London with me every weekend. They were fantastically supportive but secretly I think my father was thrilled when I was 18 and I could go on my own."



Aled Jones and
Paula Yates

“IT’S BEEN A VERY STRANGE 18 MONTHS. MY DIARY WAS ON MY PHONE AND ALL MY LIVE CONCERTS DISAPPEARED IN FRONT OF MY EYES”

I press him a little more on the famous people he has met and sung for (The Queen, The Pope) but the perpetual harking back to his superstar boyhood, is, you get the impression, a little tiring, even for someone as laidback as Aled.

“I’m 50 now and it was over 30 years ago”, he says. So, we revert to the subject of our interview, his first children’s book. The story had been inside him “for a very long time,” he says. But he had never had a chance to work on it. Then, when lockdown happened, everything changed. “It’s been a very strange 18 months. It

was like a scene from *Harry Potter*. My diary was on my phone and all my live concerts just disappeared in front of my eyes,” he says. Although the pandemic was devastating and caused a great deal of hardship for many people, being stuck at home was, in his case, a great opportunity.

Aled parked himself in front of his computer and started tapping out the idea: he had to create a plot, a plan and a story with authentic dialogue. “My editor helped me and he was brutally honest. I embrace challenge, but writing the book was a challenge. It’s all in the preparation,



“I WAS PROBABLY MORE EXCITED THAN I WAS OVER AN ALBUM. IT WAS A BIT LIKE HOLDING YOUR BABY IN YOUR ARMS”

isn't it?”, he says. The whole process took about six months. When he had finally hammered out a story which his editor was happy with, he then teamed up with Rosie Brooks, whom he calls “one of the best illustrators in the world.”

“She has done an amazing job. If nothing else comes from it, I have made a friendship that will last a lifetime. I am a huge fan of her work,” he says.

Earlier this month the finished book, a festive red with a cheerful rosie-cheeked drawing of Bobby Dean on the front, was delivered.

“I was probably more excited than I was over an album. It was like holding your baby in your arms; not quite, but a bit like that,” he grins.

In writing a children's book, Aled is joining illustrious company. A string of celebrities have turned their hands to children's fiction, including the Duchess of York, Frank Lampard and the chart-busting David Walliams. Aled already has plans for more.

“I love doing something where I can learn. I feel that book two and book three will be even better,” he says. Practising, improving and not being afraid to try new things has



been central to Aled's development as a singer and presenter and was a habit formed in childhood.

He grew up in Anglesey, North Wales where his mother was a primary school teacher and his father was an engineer. "There was always music in my family. My family and grandparents sang and I was encouraged to sing and perform at school", he says.

Soon after he joined the choir at Bangor Cathedral, he was made lead soloist. The remarkable quality of his treble voice was noticed by a member of the congregation who wrote to a local recording company about it, "without even my mum and dad knowing. The first my parents knew of it was when they received a

letter from the company, asking if I fancied doing a record", says Aled.

He went on to make several and had made 12 albums before recording the mega-selling "Walking In The Air". It should have made him a teen multi-millionaire but Aled denies this. "I didn't become very rich. My father put the money away for me for later. It wasn't about the money. I was more interested in singing at Hollywood Bowl (in Los Angeles) or going to Disneyland."

When his voice broke at 16, it made national news. His soprano career was over although by now he had sold an astonishing 6 million albums. As he was advised to rest his voice for a couple of years, he took an acting course at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School and in 1990



launched himself into plays and musicals. There are two shows which stand out for him, one was *White Christmas*, in London's West End. "Who wouldn't want to do a musical where it snows in the auditorium?", he says. The show was also a complete sell-out and a success.

The second and earlier show in his career, was *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat*. Aled was playing Joseph in Blackpool in 1995, when he met his future wife, Claire Fossett who is a member of the famous Fossett Circus family. They were married shortly after and have two children, Lucas, now 16, and daughter Emilia, 19. The youngsters have not followed their father's singing career so far, although Emilia acts and has been in *Doctor*

Who and the Netflix series, *Locke & Key*. What do they think when they see old pictures of their dad dressed as a nine-year-old chorister and singing his heart out?

"They think it's hilarious but I am just Dad to them, they don't care about my work really," he says.

I ask what his biggest challenge has been, and Aled admits one or two albums haven't always hit the mark. But having made over 30, he is phlegmatic. "You can't always be on top," he says. Another challenging time was in 2017 when an allegation of inappropriate behaviour was made against him at the BBC. His career was temporarily put on hold while it was investigated. He denied any inappropriate contact, apologised



Aled Jones,
Emilia Jones,
Lucas Jones,
Claire Fossett,
2015

“I PINCH MYSELF THAT I AM STILL ABLE TO DO WHAT I LOVE”

for his “juvenile” behaviour and was reinstated as a presenter. On the topic itself he says: “I’m not talking about it at all. It is very much in the past. It’s been and gone”.

Moving on, like all singers and entertainers, he is desperately keen to resume performing again. The closure of so many venues over the last year and a half has been particularly hard for the entertainment industry, and he is thrilled that things are opening up again.

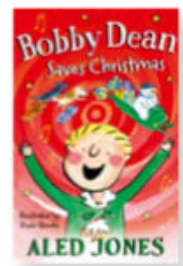
He has a cathedral tour next spring, “which I am really looking forward to”, in between his regular

show for Classic FM, TV presenting and other concerts and records.

Given his overwhelming success, I do wonder why he works so hard? “I like the variety. I like the fact I do radio, TV and singing. No two days are the same really,” he says. “I pinch myself that I am still able to do what I love”.

But then, with a voice like his, it is hardly surprising. ■

Bobby Dean Saves Christmas is published by Hodder & Stoughton in £8.99 hardback and is out now





I REMEMBER...

Paul Nicholas



All-round entertainer Paul Nicholas (76) has enjoyed success in the pop charts, on TV and in musical theatre. He looks back at working with David Bowie, playing Jesus and meeting Hollywood legends

...I WAS BORN DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN 1944 and I remember having a lot of powdered eggs because of rationing. I also remember our three-bedroom council house in North London being pretty crowded because my parents, myself, my father's sisters and my grandmother all lived there. Listening to the radio was a big pastime. When I was around age six, we'd go see Hollywood movies at the cinema,

KEN MCKAY/ITV/SHUTTERSTOCK



films like *Easter Parade* which brought a splash of colour to what was otherwise a rather black-and-white existence. I was told that when I came home I'd practise tap dancing on the lino.

...MY MOTHER WORKED FOR THE BOARD OF TRADE and my father was studying to be a lawyer. He'd go across to the local park with his books to study in peace and eventually he qualified as an entertainment and showbusiness solicitor. Prior to that, during the war, he told me he worked for MI6. He spoke Flemish, a bit of French

and a bit of German so he must have been quite useful to them.

...I WAS RELIEVED WHEN MY PARENTS DIVORCED. I was 12 when it happened and they'd had a rather tempestuous marriage. When you grow up in that environment, particularly as an only child, it has a real impact so I was happy when they decided to call it a day. I lived with my mum until I was about 16, then I went to live with my grandma. My father nicknamed her Fighting Wyn because she was quite domineering. He had nicknames for everybody. He called my mother The Ogre.

...I WASN'T VERY ACADEMIC BUT I LOVED SINGING. I gave my first performance in a school dance when I was 15 and sang "Good Luck Charm" by Elvis Presley. The girls seemed to find me more attractive, which, when you're that age, is a real plus. Changing my surname from Beuselinck to Dean, I formed a band called Paul Dean & The Dreamers. We supported Screaming Lord Sutch's band The Savages and he recruited me as their singer and pianist.

...DAVID BOWIE WROTE ONE OF MY EARLY SINGLES. After going solo in the mid-1960s and changing my name again to Paul Oscar, I met with Bowie and he wrote this song called "Over The Wall We Go" about people breaking out of prison, which was



Paul Nicholas with his wife Linzi Beuselinck, April 18, 1989

both topical and funny—it was banned by the BBC. I found Bowie to be quite a serious young man and very talented.

...I DIDN'T GET NAKED IN THE MUSICAL *HAIR*. Getting into musical theatre in 1968 and finally settling on the name Paul Nicholas, I played Claude and nudity wasn't required as I was stood in the middle as everyone else took their clothes off. Nothing had really happened for me in terms of a pop career and I worked in a music publisher's but I missed performing. I went in to audition for *Hair*, got the

part and realised musical theatre was what I really wanted to do.

...LINZI JENNINGS AND I MET ON THE TOUR OF *HAIR*. We were staying in the same apartment block in Manchester, I went downstairs to borrow some glue after I broke a lamp. That was in 1971 and we've been together ever since, except for a short time apart in the late-1970s. As I joke in my book, I think I'm only now beginning to get on her nerves!

...PLAYING JESUS IN *JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR* WAS SO EXCITING because it was a new form of theatre,



namely a rock opera. Dying on the cross each night was very moving the first few times because of the audience reaction and the beautiful piece of music that accompanied it, but I got used to it. It also led to other great gigs, like *Grease* opposite Elaine Paige.

...THE DIRECTOR KEN RUSSELL WAS A PRETTY INTENSE MAN. I worked for him in *Tommy* and *Lisztomania*. He had a terrific imagination, good energy and he knew what he wanted. But he was probably better at interpreting other people's work, like *Tommy*, than on *Lisztomania*, which he wrote himself and probably pushed it further than it needed to go.

...I RETURNED TO POP MUSIC IN 1976 to fulfil an ambition I hadn't fulfilled previously. I'd gone to America but couldn't get a work permit because I wasn't famous enough, so I thought a pop career might make me famous. I found a song called "Reggae Like It Used To Be" and thought, *That sounds like a hit*. I recorded it and it was a hit. I then did "Dancing with the Captain" and "Grandma's Party" and the plan worked because they were hits too.

...THE DEATH OF MY EX-WIFE IN A CAR ACCIDENT was the worst period of my life. Although Susan [Gee] and myself were no longer

Members of the original cast of the *Cats* musical backstage at the New London Theatre in 1981



together when it happened in 1979, it was a great shock. I was very depressed about it for years and it was really because of Linzi that I got through it. She was a wonderful help to me and my two young children, who were eight and ten at the time. We weren't together at the time but being the wonderful woman that she is, she came back to me.

...LINZI AND I WENT ON TO HAVE TWO KIDS TOGETHER, bringing my total to six because I had two children out of wedlock in my misspent youth. We're all friendly and they all come and stay with us.

I've also got 13 lovely grandchildren. Being an only child, I felt lonely and always wanted a brother or sister. I've certainly made up for it since and I did get a brother much later when my father remarried.

...PLAYING THE RUM TUM TUGGER IN CATS WAS GREAT FUN.

It was brilliantly staged and of course it reunited me with Elaine again. Unfortunately Judi Dench, who was due to sing "Memory" in the show, snapped her Achilles tendon and couldn't do it so they brought Elaine in. As for the dancing, I was never up to the standard of the trained dancers but I managed to get by and

With Jan Francis
(Below); With
actress Cyd
Charisse



when it came to the really tricky stuff I'd go into the audience and sit on their laps.

...WHEN I FIRST GOT THE SCRIPT FOR *JUST GOOD FRIENDS* IN 1983

I read it and thought, *This is gold dust. This is clever. It's romantic and it's real and I really want to get the job.* I auditioned with Jan [Francis], we did a pilot show and it caught on with the public very quickly. Jan was fabulous to work with, with a great sense of humour, and we had such fun filming it.

...MEETING CYD CHARISSE WAS A DREAM COME TRUE. We did

Charlie Girl in the mid-1980s and having grown up with those old

Hollywood movies, then suddenly dancing and singing with this wonderful, gracious woman was magic. I also met another Hollywood icon, Douglas Fairbanks Jr, when as a friend of the producer he came along to help promote *The Pirates of Penzance*. There's a great photo of us doing a mock sword fight together.

...MICHAEL ASPEL SURPRISED ME WITH HIS BIG RED BOOK

when I was doing *Barnum* at Bristol Hippodrome. That was in 1991 and doing *This is Your Life* was a lovely



The *Marigold* cast in India

experience because you don't have to do anything. People come on and say nice things about you, then you have a little drink afterwards. You also get to keep the big red book, which I still have of course.

...I ENJOYED PLAYING A VILLAIN ON

EASTENDERS. I was Gavin Sullivan on the show for a year from 2015 and it was a tough job. I have a lot of admiration for people in soaps because they're on an incredibly tight schedule, with no time to do anything else. But I was glad I did it and I had my own catchphrase: "Hello Princess".




...GETTING TO SEE SO MANY EXOTIC PLACES when I did *The Real Marigold Hotel* in 2017 was such a pleasure. Being in your seventies, and in some cases in your eighties, it's so nice to be invited to take part in a primetime show, visiting amazing places and experiencing the fun that entails. I especially liked going to India and learning to tango in Argentina. ■

As told to Simon Button

Paul Nicholas' autobiography *Musicals, Marigolds & Me* and the 3-CD compilation *Paul Nicholas Gold* are out now

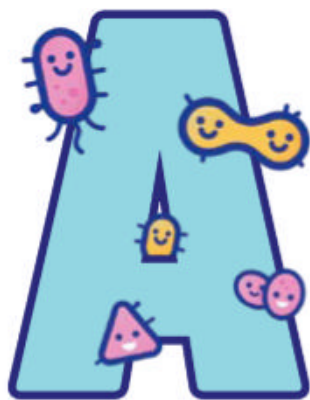


THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO YOUR GUT



The bacteria in your intestines affects whether you'll have allergies, your risk of depression—and even how well your medication works

BY *Vanessa Milne*



DECADE AGO, Kaitlyn, a 28-year-old support worker living in Ontario, Canada, became very ill. She had painful constipation, was contracting fevers and losing weight. “If I ate too much, I would vomit,” she says.

After tests ruled out Crohn’s disease and colitis, Kaitlyn’s family doctor diagnosed her with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), a chronic disorder that causes cramping, pain, and bloating along with constipation or diarrhoea.

While IBS can’t be cured, it can be managed through lifestyle changes. A dietitian suggested to Kaitlyn that the bacteria that lived in her intestines—collectively known as the gut microbiome—might be out of balance, contributing to her condition. She recommended that Kaitlyn take probiotics—pills that contain specific strains of bacteria—to help put things in order.

After only a few days of taking the probiotics, Kaitlyn felt a lot better. “The pain and fevers went away, and I was able to eat without getting sick,” she says. She still needed to avoid specific

foods that trigger her condition, but gained back some of the weight she had lost.

The state of our gut microbiome impacts many facets of our physical and mental health. But what is it, exactly? Imagine a jar of fermented food, like sauerkraut, which is full of bacteria. The bacteria that already live on the cabbage flourish when it’s covered in brine and sealed. In that oxygen-deprived space, those bacteria break down the food’s

LIKE ANY THRIVING ECOSYSTEM, YOUR GUT IS HEALTHY WHEN IT HAS A DIVERSITY OF BACTERIA



components—eg, carbohydrates—and release acid, which gives sauerkraut its tangy flavour. A similar process happens inside your intestines every time you eat: bacteria break the food down, transforming it into crucial vitamins, amino acids, chemicals, and, yes, gas.

All those bacteria start colonising you the minute you’re born. You pick up more bacterial strains from breast milk, your home, the environment outside, contact with other people, the food you eat, and even the family dog. By the age of three, your microbiome has pretty much settled into how it will

look when you're an adult. The different types of bacteria that live in your gut can help you digest food, but they also impact other aspects of your body, including your immune system, brain, and your cardiovascular health.

"Your gut is like its own ecosystem," says Sean Gibbons, a microbiome researcher and assistant professor at the Institute for Systems Biology in Seattle, Washington. "It's warm, humid, and wet—like a rainforest." And, he explains, like any thriving ecosystem, your gut is healthy when it's diverse, with hundreds of types of bacteria.

Two of the most important are *Firmicutes* and *Bacteroidetes*, which feast on dietary fibre and break down complex carbohydrates. Both also churn out short-chain fatty acids, microscopic compounds that help maintain the integrity of the gut wall (that barrier is supposed to be porous in order to let nutrients through, but if it's too porous, that can lead to inflammation). They also have anti-inflammatory properties and can promote brain health.

You should feed those two types well, because if there's not enough food in your system, they'll turn to a secondary source of nutrients. "They will actually start to eat your gut mucus," explains Gibbons. If that happens, many bacteria in your gut will suddenly be seen by your immune system as outside agents, setting off a response that can lead to

inflammatory bowel disease and other gut problems.

SIGNS YOUR GUT IS OUT OF BALANCE



You have a stubborn bowel condition

Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis—known together as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)—cause inflammation and breaks in the lining of the intestines, leading to pain, diarrhea, and weight loss. It affects less than one per cent of Europeans. Dr Eugene Chang, director of the Microbiome Medicine Programme at the University of Chicago, says its exact cause is unknown. But, he adds, researchers believe affected people are genetically predisposed to an overactive immune system, and that their microbiome changes in subtle ways to prefer bacteria that thrive in that inflammatory environment. "Those bacteria further activate the immune system. It's a vicious cycle that eventually triggers IBD."

IBS, which is much more common and affects up to 11 per cent of people worldwide, shares many symptoms with IBD but without the inflammation and ulcerations. Like IBD, the exact cause of IBS isn't yet clear, but studies have shown differences in the microbiome of IBS patients—and probiotics can help some of them feel better.

Your medications aren't working

The medicines doctors prescribe for various conditions don't always work, and in some cases, the gut microbiome may be to blame. Just as microbes break down the fibre and starches in our food, they can also break down pharmaceuticals, making them act unpredictably.

In fact, a 2019 study from researchers at the Yale University School of Medicine looked at 271 drugs taken orally and found that the gut microbiome affected two thirds of them, with the bacteria consuming about 20 per cent of their active ingredients. That means, for example, that if you have too much *Eggerthella lenta*—a bacterium found in about one third of us—the commonly prescribed digoxin might not help your heart disease symptoms.

This effect on medicine has even larger implications for cancer treatment. Recently, researchers found that the gut microbiome can affect the progression of some types of cancer, and that it also affects who responds to immunotherapy and bone marrow transplants.

All of the above has given birth to a new field: pharmacomicrobiomics, the study of how your gut microbiome affects a drug's actions. In ten to 15 years, your doctor may be able to test your microbiome through a stool sample and then modulate the dose—or possibly prescribe a probiotic—to

make your pills work better. And clinical trials are currently investigating whether cancer patients are more likely to survive if they're given tailored probiotics, a special diet, or a fecal transplant—a small bit of poop from someone else that could reset your gut microbiome.

You struggle with your weight

“Two decades ago, we thought that obesity and metabolic disorders were all about how much you ate,” says Chang. “But it turns out that the gut microbiome seems to play an important role.”

The connection is clearest in mice: when researchers from the Washington University School of Medicine transplanted stool samples from obese and thin people into the rodents, the animals who received fecal transplants from the obese participants gained more weight and put on more fat than the ones who received them from the healthier participants, even when the mice all ate the same low-fat diet.

There's some evidence from humans, too: for a study two years ago, Belgian researchers gave people who had insulin resistance and were overweight or obese a bacterium that's more common in the guts of lean men. Similar to the mice, the new bacteria lowered participants' insulin resistance, and they lost more weight and fat than a placebo group.

ELEMENTS OF A HAPPY GUT

You're depressed

We think of mood disorders as originating in the brain, but your gut may also be a source of them. A 2019 study found that people with depression had fewer *Coprococcus* and *Dialister* than most people. Other research has found that mice that receive stool transplants from depressed humans get depressed, too.

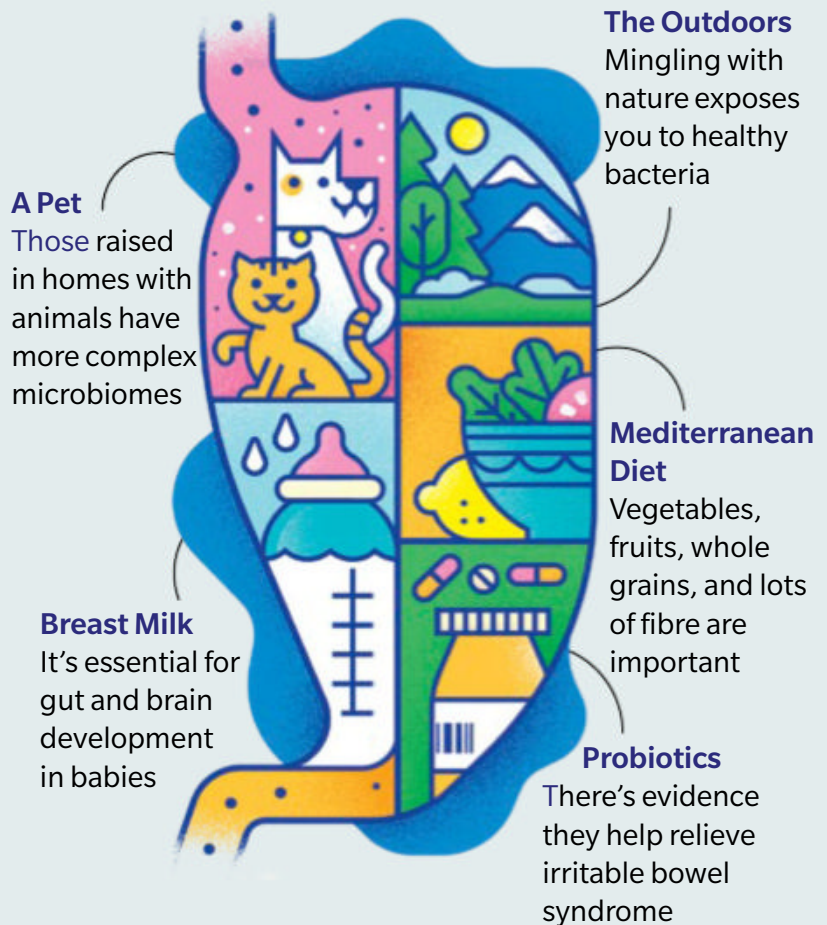
Could changing someone's gut microbiome improve their mental health? The research is still emerging, but a 2017 Australian study found promising results. It looked at people with major depression who were on medication or in therapy. Half remained on these treatments and also tried a Mediterranean diet, which is rich in whole grains, lean protein, vegetables, and fruits. That group had a much greater reduction in their depression than the others.

You have allergies

A diverse microbiome can help regulate your immune system,

especially early in life. So if your immune system is hypersensitive because of your particular microbiome, it increases your chances of having allergies, asthma, and eczema.

That's why exposure to a variety of bacteria from a young age is so important. Kids who are born vaginally are less likely to have allergies than those born by C-section, as are people who are raised on farms, have pets, or grow up with older siblings in the house.



According to B Brett Finlay, a microbiology professor at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and author of *Let Them Eat Dirt*, antibiotic use can also have a big impact: as it wipes out the bacteria making you sick, it will also indiscriminately wipe out bacteria that keep your gut diverse and healthy. That raises the risk your gut microbiome will be inadequate for preventing the conditions that cause allergies, asthma, and eczema. In fact, Finlay and other UBC researchers found that people who had been prescribed antibiotics before age one were twice as likely to develop asthma by age five—and the risk increased with every course of the medication.

The impact of a less diverse gut persists into adulthood. When researchers with the American Gut Project analysed the microbiomes of more than 1,800 people with allergies, they found that those with seasonal and nut allergies had less diversity in their gut.

HOW YOU CAN IMPROVE YOUR GUT



There isn't one magic prescription for everyone, though researchers are hopeful that within five years, microbiome tests will be detailed enough to prescribe personalised probiotics or make other patient-specific recommendations. But there

are some changes that can help you right now.

1. Eat more fibre

One of the most well-proven connections between lifestyle and gut health is that eating more fibre creates a better microbiome. Fibre is the main food source for the most important gut bacteria, so not getting enough starves them, and many of them die. That means they may produce fewer short-chain fatty acids and other important components of your diet, and begin consuming your gut's mucus lining.

Unfortunately, most people in Western countries don't get enough fibre. For example, according to Julie Thompson of the organisation Guts UK, even though UK guidelines recommend eating 30 grams of fibre each day, the average person eats only 19 grams.

To get your 30 grams, focus on eating five servings of fruits and vegetables each day, as well as a whole-grain carbohydrate at every meal.

2. Diversify your diet

Your overall goal should be to create a diverse gut microbiome. And it's not just fibre that provides sustenance for good bacteria—other things in our meals do, too. If you eat a large variety of foods, including many different types and colours of fruits and vegetables, that variety will promote a healthy gut. On the other hand, high-fat processed foods

deplete healthy bacterial strains and make your gut less diverse in general, says Chang. If you were to suddenly stop having salads and instead eat fries, he adds, “Your microbiome would change within 24 hours, with a decrease in the healthy microbes that plant fibre promotes.”

3. Go easy on antibiotics

Antibiotics are a lifesaver when needed, but they tend to throw our gut microbiome off balance by killing even the healthy bacteria that help maintain the gut wall. Usually, they are able to crowd out bacteria that can make you sick, just as it's harder for weeds to establish themselves in a lush lawn than in unplanted soil. But when antibiotics do their job of destruction, bad bacteria can take over before the good have a chance to reestablish themselves. Then, the clue that something is wrong is often diarrhoea. While most healthy gut microbiomes can bounce back from that, if yours is already unbalanced, Gibbons says antibiotics could lead to issues like IBS.

To help prevent antibiotic-caused diarrhoea, talk to your doctor about taking a probiotic the same day you start your antibiotics. A 2017 University of Copenhagen review found that only eight per cent of people who took probiotics developed diarrhoea when they took antibiotics, compared with 18 per cent of those who took placebos.

Most importantly, make sure you really need an antibiotic before you take it. According to the US-based Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, at least 30 per cent of antibiotic prescriptions are completely unnecessary.

4. Consider probiotics

Probiotics may also protect against diarrhoea when we travel to countries where the bacteria in the food and water are different from those at home. And, as mentioned, probiotics could help people with IBS. It's best to try them at the direction of a health-care provider, who can suggest specific types.

In the meantime, scientists are working to better understand probiotics. “Within the next five to ten years, I believe we'll start to see medical grade probiotics on the market,” says Gibbons.

5. Stay active

Regular exercise improves your gut microbiome. A 2016 UBC study found that athletes with the best cardiorespiratory fitness levels—a marker that measures how well your body can move oxygen to where it's needed—also had more diversity in their gut. Another study, from Spain, found that women who did three hours of exercise a week—even just brisk walking—significantly improved the composition of their gut microbiome. ■



Thirst For Knowledge

Whether it's water, juice, booze or hot beverages, let's drink to your good health!



Susannah Hickling is twice winner of the Guild of Health Writers Best Consumer Magazine Health Feature

Avoid salty drinks

Yes, that's right—some drinks have salt in them. Soda water uses sodium bicarbonate to make it fizzy, so it's salt-rich. Some have 1g per litre, which is a lot when you consider the daily maximum for the sake of your blood pressure is 6g. Drink sparkling mineral water instead. Some sports drinks also contain salt to replace what you lose when you sweat. This is fine if you're ultra sporty, but if you're not, then plain water is the way to go.

Drink more water to combat heart failure

New research from the US has found

that maintaining good hydration can prevent or slow down changes in the body that can lead to heart failure. The recommended amounts are 1.5 to 2.1 litres a day for women and between 2 and 3 litres for men, but many people don't even reach the lower end of those ranges.

Sip wine, not spirits, if you want to drink less

Anxious you might make a fool of yourself at the Christmas party? A glass of wine provides more volume for the alcohol—meaning it lasts longer and so, you'll drink less—than a gin and tonic. Other tips for holding your tittle: alternate a glass of wine with a glass of water, or opt for spritzers by mixing white wine with sparkling water.

Sugar-free drinks might be bad for your health

Even when they don't contain sugar, they contain artificial sweeteners. While they contain fewer calories, some scientists think they might still make you gain weight, as they may stimulate sweet-taste receptors and make you eat more of the wrong kinds of food. Worse still, a recent study across ten European countries found the risk of death from all causes was higher in people who drank two or more glasses of artificially sweetened

drinks a day, compared to those who downed less than one glass a month.

Orange juice is packed with sugar, but could help prevent dementia

A fruit juice may contain "natural" rather than added sugars, but they're still sugars and make it a high-calorie beverage. In fact, orange juice has more calories than orange squash. But juice is also full of vitamin C and has some other surprising benefits too—there's evidence it makes you less prone to kidney stones and to dementia. For example, a US study found that men who glugged orange juice every day were 47 per cent less likely to develop poor thinking skills than those who drank it less than once a month.

ALTERNATE A GLASS OF WINE WITH A GLASS OF WATER

Teabags contain more caffeine than leaves

Broken tea leaves, found in teabags, give out more caffeine than whole leaves when brewed. You'll also get more caffeine in your tea the longer you brew it and the hotter the water. Bear that in mind when you're making a cuppa later in the day—you don't want it interfering with sleep. ■

For more weekly health tips and stories, sign up to our newsletter at readersdigest.co.uk

How To Keep Your Bathroom Bug-Free

As much as the bathroom is where you get clean, it can also be pretty unhygienic

Sanitise those handles Beyond your usual weekly cleaning regime—loo, shower, bath, washbasin—also disinfect door handles, flush, and light switches or pulls, and wipe down all surfaces. This will help you keep all kinds of bugs at bay.

Change towels regularly Wash towels after every three uses, and after every use if you have eczema or after a workout. Use them for too long and you'll find yourself smearing dirt and germs all over your clean body! To ward off bacteria, always hang up your towel and let it dry out thoroughly.

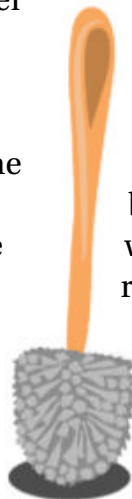
Ventilate, ventilate, ventilate Bathrooms are warm and damp—the perfect environment for a build-up of mould. This in turn can aggravate conditions such as asthma and allergic rhinitis. So make sure you use the extractor fan or open the window for as long and as wide as possible. Preferably do both.

Don't forget to look up While your air vent or extractor will remove dust and mould, it will harbour them too. So clean it at least once a year. Turn off the power supply, remove the cover and sponge with soapy water. Meanwhile, a University of Manchester study found that shower heads contained bacteria and fungus capable of triggering a range of illnesses from Legionnaire's disease to eye infections to digestive complaints. Eek! Ideally, disinfect it every three months.

Clean the cleaning implements

We often completely ignore the loo brush when it comes to our bathroom cleaning routine. Clean it weekly by soaking it in hot soapy water with a few drops of bleach for several minutes and then rinsing it. Disinfect the holder too.

Wash that toothbrush It stands to reason that your toilet brush is going to be covered in nasties, but have you ever considered your toothbrush? Research presented to the 2015 American Society for Microbiology meeting found that toothbrushes in communal bathrooms were contaminated with faecal matter! As well as rinsing your toothbrush after each use and storing it upright, soak it in an antibacterial mouthwash once a week. Replace after three months. ■



Ask The Expert: Happy Holidays

Dr Alka Patel is a GP, lifestyle medicine physician and the founder of Lifestyle First, which aims to empower people to take care of their health and happiness

How did you become interested in lifestyle medicine? I've been a GP for 20 years but the last few years I felt quite unsettled by general practice. Patients were increasingly dependent on me and on my prescriptions. So I left and volunteered in palliative care in India. It changed me. What I saw was kindness and compassion, self-care and people looking after each other. I came back and discovered lifestyle medicine.

What is it? It is an evidence-informed lifestyle change approach to prevent, treat and reverse lifestyle-related illnesses. I call it self-care medicine, root-cause medicine. It takes you back to all the important causes of changes in our health which lie in our lifestyle. Health isn't something that lands in your lap; it has to be something active you do.

What are the main challenges during the festive season? There are financial pressures. Family obligations can seem overwhelming. Meanwhile, some



people can feel more lonely. How we eat and drink changes and healthy living takes a nosedive. There's social pressure and saying no can be difficult. Striving for perfection can be a challenge too—we feel we've got to create that perfectly happy experience.

How can people have a happy Christmas? Pause, reflect and notice the small things that make you happy. Connectedness is important—choose who you want to be around. If you know someone is lonely, reach out, even just to help with their shopping. Kindness can help you re-energise.

How can they be happy and healthy in the long term? It's very individual. I've developed a free online LQ test on my website, dralkapatel.com. This can help zone in on the aspects of your lifestyle that need to be improved. Move more, eat better, sleep better, but the key thing to remember when making any change is just to start and then feel the ripple effect. ■

For more information head to Dr Patel's website, dralkapatel.com

Editor's note: This article contains frank discussion of suicide, self-harm, abuse and other topics some readers may find upsetting

Breaking The Cycle

A deeply traumatised young patient is shown that her life matters

LIFE IS NOT FAIR, I conclude, as I sit and listen to Joanna. “It started after my mum left”, she explains. “I was just so scared he’d start doing it to my sister, I let him keep doing it to me”. For three years Joanna’s father sexually abused her. Eventually she told a teacher, who reported it to the police. Joanna and her younger sister were taken into care. Late one night, before her father was due in court, he took his own life. Joanna has had no contact



with her mother since the day she left and six months ago her sister was killed in a road traffic accident. She is now totally alone in the world. At the tender age of 14, she has already had to endure more horrors than most people experience in a lifetime.

She blames herself for her mother leaving, her father’s suicide and her sister’s death. She is wracked with guilt, yet the truth is that Joanna is not to blame for any of this. She



Max is a hospital doctor, author and columnist. He currently works full time in mental health for the NHS. His new book, *The Marvellous Adventure of Being Human*, is out now

now lives in a children's home. In the past year she has been in five separate institutions because her behaviour is considered so disruptive that they cannot manage her. She has aggressive outbursts and is impulsive and chaotic. To anaesthetise herself to the realities of her life, she has started drinking heavily. If you thought her story couldn't get any worse, last month, while drunk in a park late at night, she was raped. At such a young age, she doesn't have the words to articulate how she is feeling, so instead she communicates her despair by self-harming. This time she has cut herself so deeply that she has had to be admitted to hospital.

After speaking to Joanna, I spend the next six hours trying to get her the help she so desperately needs. As she has no family, social services are acting *in loco parentis*, yet they inform me when I eventually get through to them after hours of trying, they are too busy to come and take her home.

It is telling that there are no adults involved enough in Joanna's care



THEY ARE
QUIETLY,
DOGGEDLY
MAKING A
DIFFERENCE
TO
YOUNGSTERS'
LIVES

to take responsibility for her. What she needs more than anything is a parental figure; one person to show her the affection and warmth that has been so lacking throughout the most formative years of her life. I was despairing as to what could be done. Then I chanced upon a name in the notes: Margaret. She was a support worker for the NSPCC working with vulnerable children who had met Joanna as part of an outreach project. I phoned the number and Margaret answered. I explained what happened.

"It's my day off", she began. My heart sank. "So I can get there straight away", she chirped.

In half an hour Margaret was on the ward, sitting with Joanna. There are no simple solutions and no quick fixes for Joanna. But Margaret was a start. People like her are unsung heroes. They are quietly, doggedly making a difference to youngsters lives. "I'll take her home and I'm going to make sure she always knows she can speak to me whenever she wants. I'll be there for her", said Margaret. I nearly kissed her. ■



The Doctor Is In

Dr Max Pemberton

Q: Dear Dr Max, I recently became a grandma. My daughter had a trouble-free pregnancy but then had to have an unexpected, emergency C-section. She has had panic attacks for years and has recently sought help from her GP who diagnosed her with social anxiety. I want to try and help as much as I can but her social anxiety extends to me too and she is getting upset at the thought of my visits. She's trying to keep the world at bay, hiding behind drawn curtains and blinds. I fear she's going to lock herself away and not let anyone help her. I'm also worried I won't ever see my beautiful grandchild. Any advice on what to do? - Ethel, 67

A: Dear Ethel, I'm so sorry that you and your daughter are going through this. It sounds really awful, for both of you. Your letter really preyed on my mind because it's clear that your daughter is really suffering at the moment, but it must be particularly awful for you because a parent's natural urge is to want to go to their child and hug them, help and comfort them, but the very nature of your daughter's illness means she doesn't want this. And of course it's only

natural to want to see your grandchild. I think it's fair to say this situation can't go on like this. Your daughter needs to see a mental health professional.

In the UK there are perinatal psychiatrists—these are medical doctors who specialise in mental health problems in pregnant women and new mums. Clearly your daughter's social anxiety has started to impact her ability to function day to day and therefore this needs to be alerted to the local perinatal team. Her GP can refer her to them or her midwife or health visitor can make sure she's linked in with them. They will be able to assess and follow her up, offer treatment in the form of medication or talking therapy and other forms of support or help.

The good news is that while social anxiety can be very disabling, it is also amenable to treatment which means it's very possible that your daughter will get over this and return to a more sociable state. I wish you, your daughter and of course your new, lovely grandchild, all the best. ■

Got a health question for our resident doctor? Email it confidentially to askdrmax@readersdigest.co.uk



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Stop Memories Going Missing

Fed up with losing things? Fight forgetfulness with the help of our memory expert, Jonathan Hancock

MY SON STARTED secondary school recently. There was a huge amount to get used to, but he coped more than well.

Until Monday of week two, when he accidentally left his entire sports kit on the bus.

The school was sympathetic, while we did everything we could to get his gear back. But it was nowhere to be found, and we had to buy the whole set of clothes, boots and other accessories all over again.

It's a pretty typical part of family life, I suppose: expensive, but easily forgiven. And it got me thinking about why this sort of forgetfulness is so common—and what we can do to combat it. For my son, there were three key factors. First, he was doing something he wasn't used to. It was the first time he'd carried an extra sports bag, and he simply followed his usual habit of leaving the bus without one.

Tip 1: When you've got something new or out-of-the-ordinary with you, make an extra effort to keep it close.

The second reason my son forgot his kit was likely stress. It was a new bus route for him, so he was anxious about getting off at the right stop. In moments like that, memory is low on the brain's priority list.

Tip 2: When you're on high alert, try to calm yourself down by slowing your breathing and stabilising yourself. Then give yourself a moment to think logically, and check for anything you might be about to lose (you can apply this to anything you need to remember. You'll always do better when you're happy and relaxed).

Tip 3: The third reason he forgot his bag was that he couldn't see it. He'd slid it under the seat in front of him. So, when he stood up to leave, there was nothing to remind him that he was one item light. When you're on the move, try to keep any loose possessions in sight—so that they're safe but still visible to you (and in all your learning, try to visualise ideas, draw pictures, use coloured pens... and make everything more vividly memorable). It's easy to lose things, so don't be too hard either on yourself or others.

But do a few simple things to boost your brain, and you'll stand a much better chance of keeping hold of your stuff.

As for my son, thankfully he's not left anything else behind—yet! ■



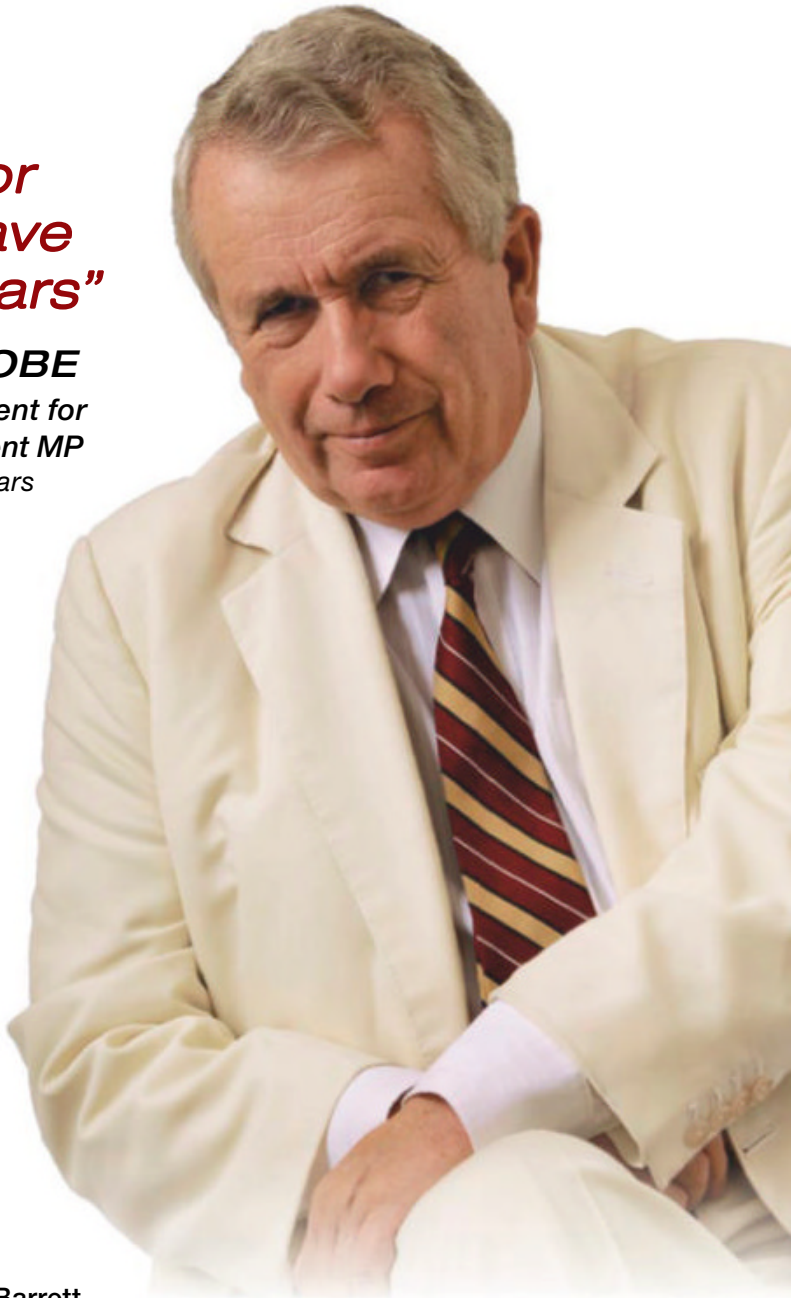
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LOCK
DOWN
Christmas
Traditions

WE'RE
KEEPING

BY *Zoe Lea*

If all goes to plan, this Christmas is set to be everything it should be. But last year, with coronavirus restrictions in force throughout much of the UK, a lot of us had to re-think how we celebrated the festive season. Not being able to take part in the usual Christmas traditions compelled many people to create some new ones. And some of these new traditions were so successful, that they're being kept this year. We spoke to people opting for them in 2021 again.





WE CAMPED OUT UNDER THE CHRISTMAS TREE

When it became apparent that a lot of activities wouldn't be allowed, **Grace Olsen** thought of ways she could bring the festive spirit to her two children, then aged five and seven.

"I was a bit sad that you only get a few years of magic Christmases when they are little, and I was gutted that we were missing out on lots of stuff during one of their best years. I just wanted to try and create as much extra magic as possible."

This came in the idea of camping out under the Christmas tree. As the family would normally go to enjoy a live pantomime in December, Grace got the idea of watching a pantomime on television—but with the added excitement of sleeping under the tree.

"We brought down the duvets with Christmas covers on, loads of pillows, made a bed on the floor and got into our pyjamas. We then watched the panto in the dark with just the lights from the tree. We always have a big, lovely real Christmas tree and with the lights flickering and glowing, with us all cosy and festive, it just felt really magical. The kids thought it was absolutely brilliant and both fell asleep curled up under the tree."

Will she be doing it again this year?

"Yes. Absolutely we'll be doing it again! We will probably go and enjoy a live panto if we can, but we'll definitely be doing the Christmas tree sleepover at some point."



I MADE MY OWN CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

Roxie Broun, who runs the website *Mum Days and Escapes*, has always loved the outdoors, but with the restrictions in place last year, it meant she spent more time in nature than ever. This led to making her own Christmas presents in the form of sloe gin and candles.

"We have always spent a lot of time outside as a family, but lockdown meant that I myself in particular really started to appreciate nature even more. It led me to read about foraging and all the wonderful food you could make with the things you could find locally. Sloe gin seemed an easy thing to try and I thought it would make a nice gift as it already



has Christmas connotations. The candles came about because I wanted something I could make to go with it. I had a candle making kit back when I was a kid and remembered it being quite easy! I made them cinnamon and orange-scented so they smelled lovely and Christmassy."

There's also the added bonus that a handmade gift holds so much more thought than a shop-bought one, and it's something that Roxie loves about the new tradition.

"Making gifts is cheaper than buying gifts and I think it's really lovely creating something from scratch. I felt proud of myself! I think to receive something that has been made for you is lovely too. So much more thought and effort than simply buying in a store. They were made with love and that's exactly why I want to do it again this year, and the years that follow."

I STARTED "CORBETTS AT CHRISTMAS"

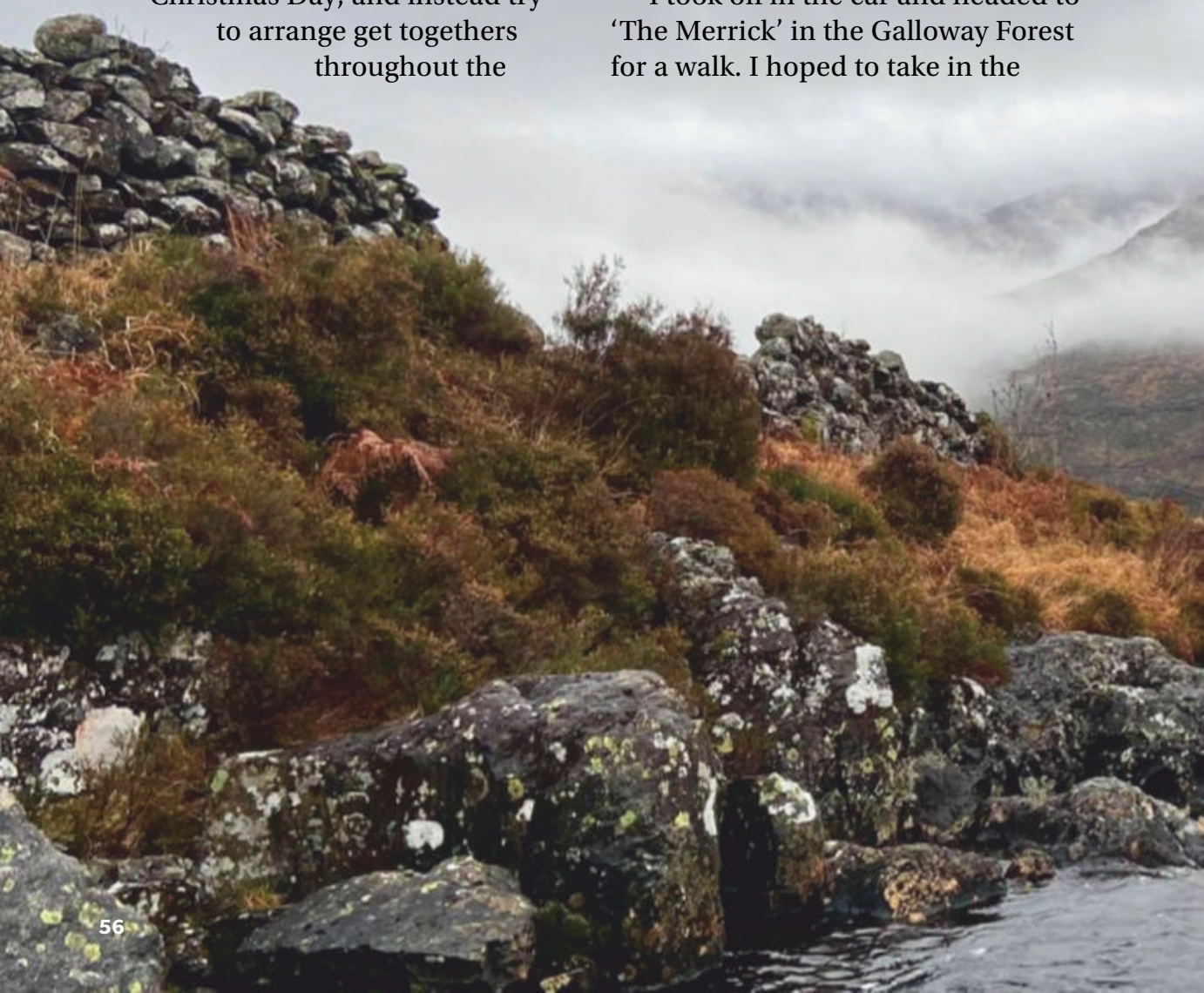
Jacob Brydon from Edinburgh had an idea to do something completely different when he learned that he'd have more time on the special day: he decided to go for a hike.

"Last year when I was trying to desperately work out how to get people together for Christmas, a lot of my family made the decision to downsize our get together and take the pressure off meeting up on Christmas Day, and instead try to arrange get togethers throughout the

festive period. It's something we'll keep up for sure—far less pressure on anyone and no stress with last minute lockdown restrictions or anything like that!"

When he learned he'd have more of the day to enjoy to himself, and that he'd also have to stay local, Jacob made the decision to do something that gave him a chance to explore the places near him.

"I took off in the car and headed to 'The Merrick' in the Galloway Forest for a walk. I hoped to take in the



views, share photos with the family as we were all doing our own things, and then come together later in the day, virtually, to share our experiences. I met a few other people who had the same idea to go for a Christmas walk, and it was great to get out and about and explore somewhere new."

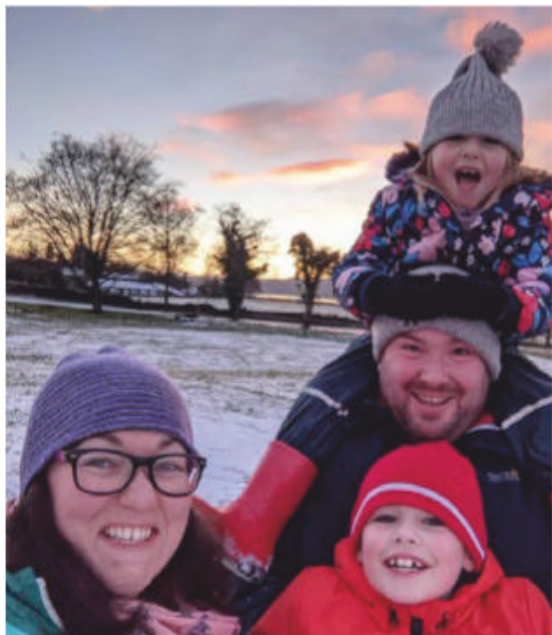
And this Christmas, he's repeating the tradition.



"This year, I'm hoping to find another hill to climb, and our family will be doing the same virtual get together to share how our day went—so hopefully plenty more stunning views

to take in! Corbetts are mountains in Scotland between 2500-3000ft—so it usually takes a few hours to walk to the top! The perfect activity to blow away the festive cobwebs."





I CREATED AN ACTIVITY ADVENT CALENDAR

When her five-year-old daughter, Sophie, was told she had to isolate around the Christmas period, **Amy Thompson** had an innovative idea that would make sure both Sophie, and her seven-year-old brother, Will, were kept entertained.

"I wanted to do something a bit different as it was going to be the first Christmas with no Santa visits or trips to Christmas markets, and I still wanted to give them a really special December."

Amy, who is an event and wedding planner, wrote down different activities on pieces of paper and put them into an advent calendar for the children to open. Each activity was different and a total surprise.

Movie night with treats, game night, Zoom with their cousins

and baking were just some of the activities that they opened on those chilly December mornings that kept them excited for the day ahead.

"We did almost all of them together. Christmas is a time to spend with family but when we couldn't see our extended family, the kids were quite upset so we tried to make it as special as possible with the advent calendar. Some of the activities we would have done anyway, like watching Christmas movies, but they thought it was a special treat every time they opened an activity because we made a big deal out of it."

Amy plans to do the same tradition again this year and is already thinking up new exciting activities to add for 2021 that won't have to be within the lockdown restrictions.



I DECORATED THE FRONT OF MY HOUSE

Dee Featherstone from Peterborough describes herself as someone who didn't enjoy the festive season, but after having her son Alfie, that changed.

"I never actually liked Christmas before having my son—I was definitely more of a scrooge. But something changes when you have children, and you see just how magical it really is. Alfie was two last Christmas, and he was really excited about the lights and was beginning to understand the concept of Christmas. After the last year had

seen him being stuck in so much, I really just wanted to bring that magic to life for him."

This came in the form of decorating the outside of her house for the whole neighbourhood to enjoy.

"Seeing Alfie's face when I started to put more items outside really made it worth it. To me, that is what it is all about, him seeing the magic. I had snow lights on the walls (so it looks like it's snowing), lights in the bushes, window lights and a giant inflatable Santa which all the kids would stop by and give a high five. I'm planning on adding a few more bits this year."

Dee also spread the Christmas cheer a little more by creating something people could take away from her amazing display. This had the added benefit of showing her son the value of giving, as well as the magic of Christmas.

"I made up some Christmas goodie packs for our local neighbourhood children in which I put toys, chocolate, colouring books in etc. and left them near our giant Santa for families to collect."

It was so successful that Dee received a lovely little card through her door full of gratitude and wishing her a lovely Christmas.

"It's such a weird feeling because I'm really excited for Christmas this year. I would normally dread it and I've already told my husband I'll be buying more for the garden!" ■



My Britain: Harrogate

The Yorkshire town of Harrogate is a must-visit for fans of relaxation and Victorian architecture.

With a renowned history as a boutique spa resort, Harrogate boasts the last working Turkish Baths in the country, housed in an ornate Moorish-style building with glazed brickwork and stunning painted ceilings. Harrogate's 100 recorded mineral springs have been the source of health tourists from the Victorian era who sought to bathe in its sulphur rich water in the hope of alleviating various skin conditions. The Royal Pump Museum, a grade II listed building where the water used to be pumped, now tells the story of this fascinating history.

As well as its reputation as a wellbeing mecca, Harrogate is home to delightful tea rooms, the Mercer Art Gallery, and award-winning public gardens. You might also be surprised to find out that the town held the Eurovision Song Contest in 1982. No wonder, then, that it's been listed as Britain's "happiest town" for three consecutive years.

"Harrogate is the queerest place with the strangest people in it, leading the oddest lives of dancing, newspaper reading and dining"

- Charles Dickens



PHOTO: RICHARD JEMISON

Tori Moor

Tori Moor, 32, is the marketing and administration officer at Harrogate Theatre, and has lived in a village just outside Harrogate for 24 years.



I love the feel and atmosphere

of Harrogate, and there are so many things to see and do. A walk around the Valley Gardens, visiting the Turkish Baths or the Pump Room Museum. The Montpellier Quarter has a great selection of independent shops and cafes, not forgetting Farrah's of Harrogate and the legendary Bettys! I'm a huge fan of the Great Yorkshire Show, too, which is held here every July and is the biggest agricultural show in the country.

Harrogate Theatre opened in January 1900.

It is one of the very few remaining "hemp houses" in the country, using hemp rope to suspend, raise and lower backdrops, lighting and

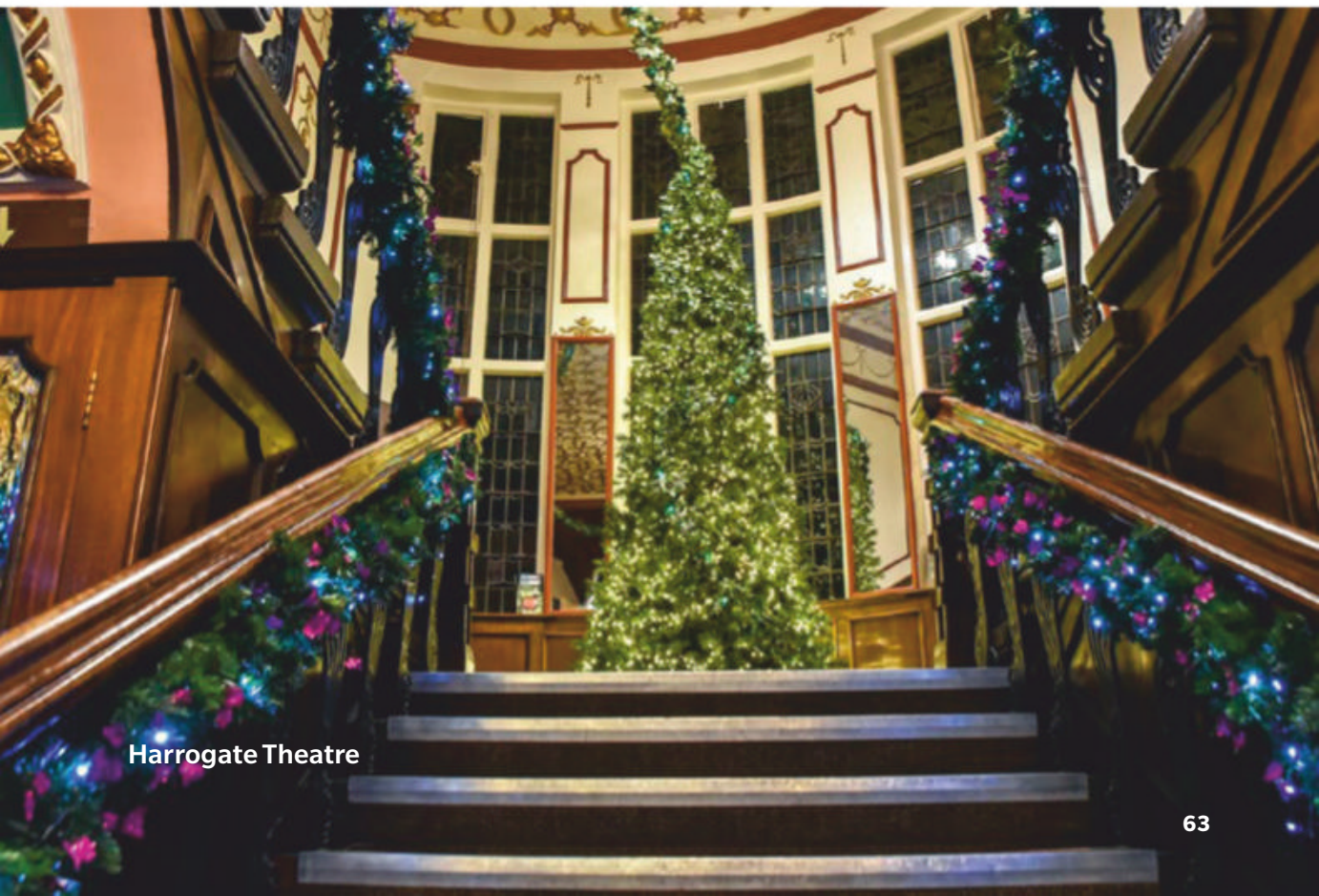


scenery. If you look up to the ceiling you will see a series of holes from which were once pumped fragrant smells, like lavender. This was due to the fact that the Victorian audiences of the day did not pay much attention to their personal hygiene.

The theatre has a resident ghost called Alice who has most recently been seen in the stalls. She often leaves a lingering smell of peppermint in her wake! I have been involved with Harrogate Theatre since I was a teenager performing as a dancer in the annual pantomime and have worked here for 13 years. The theatre feels like a second home to me. There's a real family feel to the organisation and I absolutely love working here.

Harrogate is special at Christmas. The local shops and traders make a brilliant effort with festive window displays which beautifully complement the Christmas lights around the town. The theatre's annual pantomime is an integral part of a Harrogate Christmas and the cast is usually involved in the switching on of the lights in November. After such a long time closed due to the pandemic and a massive re-roofing project, we are so excited to be back this year with our magical production of *Cinderella*. This will be packed with festive fun and is suitable for families of all ages.

Tickets are available from harrogatetheatre.co.uk or by calling 07762 159115



Harrogate Theatre

Katie Summersall

Katie Summersall, 35, is the assistant manager at the Turkish Baths and was born and raised in Harrogate. Visit turkishbathsharrogate.co.uk for more information



I was born in Harrogate and lived here all my life. When my husband got a job opportunity in York, we moved away for a while but came straight back as soon as we were able to. I just love it here, Harrogate is full of amazing history. It all started with the spa waters. In 1571 the springs were found to be medicinal, and some contained magnesium and iron. Then the hotels and railways came about, and eventually, the Royal Baths hydrotherapy centre was created. I love the fact that the Turkish Baths [the only remaining spa facility of the

centre] are still used for their original intention. They comprise three heat rooms, a steam room, a cold plunge pool and a relaxation area. The idea is that you alternate between the hot and cold. The experience is exhilarating and you feel clean and refreshed at the end. Over the years, our menu has developed to include beauty treatments and body treatments. Most of our clients are tourists looking to experience the baths, but many people come for the guided tours, so they can go inside and admire the beauty inside the baths.



What makes Harrogate truly great is the community spirit; people always help each other out. This was brought especially to the forefront because of COVID. Throughout the pandemic we had a “Harrogate Scrubbers” group—these lovely people who sewed scrubs for Harrogate hospital. There were also various support groups set up—if someone needed anything at all, a request would go out and within minutes there would be an offer to assist.

Another thing I love about Harrogate is the open space—you’re never too far



Valley Gardens

away from greenery and trees. The Valley Gardens are especially beautiful and as you walk around them, you can find iron and magnesium wells—it’s amazing to think that the Victorians used to do the same. There are also loads of great bars, cafes and shops. My favourite spot is Mama Doreen’s for brunch or afternoon tea. The portions are huge—there’s always enough to bring some home. You must try the onion tart when you’re there! ■

To plan a future visit to Harrogate, head to visitharrogate.co.uk



If I Ruled The World

Justin Hawkins

Justin Hawkins is the frontman of the British rock band, The Darkness. Their new album *Motorheart* comes out on November 19 via Cooking Vinyl. The band will be touring the UK throughout November and December

I'd introduce a smoking ban.

The only time you'd be allowed to smoke is when I'm smoking, which is roughly half of the year. If you see me smoking, then it's OK. But even then, you wouldn't be allowed to smoke indoors, and there would be well-lit, well-ventilated designated areas.

Exercise would be compulsory.

Everybody would have to do at least six minutes of plank a day—ideally with a side raise because it's good for your balance. Those who are able to do that should be forced to do it. I think everybody would live longer, have better abs and core, and nice things to look at as a result.

We'd all play football. Or at least some kind of sport that involves hand-to-eye coordination. Because when you're doing that, you can't be looking at your phone, you can't be watching television, you have to be focused on

what's happening. I think focus is a lovely byproduct of playing football, not to mention great cardio and all the health benefits it brings. I've played it all my life. It's just the most enjoyable thing. It really is this time when I feel perfectly in the moment.

We'd find a way to solve peer pressure. People tend to blame bad behaviour on peer pressure. So, I think there should be properly vetted, responsible adults, who could be implanted in the social circles of kids, kind of like teaching assistants. I've noticed that my child, for example, used to eat anything you put in front of her such as carrots, all kinds of vegetables—brilliant kid, I thought she'd live to 150. But as soon as she started going to school where she's surrounded by other kids, it was like, "Oh, carrots, they're gross." That opinion came from other kids, and it shouldn't be allowed. So, during formative years, I think there should be more adult presence in children's lives to prevent that peer pressure from making them go off the rails.

I would make veganism compulsory. Everybody would live longer. People would be really mad at first, but they'd have to retrain. No apologies. I think eventually that is what's going to have to happen anyway. I don't know whether it's in the next ten, 20 or 30 years. If I was in charge, I'd make it happen immediately. It's going to save

a lot of lives and make the world more inhabitable for a bit longer.

Niceness would be enforced. I see a lot of people preaching compassion and then not really being able to show it. It shouldn't be something that people need to work on. Some people just have a compulsion to be a tw*t. And I've suffered with it myself. I think there's a time and a place for it, but in general, the default should be "nice". And if you can't be nice, you should be punished. You don't have to wear tie-dye and be "awakened" to show compassion to your fellow person. And if the only people who are capable of doing it are the ones that wear tie-dye, then it should be mandated.

Budget travel would be banned. It's ruining the planet. Travelling by plane should be elitist, it should be a privilege. People just get so spoiled; they're standing there like, "Oh, my flight's five minutes late." It's a f****g EasyJet, it costs 35 quid, what are you moaning about? Of course it's going to be late. I come from a really small town by the seaside where Victorian tourism used to be the main source of employment for everybody. But now, with the advent of cheap travel, nobody goes there anymore and it's dead. It doesn't have to be like that. There are so many great things we can explore locally. ■

As told to Eva Mackevic

Reunited With Her Rescuers

Thirty-five years
after two fishermen
plucked a young girl
from the Pacific Ocean,
a podcast leads to a
remarkable reunion

BY *Faith E Pinho*

FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES

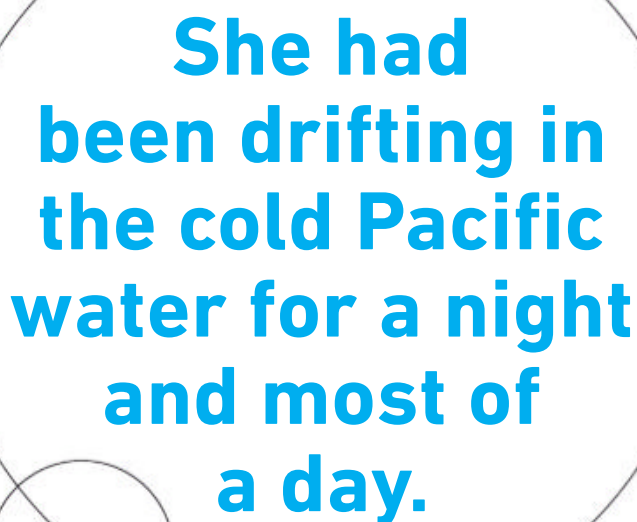


2021

This meeting
was on happier
terms

1986

Desireé Rodriguez,
nine, floated in
her life jacket until
help arrived



She had been drifting in the cold Pacific water for a night and most of a day.

Kept afloat by her orange life jacket, nine-year-old Desireé Rodriguez had watched helplessly as one family member after another let go of life. Just as she, too, began to give up, the skipper of a fishing boat spotted her bobbing in the water. Within minutes, the boat's first officer leaped in and grabbed Desireé, pulling her back toward the boat—and toward life.

That was 35 years ago, and the last time the rescuers and the girl saw one another. Until this year.

May 18, 1986, was the kind of beautiful, sunny day that regularly brought the Rodriguez family to California's Catalina Island for some fishing on their 28-foot pleasure boat, the *DC Too*.

Desireé's father, a 30-year-old construction worker named Thomas Rodriguez, loved the sport, especially catching bass. A strong, slender man, he had instilled in his oldest daughter a love of the outdoors, teaching her how to bait a hook and cast a line.

As was their custom at least once a month, the family boarded their boat that morning for a carefree day trip. For the first time, Thomas's sister, Corinne Wheeler, 33, and her husband, Allen Wheeler, 34, had decided to join them, leaving their three children at home in the Riverside, California neighbourhood where both families lived. They spent the day fishing in the Pacific Ocean, then left the island in the early evening. Soon dense fog rolled in.

Desireé fell into a light sleep beside her five-year-old sister, Trisha, at a table on the boat's lower deck. Their father's sharp orders startled her awake: "Get out of the boat. The boat's sinking!"

Desireé pushed her sister into the cold, dark water. Both girls wore life jackets. The adults did not. The girls were followed by their mother, Petra Rodriguez, a petite, quiet 29-year-old who was pregnant.

Within seconds, the boat capsized, leaving just the tip of its bow in the air—and the six family members

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Girl who survived ordeal at sea is brought ashore by rescuers at San Pedro.
**2 Die, 3 Lost but Girl, 9, Survives
Capsizing of Pleasure Boat in Sea**

By EDWARD J. BOYER and NISSON ZIMMEL, Times

HARRY CRASE / Los Angeles Times

Los Angeles Airport passes near a cyclist on the bike path of Dockweiler State Beach in Playa del Rey.

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After that day, the two fishermen lost track of the girl they'd saved

Paul Strasser and Mark Pisano, then two strapping 23-year-olds, were still new to captaining ships when they pushed off from San Pedro at six in the morning of May 19. They had 35 passengers aboard the *First String*, a boat they'd helped build, for a fishing expedition.

stranded. Looking into the faces of her father, mother, aunt, uncle, and sister, Desireé wasn't frightened.

"It was like what you would see in a movie," she recalls. "You could see nothing around you. It was just dark. But it was peaceful, quiet."

After some time, her father told them he would swim for help. "I'll be back," he said before disappearing into the darkness.

"My dad was like the superhero to me. I actually thought he would get help," Desireé says.

After some time, her mother began foaming at the mouth, and then she went still. Desireé wrapped a rope around her mother's chest and tied her to the boat so she wouldn't float away. Then her sister died too.

"I remember it was just pretty much quiet after that," Desireé says. "I think we were all just kind of in disbelief and just waiting."

The best friends had met as 14-year-olds. Soon after, Strasser had quit his job delivering newspapers to join Pisano working on fishing boats, where they scrubbed decks, cleaned fish, and earned the title of "pinheads"—eager young fishermen learning the ropes.

They graduated to deckhands and eventually to full-fledged fishermen. They spent their free time learning their trade. Before long, they became two of the youngest captains at San Pedro's 22nd Street Landing.

Their fishing trip that day began uneventfully. Pisano remembers the weather was "pea soup fog"—so thick you couldn't see the stern of the boat—and the fish weren't biting all morning.

"We were going to try one more spot and then go home," Pisano says. But then some yellowtail, a prized game fish, started biting. The

PHOTO: ©STILLFX/GETTY IMAGES, L.A. TIMES

fishermen hung around for another couple of hours, pulling in fish after fish. As they worked, the fog cleared and the sun started shining.

As night turned into the next day, Desireé and her aunt and uncle were slipping in and out of consciousness. To keep themselves awake, Desireé and her aunt daydreamed about what they would do after they were rescued. They would stay in a hotel, order room service, and burrow under the blankets in bed, cosy and warm.

“We still had hope,” Desireé says. “Like, we’re going to be OK. We’re going to come out of this.”

Her uncle evidently didn’t share their hope. With the afternoon sun now high overhead, she recalls, he swam away from the boat.

“He just kind of gave up,” she recalls.

She swam after him, propelled forward by her aunt’s plea: “Don’t let him drown.” Desireé caught up with her uncle quickly but struggled to keep his tall, stocky frame above water. She finally had to let go, and he slipped beneath the surface.

Desireé doesn’t remember how or when her aunt died. But soon, the nine-year-old became aware that she was alone in the ocean.

“At that point, I just made the decision that I need to get away from this boat,” Desireé remembers. “I need to swim away, somewhere else... Where? I don’t know.”

Late that afternoon, Strasser and Pisano set off on the return voyage to San Pedro with their haul of fresh-caught yellowtail.

About seven miles away from Catalina Island, Strasser noticed something white flashing in the water. He steered the *First String* toward it and peered through his binoculars, thinking it might be a boat bumper.

“We’ve got something going on here; this is weird,” Strasser recalls saying. “When I pulled up to it, I saw a dead body face down,” he says. “It was tangled up in all this rope.”

Strasser radioed the Coast Guard.

IF THE BOAT HADN'T COME RIGHT THEN, I DON'T THINK I WOULD HAVE LIVED

Passengers were yelling on the deck below. In the commotion, he noticed two other people in the water: one was floating facedown. The other, wearing an orange life jacket, was bobbing with the swells, her head and brown hair visible just above the water.

“I knew if there was a life jacket, we have a chance,” Strasser says. He steered the boat closer, and Pisano jumped into the water. Pumping with adrenaline, he swam toward the figure and grabbed the life jacket.



Strasser with Pisano (left and right, respectively, in both photos) and, in second photo, a grown-up Desireé

From her near-unconscious state, Desireé flinched. Pisano swam her back to the boat, where Coast Guard medics covered her in warm water bottles that felt prickly on her cold skin.

If the boat hadn't come right then, says Desireé, now 45, "I don't think I would have lived, I'll be honest with you. I think at that point, I was just kind of done."

A Coast Guard spokeswoman said at the time that Desireé had "a strong, resilient constitution." The little girl walked out of the hospital the next day after being treated for exhaustion and hypothermia.

When officials pulled the family's boat out of the water, they didn't find any sign of collision, concluding that a large swell, perhaps from the wake of a passing ship, may have capsized the *DC Too*. The two bodies they had found were Desireé's mother and

aunt. The search for Desireé's father, sister, and uncle was abandoned two days after her rescue.

"I had hoped that my dad did make it somewhere," Desireé says. "Maybe he is living on an island and just got amnesia and didn't know that he has a family. You know, you always have hope. But you get older, and reality sets in, and you're like, OK. He didn't make it."

Desireé Rodriguez, now Desireé Campuzano, was adopted by another aunt and uncle. No one asked about her experience in the water. They didn't want to traumatise her, she says. She attended therapy for a while, but mostly she coped by herself and tried to be a good person, guided constantly by the question, *What would my parents expect of me?*

Desireé attended university while building a career in criminal justice. She married in 2013 and had a son six years ago.

In her late twenties, Desireé began to wonder about her rescuers. She sent TV personality Oprah Winfrey



Podcaster
Friedman
(hugging
Desireé)
helped give this
incredible story
a new ending

a message to try to get help finding them, but nothing came of it. Strasser and Pisano sometimes thought of her, too, especially whenever anyone asked, “What’s your craziest story at sea?” But neither Desireé nor the men who saved her knew where they could start looking.

“Desireé was a ghost,” Strasser says. “We saved her, she’s out in the world. And that’s all we knew.”

When the COVID-19 pandemic derailed Philip Friedman’s plans to return to his teaching job near Shanghai, China, the 63-year-old fishing aficionado decided to stick around Southern California with his family and make a podcast about his hobby.

Friedman Adventures launched in December 2020, featuring stories from fishermen around the wharf talking about boats, catches, and fishing tips. On one episode Pisano

talked about the 1986 rescue.

That day, 41-year-old Pablo Peña listened to the show on his 20-minute commute to work as a railroad engineer. The incredible story he heard on the air triggered a memory. Peña remembered a conversation he’d had years earlier with a former coworker. She’d once told him she’d lost her parents in a boating accident and had been the only survivor.

“I was like, well, it could be her,” Peña says. “But he would have to say her name was Desireé Rodriguez to make this solid.”

Then Pisano said on the podcast, “Her name was Desireé Rodriguez, the girl we rescued,” adding that there were many Desireé Rodriguezes in Los Angeles.

Peña says “I thought, *Wow, this is just surreal!*” He had met the podcaster a decade earlier on a fishing excursion, so he sent a

message to Friedman.

"I was like, 'You gotta be kidding me, dude,'" Friedman says. He knew he wanted to locate her. "We've got to finish this story!" Friedman concocted a plan to surprise the two fishing captains with the woman they'd rescued years earlier. First, he reached out to Desireé to ensure she wanted to meet her rescuers.

"I thought, *This is weird*. Not a bad weird, but it's just kind of eerie," says Desireé, now a sergeant in the Los Angeles county sheriff's department. "After all these years, for this to come up—what are the chances? Very slim."

Desireé agreed to show up at the studio a few days later. The plan was that she would pose as a woman named Raquel, a translator who was going to retell the captains' rescue tale on Spanish television.

"I was nervous at first," Desireé says of the experience, "just seeing the guys and putting a finalisation to 'what happened.'"

All smiles, Desireé listened to her rescuers recount their side of the story. They were clueless as to her true identity.

After almost ten minutes, Friedman ended the ruse. "Boys, I want to tell you something," he said. "This is not a translator. I'm going to let her introduce herself to you."

"I'm Desireé," she said, her voice gently wavering.

Pisano slapped the table in an

instant of recognition. Amid hugs, tears, and exclamations, the story that decades earlier had united the strangers came tumbling out.

"I feel like she's sort of our daughter, in a way, because we were the ones who brought her back to life," Strasser says.

For years, Desireé had wondered about the men who rescued her. Now that she's met them, she says she hopes to stay connected forever.

On May 18, 2021, the 35th anniversary of the accident, Strasser and Pisano took Desireé and her family on their fishing boat to Catalina Island, following the same course they took all those years ago.

"It looked just the same as it did the day we found her," says Strasser. They stopped the boat, and the family said some prayers. Then the men handed them bunches of flowers—carnations, roses, and lilies—to toss into the water as a sign of remembrance.

It was an almost uncannily perfect gesture. The men had no way of knowing, so a teary Desireé explained: her mother had loved lilies, they were her favourite flowers. ■

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INSPIRE

THE ELECTRIC REVOLUTION: WHAT'S NEXT?

BY Neil Briscoe



BATTERY POWER FOR MOTORING SEEMS
INEVITABLE NOW, BUT WHAT FORM WILL
THE CAR OF THE FUTURE REALLY TAKE?



THE FUTURE OF MOTORING IS ELECTRIC. ISN'T IT?

Certainly, the current orthodoxy is that batteries are the way of the future, driven by the need to slash the carbon emissions of transport. It is, though, a lot more complicated than merely taking out an engine and replacing it with an electric motor.

Thirty-something years ago, I was sat on the floor of my grandmother's living room, with a stack of old *Reader's Digest* in front of me. In one, I found a piece on the 100th anniversary of Mercedes-Benz. In this feature, a senior Mercedes engineer was asked what cars we'd be driving in 20 years' time.

"Well..." he replied with the confidence only a German car engineer can display; "We design our cars to last for at least 30 years, so we will be driving the cars we are making today."

In many ways, the man from Mercedes was right—some 35 years on from me reading those words, we are for the most part still driving around in cars that are not fundamentally different from those then coming off the production lines in Stuttgart, in Tokyo, in Detroit, in Turin. In the next 20 years, though? Even the most confident engineer might now baulk at being too precise in their predictions. The rise of the electric car is going to change what the very word "car" means.

One who thinks that we're on the cusp of just that is Stephen Bayley. Bayley is a founder of London's Design Museum, an art and architecture critic, and as the vernacular would have it, a petrolhead. He's long been a correspondent for the motoring

magazine *Octane*, and has just published a collection of his essays from the same, entitled *Age Of Combustion*. It's an age which Bayley reckons is about to come to a screeching halt, and not merely because we will be driving cars powered by batteries.

"There's no doubt in my mind that it's sort of five minutes to midnight for the motorcar, as we know it. It's probably not going to go away entirely, but its form is going to be so different. We can now see the past century of the car as a finite historical period. When we get car autonomy, *if we ever get it*, cars will

become very different. They would no longer be expressions of status, power desire, privilege, and that may be a very good thing."

Autonomy—the idea that control of a car can be turned over entirely to computers, radars, laser sensors, and cameras, allowing you to be driven rather than driving—has grown up more or less in concert with electric cars, and the two combined could—probably will—transform the literal landscapes of our lives in the next 20 years. Bayley's vision has it that cars that drive themselves cease to become a symbol of our own personal success, and instead become mere



disposable transport. You generally don't care which badge is attached to the boot of the taxi that picks you up and drops you off, after all.

The car driving you is critical to the electric motoring plans being made by some of the largest car makers, not least Volkswagen. The German giant's new board member for sales, marketing and after-sales, Klaus Zellmer, told me that VW will, in the future, be more of a transport provider than a mere seller of cars.

"We have a trend in society where people, younger people especially, are less willing to commit to purchasing a car. Why would they

purchase a car, they ask, and deal with all the consequences of that—such as resale value, insurance, tax and so on—when they can let us take care of all that?" says Zellmer. "You give me a car and I pay for it when I need it"—that is the societal trend.

"The new aspect will be autonomous driving, because once we have that, then you can do all sorts of things inside the car. You can talk with your family, you can play games, or watch a movie, you can work, you can even sleep. So we have to create this environment that differentiates our car of the future from other cars, and that gives you



the sense of something that you might even call a mobile home. And I think that's where the new competitive environment will be."

Electric power is critical to the potential of autonomous control—already cars are being banned from city centres across the world if their emissions are not low enough, so the demand, led by both legislation and consumers, will push us more and more towards electric cars. Ford, Jaguar, Fiat, VW, BMW, Renault, and many others have already pledged to have only electric cars on sale in Europe by the end of this decade. Audi has said it will launch its last petrol-powered car in 2026.

While the technology now exists to give even relatively affordable electric cars ranges of more than 250 miles (400km) on a single charge of their battery, much more needs to be done in the coming years to improve the ability to charge those batteries. Fast chargers are becoming faster, but they are still sparse on the ground in many places, and their reliability is suspect. Charging at home, overnight, is the most sensible and most affordable option, but it's difficult-to-impossible for those living in apartments, or even terraced houses. Oliver Zipse, chief executive of BMW, has said: "European automakers are driving the transition to e-mobility but the success of this huge effort is seriously threatened by

the delayed installation of charging infrastructure in the EU. The EU Commission quickly needs to take action and set binding targets for the ramp-up of charging infrastructure in the member states. Otherwise, even the current reduction targets in

NUMEROUS CAR MAKERS HAVE PLEDGED TO HAVE ONLY ELECTRIC CARS ON SALE BY THE END OF THIS DECADE



fighting climate change are at risk.”

William Todts, executive director at Transport & Environment, told me: “If we're serious about global warming we need to go electric fast. To speed up the transition we need ubiquitous and easy charging not

WE CAN ADDRESS THE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND HAVE A HECK OF A LOT OF FUN DOING IT



David Twohig

just in Norway and the Netherlands but all across Europe. EV charging targets per country are a great way to make that happen and the Commission should stop dragging its feet over this.”

However, are we all so focused on perfecting battery technology that we may be missing out on other ways of keeping our cars but cutting our emissions? Toyota, currently the world's largest and most successful car maker, is still betting heavily on hydrogen as the fuel of the future—it can be used in a hydrogen fuel cell (essentially a big chemical battery that you fill up with hydrogen instead of charging it with electricity) or even burned in highly-modified combustion engines. Equally, Porsche is currently working on e-fuels, which mix hydrogen made from renewable electricity with carbon dioxide taken from the air to produce an alcohol-like liquid fuel that is, in theory, carbon-neutral.

One man who possibly has a better idea than most of what future cars will be like is David Twohig. The Irish-born engineer has been instrumental in creating two of the most important cars of recent years—the Renault Zoe, currently Europe's best-selling electric car, and the Alpine A110, one of the most critically acclaimed new sports cars of recent years. He reckons that the cars of the future will be, just as that

Mercedes engineer said so long ago, quite a lot like the cars of today.

"It's a huge challenge", Twohig tells me. "We can do amazing things with electric in terms of straight-line acceleration, and even cheat physics a bit with clever software, but the effect of mass on lateral acceleration—when you're cornering—is unsolvable until batteries become a lot lighter. Which they will, but it won't happen tomorrow. I'm very interested in the work being done on "clean" combustion engines—such as Porsche's work on synthetic fuels, which is fascinating, so I can easily

imagine a trend towards lightweight cars, with perfectly-clean internal combustion engines, developed for the enthusiast market, nicely complementing the electric cars that we will all be driving Monday-to-Friday. I'm a huge optimist about all this. We can address the environmental issues that we've created, and have a heck of a lot of fun doing it."

Whatever the future of motoring holds, there's no doubt that it's an exciting time to witness such a crucial stretch of its development and perhaps become a part of it on a mass scale very soon. ■



CHASING THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

Visiting Canada's Northwest Territories in search
of a primeval encounter with nature

BY *Sallie Tisdale*
FROM *Harper's*



The aurora borealis
lights up the sky near
Yellowknife in Canada's
Northwest Territories

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BY THE TIME I finish dressing and walk into the lobby of the Explorer Hotel in Yellowknife, it's 9pm. There is a crowd of Japanese tourists wearing identical red parkas and black polar boots the size of toasters. Outside, in the black Canadian winter night, four yellow school buses pull up. The Japanese group fills the first three, and the rest of us, a mixed dozen from several countries, climb into the last.

The bus bumps onto the dark highway. It is February 2020, and it's almost as cold inside as out; the windows are already icing over from our breath. Our guide is Céline, a petite Frenchwoman. "The prediction is clouds tonight," she tells us. "But a prediction is just a prediction. So we will be hopeful."

After about 20 minutes, the bus turns down a narrow road toward Aurora Village, a collection of teepees and small buildings beside a frozen lake. The few lights are dim and downcast to protect our night vision. We follow Céline's blinking red headlamp, the only way we can tell her apart from the crowd. More than a hundred people are plodding from the parking lot along hard snowy trails between dark trees. As we emerge from the woods, Céline points out the path to the heated, 360-degree-rotating recliners (extra fee required). We find our teepee at the edge of a

field—a place to warm up and rest, but not to stay. We aren't here to be indoors.

The clouds lift. The teepees are in a small bowl, and trails lead through the trees to low bluffs with longer views. I join a crowd of silhouettes. I shift from foot to foot. All winter, Portland, Oregon, where I live, had been unseasonably warm. I longed for cold, the kind that would make me sit up and pay attention. I went north for the aurora, but also this: the dark, the sky, the ice.

"Is that it?" someone asks, pointing at a small dome of brightness on the horizon. I think it is Yellowknife. The city has dark-sky compliant streetlights, but the town is plainly visible from a distance.

"Is that it?" somebody else asks, pointing at a pale flash on the opposite horizon. But it is just headlights from the highway. We don't really know what we are seeking, what we will see. We may see nothing at all. The aurora follows its own subtle schedule, and aurora tourism runs on hope, on expectations manipulated by Instagram and travel websites. Thousands of edited, enhanced photos of emerald-green drapery and quivering ruby-red arcs make false promises. I've tried to keep my own expectations tightly bound.

We watch, and over about 20 minutes, a cloud grows into a fine white arc stretching across the lower

Yellowknife sits on the shore
of Great Slave Lake, one of the
world's largest, deepest lakes



half of the sky, brightening until it is a river of pearl. Céline and I lie back on a pile of packed snow, watching the glowing track cross the sky like a painter's brush. It changes without changing; a fraction dissolves and reappears, slides away, returns. The river cleaves into two puddles of ghostly milk. I can't *see* it changing, yet it changes. Soon the two wide swathes thicken and then burst, flooding the banks until the entire sky is filled with vibrating light. A hundred voices shout from the darkness all around. Fluttering sheets of pale light, pinkish folds shifting as if from a breath, shimmering rays, and billowing golden clouds, liquid and shining in all directions. Now, I know.

THE SUMMER BEFORE, a friend invited me to come along on a trip organised by the Cloud Appreciation Society (CAS), of which

I was also a member, to view the aurora borealis in Yellowknife. I don't generally do that kind of thing: travel in packs, with guides. I'm too cheap for curated trips, too introverted for groups, and I prefer to stay close to the ordinary daily life of a destination. But viewing the aurora is a peculiar undertaking, something best done in very cold places at night, far from cities, in an environment that doesn't reward the solo traveller. I decided that I would need to go in a group for this, and if so, this was the group for me.

The capital of the Northwest Territories sits on the shore of Great Slave Lake, one of the world's deepest and largest lakes. The Dene people have lived along its shores for thousands of years; Yellowknife is named for Indigenous copper knives. It began as a fur-trading outpost, then ignited with a gold rush in the 1930s, and is now a diamond-mining centre

with a population of roughly 20,000. Until 1960, the whole region was inaccessible by road, and until about ten years ago, Yellowknife was not a major tourist destination. Its winter visitors were mainly miners, trappers, and a few travellers seeking a hideaway. By 2019 there were almost six times as many visitors as residents.

A large proportion of visitor spending here is related to the aurora borealis. Viewing it is often promoted as a kind of primeval encounter with nature. Just as people yearn

TO INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES, THE LIGHTS ARE WORTHY OF RESPECT



to see megafauna such as lions and elephants, we seem to have a collective desire for the cosmic view, for those things large enough to push us down into our place, close to the skin of the planet.

After two nights at the Explorer Hotel, I joined the CAS group for a trip to Blachford Lake Lodge, about 60 miles away. Small bush planes are a common way to get around in this vast territory of more than 100 square miles of fresh water. There were about a dozen people from the United States, England, and Australia going up in the Air

Tindi turboprop. We crammed in among luggage and supplies, and the unpressurised craft slid over a quilt of spindly trees, frozen lakes, and satiny mounds of snow. This is part of the immense Canadian Shield, where the continental crust was swept clean by ice, and the oldest rock in the world was found. The boreal forest of black spruce scribbled across the white in all directions, a fraction of a vast biome stretching around the globe. Except for a few snowmobile tracks just outside Yellowknife, there were no signs of humanity at all.

We landed on the lake; a smooth, fast slide between small islands. The lodge, at the top of a hill, was to be our living room for several days. Our cabins were down the long slope, along interlacing trails, their paths compressed by snowmobiles. The surrounding snow was deep and fine; I learned to beware of the trail's edge when I stepped off it and into powder up to my waist.

Three of us from Oregon shared the cabin farthest from the lodge, near the shore. The low trees leaned every which way in the permafrost, small and dark and ancient, and the lake stretched out of sight around layered hills under virgin blue sky.

OUR TIME AT BLACHFORD LAKE was marked by shared meals and conviviality. We gathered every evening in the lodge. One night, Elizabeth MacDonald, a



Blachford Lake Lodge is best reached by bush plane

visiting space scientist from NASA, gave a lecture on the aurora's physics. She told us how glad she was to be here; she spends most of her time on data. "I study the aurora," she said, "but I don't get to see it that often."

We see the aurora because electrons charged by the solar wind collide with atoms in the upper atmosphere, mostly atomic oxygen. A fountain of resulting photons spills across hundreds of miles in seconds. Atomic oxygen releases red light when high in the atmosphere and can emit greenish-white light at lower altitudes. Sometimes deep blues and purples appear from ionised nitrogen. A furious discharge cascades down through the atmosphere into increasingly dense air until it is exhausted. The power of the aurora can be as high as 100,000 megawatts.

For aeons, people have said the aurora makes noise, that it swishes, whistles, cracks. One polar explorer described it as "the sound of field-ice, then it was like the sound of a water-mill, and, at last, like the whirring of a cannon-shot heard from a short distance." It has been long thought, however, that whatever audible sound reaches a human ear at ground level could not be an effect of activity at such a high altitude. But in 2012, Finnish scientists captured faint hissing, popping, and clapping during an aurora, and proved the sounds were coming from the sky. A geophysicist in Alaska reacted to the news by saying that auroral sound was "scientifically unreasonable," but admitted that he has heard it, too.

To Indigenous communities, the northern lights are familiar but worthy of respect. Many Inuit people in the Arctic share a myth of the



lights, which they call *aqsarniit*. They are said to be the spirits of the dead playing football, usually with a walrus skull. The *aqsarniit* were traditionally considered dangerous because they move so quickly and heedlessly in their pursuit. It's been said that the Sámi people, of Fennoscandia, believed that the aurora, called *guovsahasat*, could swoop down and burn a person. Women would cover their heads to keep the aurora out of their hair, people kept silent to avoid irritating it, and bells were taken off reindeer when the aurora was bright. Early European and Asian observers thought the aurora was a heavenly battle, a line of enormous candles, or a fissure in the sky. Edmond Halley—the early 18th-century astronomer of Halley's Comet fame—theorised that it was the result of water vapour

somehow igniting the atmosphere after being released from fissures on Earth's surface.

The aurora is only a few hundred metres thick, since it follows the lines of our planet's magnetic field. But it is also immense, hundreds of kilometres wide and high, and it occurs between 100 and 1,000 kilometres above the earth, in the ionosphere. The International Space Station flies through this range. The lights cannot form lower in our skies because the energy of colliding particles is lost as the atmosphere becomes denser.

Each evening at Blachford Lake, we waited. The intensity of the aurora depends on many factors: the roughly 11-year solar activity cycle and its many effects; whether the solar wind is steady or gusting; and the sun's rotation in relation to Earth's. In

the end, viewing is a local problem. Maybe you need a treasure to trade, good luck, good karma, or a blessing. Once you are in the right place at the right time, all you can do is wait.

After lectures, we mingled in the lodge, an artificial family. I joined games of Trivial Pursuit. I hung out with a doctor from Melbourne and talked to a retired social worker from the US state of Maine. About 9:30pm, someone would say, "It's starting." We would get dressed and go out, and move slowly from one viewpoint to another, from the bluff in front of the lodge to the tepee on the far side of the hill. A few gentle arcs would gradually widen and join and become an arch with trailing ribbons, wavering, glowing, seeming to shimmer.

Before I had seen aurora borealis, I had imagined it erupting above me, an abrupt display of light spilling out of the sky. I put myself in the centre. But I was just spinning slowly beneath an enormous event. It is happening all the time, this torrent of ionisation and spectral light; mostly we don't see it. For a few hours each night, I was granted a fractional view of cosmic forces, by the benevolence of darkness and a clear sky.

The days were clear and bright and flagrantly cold. After breakfast, people would break into pairs and small groups to go on snowmobile rides or ski across the lake. I read, napped, played more Scrabble. I went

for hikes, stomping along snowmobile tracks in several layers of insulation. The trails passed through mounds of glittering snow dappled with velvet-blue shadow, broken by the marks of other travellers: snowshoe hares, caribou, lynx. Walking was cacophony, every step a chorus of squeaking snow, swishing pants, and creaking ice. But when I stood still, silence. A single bird's note. Then silence again.

"IT'S STARTING," SOMEONE says. This is our last night at the lake, and the temperature is minus 32 degrees Celsius. We stand at the ice's edge under the black sky. The snow, which is everywhere, which is the whole world, reflects the faint fog of starlight, and yet we see one another only as shadows. Above us the sky is a white wash. The wash glows, widens, brightens, and begins to spin over my head, a luminous cyclone of pearl and dove and alabaster, suddenly so thick and near I could pluck off a tuft in my hand. Faint flashes of pink and green and blue, barely there, gone. We spin and crane our necks, gasp and laugh.

When I first arrived in Yellowknife, I kept reminding myself that I might not see the aurora at all, that it wouldn't look like the pictures, that the real thing would be less than I expected. And I was wrong. I am not sorry that I couldn't see what is in the photos. I am sorry that the photos don't capture what I could see. ■

My Great Escape: **The Darling Dales**

*Our reader Suzanna
Kyle explores the
Yorkshire Dales*

AFTER BEING COOPED up during the pandemic, my husband and I yearned to get out to some rugged wide-open spaces and the Yorkshire Dales were ideal.

We rented a cottage in Sedbergh which nestles snugly in the basin of the Howgill fells. The 16th-century St Andrews church in the centre of town houses two impressive embroideries illustrating life past and present in Sedbergh. The craggy isolation of the area is intoxicating and one of first walks is the Orton Circular Walk which took us gently up and down fells with historical points of interest along the way such as an old lime kiln, a Celtic stone cross marking the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887 and the Gamelands Stone Circle which dates to 2,500 BC.

After a long steady climb, we reached the top of Orton Scar. The



landscape was bathed in golden sunlight and crisscrossed with dry stone walls on green meadows where many sheep graze. Purple thistle, ferns and nettles crowded together along the muddy paths strewn with gangly roots and stones to trip you up if you're not careful. Little streams trickled down the hillsides. The air smelled moist with a hint of moss.



Another day we drove over to Arncliffe on the estuary of the Kent River and walked along a path on the beach. The tide was out and the smooth golden sand sparkled in the sun. We breathed in the salty air and watched seagulls wheeling and screaming overhead.

We also visited Skipton Castle, which is over 900 years old. In the inner courtyard, we saw a very tall yew tree that Lady Anne Clifford planted in 1659. We visited the Dales Countryside Museum in Hawes, too, which offers a shed load of information about the history of the Dales. Just down

the road is the Wensleydale Creamery and we watched a short film on how they make their cheeses. Of course, afterwards we fancied cheese and crackers and bought a selection for our happy hour.

One morning after a hearty breakfast, we decided to tackle the Cautley Spout walk to see England's highest waterfall above ground. Unfortunately, we chose a windy day and though I squatted like a sumo wrestler to resist the ferocious wind, I soon tired and stopped half way up beside a babbling brook or as we're in the Dales, a "gurgling gill"!

We had a jubilant escape from our COVID coop, for the Dales delivered all we had hoped for and more. ■



Tell us about your favourite holiday (send a photo too) and if we print it, we'll pay £50

OLD GRIFFITH PARK ZOO

Los Angeles

HIDDEN
GEMS

Ever wondered what a zoo is like from the animals' perspective? Griffith Park, a 4,310-acre tract of greenery in the hillside Los Feliz area of Los Angeles—not far northeast of Hollywood—offers the chance to find out.

Opened in 1912 and replacing a former ostrich farm, the Griffith Park Zoo began life with just 15 animals. A series of donations and investments saw it quickly expand in volume and lure as many as 2 million annual visitors. As LA grew, however, the zoo came under fire for being “inadequate, ugly, poorly designed and under-financed”. It was eventually closed in 1966, with all animals transferred to a new and still-operational facility two miles away (lazoo.org).

Wholly abandoned, the canyon-set site remains today. Many of its caves-with-iron-bars enclosures—such was the prevailing early-century zoo style—are now open so that visitors can gain a sense of life inside the cages. Grills and picnic benches inside bear grottoes enable an unusual lunch spot, while longstanding graffiti reminds of the urban setting.

Nearby, a trail provides a zookeeper's view of the old lion's den and some of the numerous former monkey cages are also accessible—their cramped size helping one to further understand why so many concerns about animal welfare were raised.

The unusual, slightly eerie setting has tempted plenty of cinematographers. *Anchorman's* bear-fighting scene took place in one of the old caves, while two *Starsky & Hutch* TV-series instalments and the first ever episode of *S.W.A.T.* were also filmed here. ■

By Richard Mellor





Staying Warm This Winter

Evenings are getting colder, nights are drawing in and it's beginning to look a lot like Christmas...

However, this winter seems to be arriving with more vengeance than usual. There's the flu and the implications of coronavirus supply chain and food stock issues. Added to this, wholesale gas prices are soaring—since January they've increased by 250 per cent. This is due to an increased demand for liquified natural gas from Asia, and last year's cold European winter putting pressure on supplies, leading to stored gas levels being lower than normal.

This increase in wholesale energy costs has meant that Ofgem's latest energy

price cap has also risen sharply. Around 15 million households have seen their energy bills increase by around 12 per cent since the start of October. Add to this the uncertainty and worry about energy firms still being able to provide for their customers (as it stands, ten have gone bust), and it's enough to send chills up anyone's spine.

However, it's not all bad news. There are some simple ways in which you can stay warmer this winter without paying a hefty price. Read on for some clever tips on how to stay cosy, not cold, this Christmas time.



PARTNERSHIP
PROMOTION

Urgent appeal

HELP OLDER PEOPLE THROUGH THE COLD, LONELY WINTER MONTHS

People like Frank have very simple wishes; to be safe, warm and have food this Christmas.

"It was always a choice between eat or top up the gas and electric for the hot water, the heating, the cooker, the stair lift. I never had enough money. I don't know what I would have done without your grant. Probably died I expect."

Frank, 72

Never has our help – and yours – been more critical.



SCAN to donate



**OR call 0207 881 1169 or visit
www.fote.org.uk/WinterAppeal**

Every heart-warming gift will be doubled by our match-funding partner and help pay for essentials like warm clothing, heating and hot water for older people living in poverty.

Receive Valerie's delicious biscuit recipe if you sign up to hear from us. Change your contact preferences anytime by emailing enquiries@fote.org.uk, call us, or write to our registered office 40-42 Ebury Street, London, SW1W 0LZ. Friends of the Elderly promises to handle all your personal information in accordance with our Privacy Policy (www.fote.org.uk/privacy-statement) and the current data protection regulations. Registered charity in England and Wales (no 226064). Names have been changed to protect identities.

Registered with





12 Top tips for staying warm this winter

1. Feet up thinking

Around ten per cent of heat loss in an average home comes from the ground floor, and the Energy Saving Trust estimates that you can save £70 a year on energy bills if you insulate the ground floor of a detached house. If you have wooden floorboards, use a flexible silicon-based filler to block small gaps between boards and pop a rug down to prevent draughts. Carpets? Choose an insulating layer such as fibreboard underlay under your floor covering. If you have access below your floorboards and you're a

more competent DIY-er, use netting to hold mineral or wool insulation between joists on suspended timber floors. Don't forget about ventilation, and if you have any doubts speak to an expert.

2. Heat it

Hit the sweet spot with home heating by using timed room thermostats and thermostatic radiator valves. These heating controls not only set your heating and hot water timings, they also allow you to only heat specific areas in your home

and set different temperatures in each room, keeping you warmed up and your bills down.

3. Shut out draughts

Doors and windows are often the worst culprits when it comes to letting cold air in. The Energy Trust states that draft proofing cracks and spaces around these areas can save you on average £25 annually, so get to work with some self-adhesive draught-proof strips around casements and fill in any larger cracks with putty or sealant. Bigger gaps at the bottom of doors or letter boxes can be sorted out using brushes or hinged draft excluders. Chimney balloons or a chimney cap are also worth exploring if you don't use your fireplace. Sound like a job too big? Enlist a local handyman to help.

4. Home Insulation help

It's worth checking in with your current energy providers to see if you qualify for any grants or offers available under the Energy Company Obligations (ECO) scheme. These range from new boilers to loft and cavity wall insulation, and depending on your personal circumstances, you could be eligible. Always do your research though—cavity wall insulation isn't right for every home, so it's vital to carry out thorough checks prior to any work being done.

5. Sleep well

Winter duvets are a great investment. With a heavier weight (usually between 10.5 and 13.5 tog), they'll keep you cosier through colder nights. Add a wool or cotton fleece blanket—better at trapping body heat than synthetic fibre—and some flannel pyjamas for extra warmth. Cold toes? Treat yourself to an electric blanket or snuggle down with a hot water bottle.

6. Layer up

Several layers of thinner clothes will keep you warmer than one thick, bulky layer, and it's a good idea to think in threes. Firstly, your base layer needs to wick away sweat, so polyester or silk is good. The middle layer keeps you warm; opt for a fleece or jumper, snug but not too tight. Finally, if you're venturing outside, the outer layer needs to block wind, rain and snow, so go for something warm and waterproof to keep the chills away.

7. Head, fingers, toes

Heading out? Don't forget to pop a hat on and pull your scarf up over your mouth to help warm up the air you're breathing in. Hand-warmers (single use or rechargeable) are great to use in gloves, and thermal leggings can also keep your legs warm in icy weather. Staying in? Treat yourself to some sheepskin slippers and thermal socks for toasty toes.





10. The importance of eating

Start your day off with a big bowl of steaming porridge. Indulge in some warming soup or hearty stews. Put the kettle on and have plenty of hot drinks. Eating well can boost your immune system and increase your overall energy, so make sure your cupboards are full. Unable to get out to shop? Explore supermarket home deliveries, or ask friends, neighbours and family to keep you stocked with the essentials.

8. Close the curtains

Thick curtains can keep draughts out around windows and improve insulation. Go for floor length and add a good thermal lining to provide a barrier to the cold. Close them at night to keep the heat in, but on those bright sunny winter days, keep them open to let the warmth shine through.

9. A helping hand with heating bills

Born on or before September 26, 1955? You may be eligible for government help with your heating bills. The Winter Fuel Payment is between £100 and £300 and is an annual tax-free payment so it's worth checking. Find out more at [gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment](https://www.gov.uk/winter-fuel-payment).

Cold Weather Payments are also available to specific households when the weather turns very cold. Check out further information from November 1 by visiting [coldweatherpayments.dwp.gov.uk](https://www.coldweatherpayments.dwp.gov.uk). The government's Warm Home Discount Scheme ([gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount](https://www.gov.uk/the-warm-home-discount)-

scheme) may also be useful depending on your circumstances.

11. Keep active

It may be tempting to stay in when the weather is bad, but it's important to keep your body moving—plus exercise is a great way of warming up. A short walk outside or some gentle exercises at home will not only get your blood pumping, but can also keep you well mentally—important with longer, darker evenings. It's worth thinking outside the box too; vacuuming, mopping or sweeping the floor all count towards staying active!

12. Avoid alcohol

It might be tempting to have a wee dram to warm the cockles, but while alcohol might make you feel warmer initially, it actually lowers your body temperature by drawing heat away from your vital organs, so approach with caution in winter months. ■

BECOME A CARBON REDUCING HERO

Worcester Bosch has launched its latest sustainability campaign to encourage the nation to become Carbon Reducing Heroes.

But how can you become one?

Many of us would agree that we could do more to reduce our personal footprint upon the world, with statistics revealing that 71% of us worry about climate change every single day.

But, whilst in reality there are lots of ways we can make a difference, knowing how to do this is often a real difficulty.

This is why the UK's leading boiler manufacturer **Worcester Bosch** has introduced its latest sustainability campaign, which looks to inspire consumers to become 'Carbon Reducing Heroes'. The new initiative aims to educate homeowners on the choices they can make to reduce their carbon footprint, including when it comes to home heating and hot water. And the smallest changes really can make the biggest difference.

On average, over half of your annual household energy bills come from heating our homes. Added to the fact that 15% of the UK's carbon emissions come from home heating, we need to find solutions that allow us all to make greener choices when it comes to keeping warm. The good news is, Worcester Bosch are

already years into this process – but they need your help.

By choosing to make the switch to a newer, more efficient boiler, you will have taken the first big step to heating your home more sustainably, as well as future proofing your home for emerging greener technologies.

Worcester is actively encouraging installers across the UK to support the campaign in order to offer you the advice and confidence to start making greener choices when it comes to home heating.

To become a Carbon Reducing Hero, head over to the Worcester Bosch website and receive hints and tips on the small changes you can make to live more sustainably at home. You can also find information on the company's Future of Heating Hub. ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON CARBON REDUCING Hero please visit www.worcester-bosch.co.uk/future. You can also view the company's new ad on its YouTube channel, social channels and on your TV screens throughout November.

 **WORCESTER**

 **BOSCH**



PARTNERSHIP
PROMOTION

It maybe winter outside but **FRIENDS OF THE ELDERLY** is helping to keep people warm



For 26 years, 72-year-old Frank worked as a lorry driver moving goods around Europe and the UK. He missed his family while he was away and loved coming home to a loving, lively household.

When Frank's wife passed away from cancer, it was the first time his house felt unusually quiet – it was now just him and his hamster. With the added onset of the COVID pandemic, resulting lockdowns and financial issues, his day-to-day life became increasingly challenging.

Frank lives on a very low income and works out his finances every week to the penny. Frank found that he never had enough money and he was often forced to choose between eating or topping up the utilities. Some days he only ate a single tin of soup.

The cold, dark days brought further hardship. *“I had no lights, no electricity, no nothing. I had no electric to work the stair lift. I have nerve damage in my feet and legs, which causes unbearable pain.*

Most days I would not even try to walk up the stairs to my bed. I would lay on the couch or even the floor with a blanket wrapped round me. I tried everything to get comfortable. It was so cold.” **said Frank.**

“One really bad night, I had to press my emergency button to call for an ambulance – my health was terrible. I was in hospital for a couple days before I could return home.” **Frank added.**

However, help was on hand. Friends of the Elderly awarded Frank a £400 grant to top up the gas and electric which has made an incredible difference. **Frank concluded,** *“I’m a lot better now, my home is warm, I’ve got hot water and I can go upstairs and sleep in my bed. Now I don’t have the added worry about my gas and electric costs. I have an extra bit of money to buy and enjoy proper food.”*

“I can’t believe the difference the grant has made and it’s helped me 100% with my stress and anxiety. I don’t know what I would have done without Friends of the

Elderly's grant. Probably died I expect. You are a lifesaver. I had nowhere else to go."

Friends of the Elderly has been supporting older people for over a century. From serving up 'Penny Dinners' to World War I veterans, to awarding one-off grants and regular allowances to older people living in poverty in the present day - older people are at the heart of all we do.

The charity has launched its **2021 Winter Warmth Appeal** which focuses on the problems facing many older adults. Worries such as not being able to stay warm enough in their homes through the chilly winter months and not being able to afford the everyday, basic essentials - such as food - due to worries relating to the rising costs of energy bills. These exhausting fears are constant anxiety triggers, drains on emotions, and strains on mental wellbeing and physical safety.

"Every day we receive downhearted and discouraged calls from many older people who may be living on their own, who are desperate for help and support, are living in unsafe conditions or facing dire situations. More often than not, they have nowhere else to turn and Friends of the Elderly is their last and only hope," said Mark Wilson, Friends of the Elderly's Chief Operating Officer.

Shockingly, two million pensioners in the UK live in poverty* and, earlier this year, it was reported that almost three million elderly people turn off their heating as they cannot afford to pay their energy bills**. These are some of the reasons why our Winter Warmer Appeal is so vital to those older people who are at risk this winter.

Keeping warm is imperative for vulnerable older people. Colder temperatures increase the risks of heart attacks, strokes, flu, pneumonia and in extreme, serious cases of low temperatures - hypothermia.

Never has our help been more critical - and your support so clearly needed

Mark concluded, *"Helping older people like Frank is at the heart of our 2021 Winter Warmth Appeal. It's what it is all about - helping older people to keep warm, healthy, comfortable and safe."*

"Every penny we receive is match-funded by the Edward Gostling Foundation and goes towards making sure older people do not feel alone, cold or forgotten this winter."

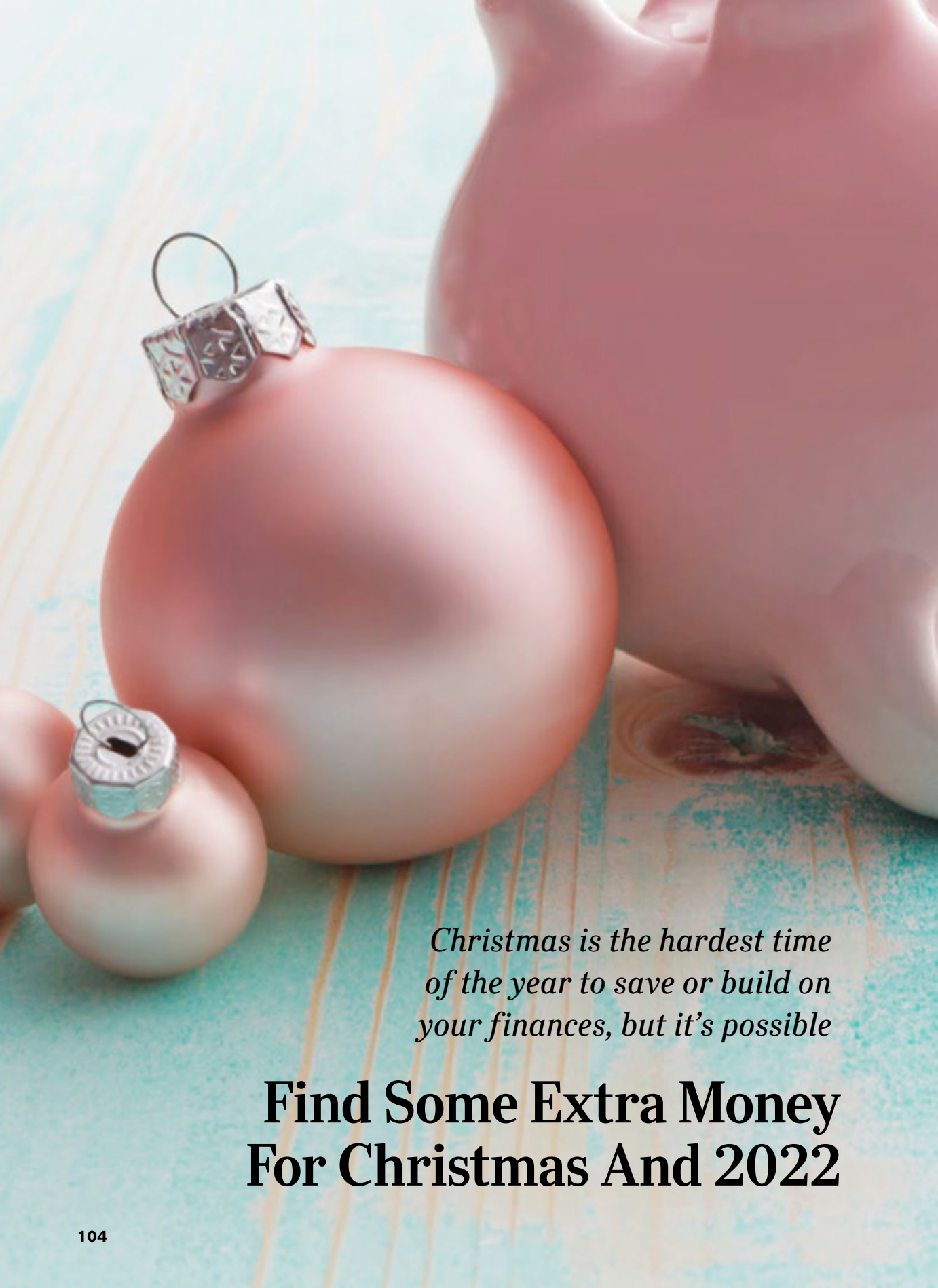
ABOUT FRIENDS OF THE ELDERLY'S WINTER WARMTH APPEAL FOR OLDER PEOPLE

Friends of the Elderly has helped hundreds of older people across the country with grants for heating bills, basic essentials and so much more.

For more information please visit www.fote.org.uk/WinterAppeal, or call: 020 7881 1169. Alternatively, please write to us at Friends of the Elderly 40-42 Ebury Street, London, SW1W 0LZ




Frank's name changed to protect his identity.
References: *AgeUK. ** EnergyLiveNews

A close-up photograph of a pink piggy bank and several pink Christmas ornaments. The piggy bank is on the right, and the ornaments are on the left. They are resting on a light blue wooden surface with a visible grain. The lighting is soft and warm, creating a cozy holiday atmosphere.

*Christmas is the hardest time
of the year to save or build on
your finances, but it's possible*

Find Some Extra Money For Christmas And 2022



IN ANY YEAR **DECEMBER** is going to be an expensive month, but I think 2021 is going to be even tougher to afford thanks to likely shortages and inflation leading to higher prices. And let's not forget the huge energy price hikes also squeezing budgets.

So what do you do if there's less money to spend and everything costs more? Well, you know as well as I do that you shouldn't spend more than you have. But it doesn't have to mean buying fewer presents or scaling back the Christmas dinner (though that's

not a bad idea if you always end up with too much food and drink).

Instead, you could look to boost your existing festive spending power. All the suggestions below make the most of your normal spending or access potential funds you might have neglected.

The extra money you can make might not be enough to really splash the cash, but it could help you make up for those rising costs elsewhere.

As we're already approaching the big day you might not actually receive the money from some of them before you need to spend it, but at least you'll have an extra buffer throughout 2022.

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO MEAN BUYING FEWER PRESENTS OR SCALING BACK THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

Earn cashback

This is one of my favourite ways to make some money—you just need to change the way you pay. With cashback you are paid when you spend cash. As long as you don't use this as an excuse to spend more, it's effectively free money.

There are a couple of options. You could look at a cashback debit or credit card. The best ongoing rate is from the new Chase Bank current account. For the first 12 months you'll get 1% back on most of your purchases. For the average household that could add up to around £150 a year. However it is an app-only bank so you'll need a smartphone to open and manage your account.

A higher initial rate is available for new American Express cardholders, with boosted welcome bonuses worth £100 to £150 as long as you spend a few grand in the first three months. Some cards will pay out the bonus earlier than others.

To qualify for this extra offer you

can't have had a personal American Express credit card in the last 24 months. Make sure you check your eligibility on their website before you make your application.

The other way to earn cashback is via websites such as Quidco or TopCashback. You need to visit these sites to search for the retailer you want to use, for example Marks & Spencer or Boots. You'll see the rate on offer displayed. Click through from the cashback site to the retailer's online website and shop as normal. It can take a while for your earnings to be confirmed, so it won't be an instant money maker—but it quickly adds up.

And best of all you can combine both cashback on your card with shopping via cashback sites to boost your earnings.

Switch banks

Though deals come and go, one way banks entice customers to open up new current accounts with them is through huge switching bonuses. These usually range between £100 and £150, and payment can be in your account as fast as ten days or take as long as three or four months.

To get the money you'll need to open a new account with the bank offering the bonus and then complete a full switch from another current account. This will mean closing down your old account completely. As part of the process

your money in and out of the old account will be transferred for you.

You'll always need to read the terms and conditions for each switching deal. Some will also require a couple of Direct Debits, or perhaps a regular deposit into the new account.

Look for forgotten money

A quicker way to access some spending is to look for any balances sitting around on unused cards and forgotten accounts that you can access now.

Start with old savings accounts and even extra current accounts. There could be the odd extra quid or two sitting around in these neglected accounts, so do check!

Take a look at your bills to see if you've overpaid, and make sure any credit due from when you switched away from old providers was actually sent to you.

Another common place to look is any kind of loyalty scheme. If you haven't checked for a while there could be a healthy amount sitting there for you to spend on Christmas. The same applies if you're already using the cashback sites that were mentioned above.

Make sure you root through your wallet for any forgotten gift cards or prepaid cards. Though sometimes these balances expire if unused for a year to two, you might strike lucky. The same applies to old Oyster cards

which you probably haven't used since contactless became the norm.

While you're looking, see if there is any foreign currency at the back of a drawer which you're not needing. Swap that back into sterling for more cash to spend now.

And log on to any websites where you've been sent a refund. Sometimes this could be sitting in your online account.

Sell old things

It's also a good opportunity to look for anything around the home which you don't need anymore. Anything in decent nick will sell for fair amount of money, but even broken and damaged items can sell.

Sites like eBay and Depop are obvious places to start, but look for local selling groups on Facebook Marketplace to avoid fees.

Plan your spending

Finally, you might be able to free up some extra cash by simply paying more attention to where your money is going.

Go through your statements, or even better, put all your spending into a spreadsheet, to look for outgoings costing more than you might've realised.

You might not be able to streamline all your spending, but if there's any that can be trimmed back, you can reprioritise this money for other purposes. ■

It's A Wrap

Add a homemade touch to your festivities with these tags

IN RECENT YEARS, eco-friendly and zero-waste living have gone from trendy buzzwords to a way of life for many, including myself! And never is that more true than at Christmas. It's easy to let the waste pile up, especially when it comes to gift wrapping. But I've got a fun, crafty way to help reduce some of that waste!

Last year, I created some free templates for reusable, zero-waste embroidered gift tags, and I'm excited to stitch up some more this year. Each one can be crafted in less than 20 minutes, then reused over and over again.

You could also easily personalise these gift tags, simply by stitching the recipient's initials onto the design. They could then cut away their initials and stitch a different one, in order to reuse the tag. Or, even better, they could keep their own initials and hang it on their tree as an ornament.



Mike Aspinall runs one of the UK's most popular craft blogs, The Crafty Gentleman, where he shares free DIY tutorials



You will need

- **Printable template** (find them at thecraftygentleman.net or draw your own!)
- **Felt or thick card** (at least 200gsm)
- **Sewing needle**
- **Embroidery thread**
- **Tailor's chalk** (if using felt)
- **Scissors**

What to do

1 Print out the templates, then cut out the design you want to make. If you're making the tags in card, print them directly onto your cardstock, but if you're making them in felt, print them onto paper and trace the design onto the felt with tailor's chalk.

2 Using your needle and embroidery thread, stitch the design on the template using the dots as a guide. It's best to use a back stitch to create the design (go forward 2 dots, back 1, forward 2, back one... and so on, in order to create a continuous line of stitching).

If you're stitching them in felt, it's easiest to stitch through both the paper template and the felt, then tear away the paper at the end (rather than trying to transfer all of the dots onto the felt). If you're stitching a card tag, try not to bend or tear the card as you do this. It might take a little practice to get a good feel for it—but the effort is definitely worth it!



3 Build up the design until it's finished, using as many colours of thread as you want.

4 Tie off the loose ends and cut away the excess thread.

5 Finally, tie a loop to the top of the tags, and attach to your gifts.

The simplicity of these tags make them the perfect low effort / high impact craft project. They're perfect for a relaxing craft afternoon with friends—or you could curl up on the sofa with a festive film, and create a whole batch of them. It's even more fun with a mug of hot chocolate! ■



'Tis The Season To Embrace Frivolous Festive Fashion

Bec Oakes discusses her sartorial plans for this year's festive season

WHEN IT COMES to Christmas Day style, you likely fall into one of two camps. You're either dressed to the nines with a full face of makeup and perfectly coiffed hair or you use the holiday as an excuse to spend the entire day in your pyjamas.

I have always been the latter, forgoing getting dressed in favour of staying cosy in a pyjama set—I'm gifted one from my parents every year—and bed socks. Christmas in my family has always been a small, laidback affair spent at home with Buck's Fizz and *The Sound of Music* and I've never seen the point in making an effort for it.

For the 2021 festive season, however, I'm making a change. I've had this sudden urge to dress up, to break away from my PJs and embrace all the sequins, sparkle and finery that

come with the festive season.

This sudden change of heart is due in part to a job I started recently at Selfridges. Within the Women's Designer Galleries is the dress edit—a curated collection of classic designer pieces, alongside occasion wear by some of the best contemporary brands. Being exposed to impeccable gowns by **Galvan** and **Alexander McQueen** and perfect party pieces from the likes of **Dion Lee** and **The Attico** on a regular basis has certainly inspired me to up my style game.

I suspect the pandemic has also played a role. During various lockdowns I've missed a lot. And with that, came missed opportunities to get all dressed up; tailored suits, cocktail dresses and a black lace number from Self-Portrait being relegated to the back of my wardrobe and replaced with yoga pants, sweatshirts and slippers.

So now, as the opportunities to get dressed up return, I want to grasp them with both hands.

Behavioural psychologist Dr Carolyn Mair, author of *Psychology of Fashion* and founder of the website



Bec Oakes is a Lancashire-based freelance journalist with particular passions for fashion and culture writing

psychology.fashion, suggests I won't be the only one feeling this way. "As we emerge from being indoors for a year and a half, many of us want to express a different identity, one that is outgoing, fun and frivolous. What we wear allows us to negotiate our identity by expressing it differently through clothing. This can influence not only how the wearer thinks, feels and acts, but also changing how others relate to us."

She continues, "Party clothes have always been popular during the festive season, but this year we may be even more motivated to dress up as an expression of celebrating freedom and embracing life."

Actively choosing clothing that makes us feel good is known as "dopamine dressing." A 2012 study found that when participants wore clothing of symbolic meaning, their perceived confidence increased.

When we have a strong belief in the potential "power" of a piece of clothing, Dr Mair explains, it can influence our behaviour and the behaviour of others. "[When we're confident] we stand differently and use more expressive mannerisms, as well as being more alert to opportunities. These lead to more positive interactions with others.

"Dressing up shows we want to be seen and to engage positively with others. When we believe these things will happen, we are more likely to experience them. As the party season

approaches, we can use the power of belief in what we wear to help us feel great and have great interactions with others." The perfect antidote to a tumultuous past year and a half.

The fashion world certainly seems to agree. From sequins and sparkle at **Valentino** and **Isabel Marant** to faux fur galore at **Stand** and **Anna Sui** and a roaring 1920s redux at **Chloé** and **Khaite**, the autumn/winter 21 collections provided us with a plethora of partywear inspiration. And, the recent fashion season showings for next spring suggest joyful fashion will last long beyond Christmas and New Year, with hiked up hemlines, high-octane glitz and glamour being a common theme among many of the collections.

As for the exact direction my Christmas Day ensemble will take, I haven't yet decided. All I know is I want velvet, I want sequins, I want faux fur and marabou trims. I want everything fine, fun and frivolous to celebrate Christmas. That said, I can guarantee you'll catch me swapping my stilettos for **Ugg's** finest slippers as soon as I've finished my Christmas pud! ■



Much Kneaded

Jenessa Williams investigates the beauty and wellbeing benefits of handheld massage guns

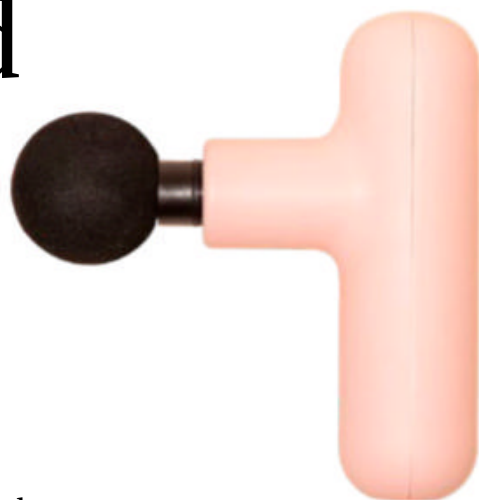
What are they?

Originally beloved by athletes, massage guns are gaining popularity as a stress or pain-relieving tool. A quick and convenient alternative to a traditional deep-tissue massage, many offer detachable heads to target calves, ankles or the tops of shoulders, available in a range of sizes and speeds.

What are the supposed benefits?

If you often find yourself aching after the gym or a long day of work, a massage gun may well be your new best friend. Sending pulses at a steady frequency that is difficult to achieve manually, they allow you to target a specific area of tightness, loosening lactic acid buildup muscle and allowing for greater mobility and muscle flexibility. Even if you're not so physically active, a couple of minutes of regular massaging can do wonders for your complexion.

Through vibration frequency, the movement of a massage gun will encourage blood and lymphatic circulation, giving a new vibrancy and comfort to skin as toxins drain out and oxygen flows through. If you've been feeling sluggish or struggling to



unwind, massage guns are also thought to be a useful tool in the rehabilitation of depression, anxiety, digestive disorders and stress-related insomnia.

Do they actually work?

Once you get used to the quiet humming noise, the swift, targeted relief a gun can offer more than justifies the initial spend. Leading the market is the **Lola**, a lightweight handheld gun in a sleek matte finish with four speeds that tucks easily into the pocket of an overnight bag. The key is to operate within your own comfort—be sure to fit the adjustable heads firmly and work through the speed functions slowly, building up to higher pressures only if necessary. While concerns about suitability for specific conditions or injuries should always be discussed with a doctor, the massage gun is certainly proof that both internal and external beauty can be achieved by listening that little bit closer to our bodies. ■



FESTIVE FIVE

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Add a little more sparkle this Christmas

Much like Santa and Rudolph, sparkling wines and Christmas tend to come as a pair. Whilst big Champagne names like Moët or Bollinger may be the obvious choice, there are lots of wonderful bubbly alternatives to consider this festive season.

Explore English fizz

A shift in British climate means grape-growing conditions in southeast England now mimic the Champagne region of France. Winemakers here are using the classic Champagne grape blend of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier to produce exceptional quality, fresh, elegant English sparkling wines with delicious notes of buttered brioche and lemon nougat.

Other brilliant bubbles

Prosecco is the sparkling wine of choice for many. Sweeter, less acidic, and fruitier than Champagne, it's very versatile and pairs well with a range of cuisines, making it the perfect aperitif and celebratory Christmas sparkler. Crémant is also a style of sparkling wine which predominantly uses lighter, more delicate Chenin Blanc grapes, giving flavours of lemon and pear – delicious.

Cheers to Champagne

However, if Christmas just isn't Christmas without a glass or two of champers, why not swap the big names for something a little more unique? Champagne Gremillet is a small, family-owned Champagne house. Their Champagne shows fine mousse in the glass and fresh floral aromas, with a crisp citrus finish. Champagne Ayala is another great option. Producing the drier styles of top-class Champagne, this is a truly boutique house producing exceptional and intriguing fizz.

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World Kitchen

Ukraine: *Borscht*

A sweet and sour soup made with beets, cabbage, garlic and dill, borscht is a truly classic dish that every Ukrainian grew up on. There are as many variations of Ukrainian-Russian borscht recipes as there are regions and families. Everyone makes it differently, sometimes even within the same family. Here, food blogger Olena Osipov shares her grandmother's precious, original recipe...

Method:

1. In a large pot add broth, bay leaves and bring to a boil.
2. Meanwhile, wash, peel and cut the vegetables.
3. Once the broth is boiling, add cabbage, cover and bring to a boil. Then reduce heat to low and cook for 20 minutes.
4. In the meantime, preheat a large skillet on medium heat and swirl 1 tbsp of oil to coat. Add onion, carrots and saute for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
5. Add beets, remaining 1 tbsp of oil and cook for another 3-4 minutes.
6. Transfer sauteed veggies to a pot along with potatoes, tomato paste and salt. Cover, bring to a boil and cook on low heat for 20 minutes.
7. Turn off heat. Add vinegar, garlic and pepper. Stir and let borscht sit for 10 minutes to allow flavours to marry each other.
8. Add dill, stir and adjust any seasonings to taste.
9. Serve hot, with a dollop of yogurt or sour cream, bread and garlic clove on the side (though this step is completely optional).



Ingredients:

- **12 cups beef or vegetable broth or stock**
- **5 cups green or red cabbage**, thinly sliced
- **1 large onion**, chopped
- **3 medium carrots**, chopped
- **2 tbsp olive oil**
- **3 large beets**, peeled and cut into matchsticks
- **4 large potatoes**, peeled and cubed
- **6 oz can tomato paste**, low sodium
- **2 tsp salt**
- **3 bay leaves**
- **1 tbsp white vinegar**
- **3 large garlic cloves** grated
- **Ground black pepper**, to taste
- **1/4 cup dill or parsley**, finely chopped
- **Yogurt or sour cream and rye bread**, for serving

For more food recipes from Olena, visit her blog at ifoodreal.com



MIA'S MEATBALLS

This is one of my daughter Mia's favourite recipes, not only to eat but to make. Often you will find us on a Sunday morning preparing this dish together; I have to say it is my favourite time of the week when that happens. The meatballs will be the best you have ever tasted and the secret is definitely the bread soaked in milk, it makes them so tender. I have suggested serving these with pasta, but it also works well with rice, or in a panini.

METHOD:

- 1.** Take a medium flat tray and pour in the olive oil. Using your fingertips, spread the oil all over the tray and set aside.
- 2.** Break the bread into a large bowl and pour over the milk. Using your fingertips, mix the bread and milk together, to make a wet paste. Add the minced meats and combine. Now add the parsley, garlic, pecorino, 2 tsp salt and $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp pepper, crack in the egg and use your hand to mix it all together.
- 3.** Divide into 10 large meatballs, rolling between your palms for 30–40 seconds to become compact. Gently place on the prepared tray. Cover with cling film and rest in the fridge for 30 minutes (you can leave them overnight if you wish).
- 4.** Now for the sauce. Place a large saucepan over a medium heat and pour in the olive oil. Place in 8 meatballs and



A TASTE OF
HOME

fry for 15 minutes, gently turning regularly using 2 tablespoons, ensuring they are browned all over (set aside the remaining 2 meatballs for the sauce). Switch off the heat and gently transfer the cooked meatballs one by one to a large plate, leaving the oil and juices in the saucepan.

5. Place the same saucepan back over a medium heat and add the remaining 2 raw meatballs. Add the crushed garlic, and, using a wooden spoon, break the meatballs into small pieces and fry in the sizzling oil for 4 minutes. Pour in the chopped tomatoes, torn basil leaves, 2 tsp salt and ½ tsp pepper. Fill one can with hot water and pour it into the saucepan. Stir, then simmer for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally and making sure you scrape the base of the pan for any caramelised bits.

6. Reduce the heat to a minimum and carefully place the whole meatballs in the sauce, pouring in any juices left on the plate. Gently stir, making sure the meatballs are completely covered in sauce. Cook for 2 hours, stirring occasionally, always gently, so you don't break the meatballs. Switch off the heat.

7. Fill a large saucepan with 4 litres of water and 1 tbsp salt and bring to the boil. Add the pasta and cook until al dente, normally 1 minute less than instructed on the packet. Meanwhile, carefully remove the meatballs from the sauce and keep warm (if serving with rice, you don't need to remove the meatballs, you can just spoon them on the rice).

8. Drain the pasta and tip into the sauce. Stir for about 20 seconds, ensuring the pasta is well coated. Divide the pasta and meatballs between 4 warmed plates, with the sauce, and sprinkle over the mozzarella. Enjoy!

INGREDIENTS:

Serves 4

FOR THE MEATBALLS

- **2 tbsp olive oil**
- **5 slices of white or brown bread**, crusts discarded
- **200ml milk** (whatever you have in the fridge is fine)
- **500g minced pork**
- **250g minced beef**
- **2 tbsp finely chopped flat leaf parsley leaves**
- **1 large garlic clove**, crushed
- **70g pecorino cheese**, finely grated
- **1 egg**
- **500g fresh egg tagliatelle or fettuccine pasta**
- **fine sea salt and freshly ground black pepper**

FOR THE SAUCE

- **6 tbsp olive oil**
- **1 large garlic clove**, crushed
- **3 x 400g cans of chopped tomatoes**
- **8 large basil leaves**, torn in half
- **2 mozzarella balls (125g each)**, drained, cut into small cubes and refrigerated



Extracted from Gino's Italian Family Adventure: Easy Recipes the Whole Family Will Love by Gino D'Acampo (published by Bloomsbury)



★★★★★

SILENT NIGHT

“Tonight is all about love and forgiveness,” announces Nell (Keira Knightley) as she welcomes friends and family into her house on Christmas Eve. A textbook festive sentiment that gains a whole new meaning in *Silent Night*. The evening starts off as a typical toxic family get-together, where, as people get increasingly drunk, ugly truths and resentments begin to surface. Recovering addicts fall off the wagon, bored housewives make crushing confessions, societal advantages get called out—you get the picture.

Among the run of the mill outrage, however, some incongruous bits of dialogue begin to circulate around the dinner table: are the Russians trying to poison us? Is the Earth about to self-destruct? Who will and who

won't take “the pill”? It all feels like a bizarre dream in which incompatible elements of our life get jumbled. When the other shoe finally drops, it catapults *Silent Night* into the realm of apocalyptic horror. It's impossible to describe what goes down without giving too much away, so let's just say that a dystopian cataclysm, suspicious medicine and the government all play a part. Whether or not the idea for *Silent Night* was conceived pre-COVID, there's a risk that its message could be wildly misinterpreted in these bizarre times. We urge you to leave preconceptions behind the door though and enjoy it for what it is: a silly, entertaining horror comedy that, if anything, will remind you that your family Christmas isn't half as bad.

By Eva Mackevic

4 Of the greatest classic Christmas films



MEET ME IN ST LOUIS

(1944)

Pure Technicolor perfection starring the inimitable Judy Garland, *Meet Me in St Louis* tells the story of four sisters on the cusp of the 1904 St Louis World's Fair. There's the thrill of young love, song, dance, period costumes—everything you may want from a timeless holiday treat. It also happens to be the film that introduced Garland to director Vincente Minnelli, whom she later married and had her famous daughter Liza with.



IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

(1946)

The *Citizen Kane* of Christmas movies, *It's a Wonderful Life* tops every list of the greatest holiday films ever made. James Stewart stars as a desperate businessman who considers taking his own life. Fortunately, his guardian angel comes to the rescue and shows him what his life would have been like if it hadn't been for all his good deeds. It's a wholesome, deeply moving film that reminds us that goodness is within all of us and it's never too late to turn your life around.



THE APARTMENT

(1960)
Perhaps not the most traditionally Christmassy film (it deals with extramarital affairs and the action extends up to New Year's eve) *The Apartment* is nevertheless a heartwarming story of a man and woman thrown together under ill-fated circumstances over the holidays and—you've guessed it—they fall in love. Starring Jack Lemmon and Shirley MacLaine in what were arguably their greatest roles, and masterfully directed by Billy Wilder.



FANNY AND ALEXANDER

(1982)

The dreamiest, most magical entry on our list, *Fanny and Alexander* was one of Swedish director Ingmar Bergman's final films, inspired by his own childhood. It follows the lives of the two eponymous children and their large, colourful family in a small Swedish town. Intimate, emotional and breathtakingly beautiful, it won four Academy awards, including Best Foreign Language Film.

We leave 2021 with TV mulling the idea of institutional change. Onscreen as off, it's proving a haphazard process, illustrated by two new comedies off the Tina Fey production line. Once envisioned as an Alec Baldwin-led *30 Rock* spin-off, **Mr. Mayor** (NOW TV) now stars Ted Danson, fresh from playing God on *The Good Place*, as Neil Bremer, a billboard magnate installed as Mayor of Los Angeles. The writing's familiarly sharp, but no-one's yet worked out whether Bremer's a relic of the old guard or another of network TV's lovable single dads (nor, really, what Holly Hunter's doing as Bremer's oddball deputy).

Better is **Girlz5Eva**, created by *30 Rock* scribe Meredith Scardino for NBC's new Peacock streaming service, which launches on NOW this winter. The tale of a Spice Girls-like pop act reforming 20 years on as variously frazzled and deluded 40-somethings, it features some of

the finest throwaway gags in years (my favourite: hybrid reality show *American Warrior Singer*, where contestants strive to get a note out before being thumped). It's goofily funny, but also a fond portrait of women trying to re-empower themselves within an industry that values youth above all else.

Over on Netflix, **The Chair** sees *Killing Eve* survivor Sandra Oh ducking the (not inconsiderable) fallout from being the first woman of colour to chair a prestigious American university's English department. Here's an academic cousin to Prime Video's much-missed orchestral treat *Mozart in the Jungle*, deploying a blue-chip ensemble cast to pick over hot-button campus issues with an elegant wit. Just six episodes so far, but there's already plenty of scope here for both characters and show to grow—which is surely what anybody wants from any institution.



by Mike McCahill



Retro Pick:

Enlightened S1-2

(NOW TV)

White Lotus creator Mike White's ahead-of-the-curve comedy-drama sees eager-beaver Laura Dern attempting to subvert corporate culture, with poignantly mixed results.

A classical Christmas: 4 best pieces of festive music



Christmas Oratorio by Johann Sebastian Bach

One of the festive season's most established classics, Bach's *Oratorio* was composed for the Christmas of 1734. It's divided into six parts—each with its own sound and story—that would have been performed separately on feast days during the Christmas season. Profound and reflective, it contains some of the most stirring choruses and moving arias you'll ever hear.

A Ceremony of Carols by Benjamin Britten

This contemplative choral piece was inspired by medieval English poetry from *The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems*, which Britten purchased while on a five-week voyage from New York to Britain in 1942. Featuring beautiful chants and heavenly harp parts, the piece feels both modern and ancient.



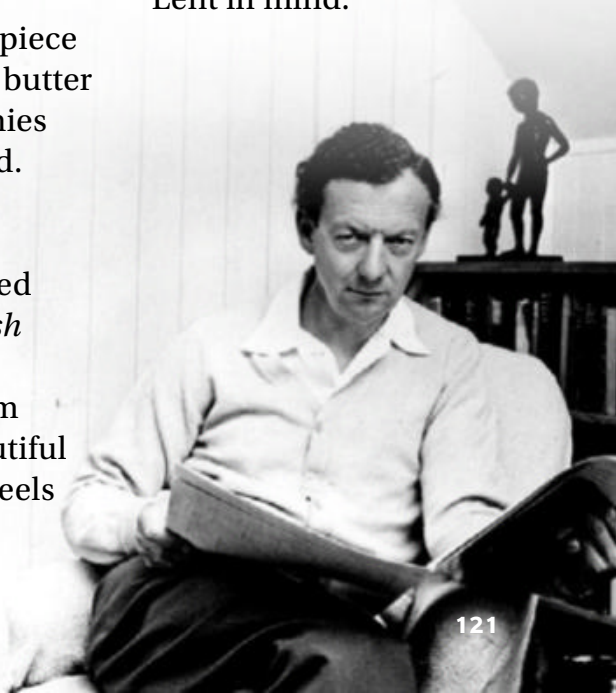
The Nutcracker by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

You'd be hard pressed to find anyone who wouldn't recognise the playful opening notes of the "The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy". The tale of a toy soldier who comes to life, *The Nutcracker* is a firm Christmas mainstay and a master class in musical storytelling. Enchanting, imaginative and wholesome, the piece is the bread and butter of ballet companies around the world.



Messiah by George Frideric Handel

Handel's crowning achievement is widely considered to be one of the most performed pieces during the holiday season around the world. Famous for its rousing "Hallelujah" chorus, the oratorio was surprisingly not intended for Christmas originally; Handel wrote it with the Easter Lent in mind.



December Fiction

A cosy Christmas read is on the cards for our December fiction pick

The Christmas Bookshop

by **Jenny Colgan**

Sphere, £14.99

WHATEVER ELSE PROVES in short supply this Christmas, it won't be the kind of festive romantic fiction designed to be a winter warmer for its primarily female readership. By my perhaps conservative reckoning, there are approximately 50 new novels around in this category. Nonetheless, it's hard to imagine any doing a better job than *The Christmas Bookshop*—where, once again, Jenny Colgan manages the neat trick of staying utterly faithful to the conventions of the genre, while also smuggling in some sharp comedy and keen social observation.



James Walton is a book reviewer and broadcaster, and has written and presented 17 series of the BBC Radio 4 literary quiz *The Write Stuff*



Carmen, like many a romcom heroine, is approaching 30 and not feeling good about herself. Single and working a dead-end job in a dying Scottish town, she keeps hearing from her mother about how well her sister Sofia is doing as a high-flying (and thin) Edinburgh lawyer with three children.

Worse, when that dead-end job finally goes, it's Sofia who comes to the rescue. Reluctantly, Carmen moves into her sister's gorgeous house and starts the job Sofia has arranged for her in a second-hand bookshop. The shop has potential but, as chaotically run by its owner, will close if Carmen can't turn it around by Christmas, now a matter of weeks away. So what could possibly go right?

The answer, naturally, is quite a lot—especially once a handsome Brazilian bloke shows up. Yet, while there’s never any huge doubt about where we’re heading, Colgan provides enough twists to make it a highly satisfying relief when we get there.

Meanwhile, she gives us plenty of other things to enjoy. The book has much mischievous fun with Sofia’s perky blonde New-Age nanny Skylar (real name, Janet). It has even more with a narcissistic self-help author whose gleaming teeth reduce middle-class mums to jelly, and whose bestselling books have titles like *Your Child’s Calm Wellness in Five Minutes a Day*. As the chip falls from Carmen’s shoulder, *The Christmas Bookshop* also becomes a touching love letter to Edinburgh.

Add in a large supporting cast—all deftly portrayed, particularly Sofia’s children—plus walk-on parts for some much-loved characters from her previous books, and Colgan’s mission here is triumphantly accomplished.

Name the author

Can you guess the writer from these clues (the fewer you need the better)?

1. She was born on Christmas Eve 1973 into a Mormon family.
2. The second and third books in her best-known series are *New Moon* and *Eclipse*.
3. The first is *Twilight*.

A Choice Of 2021’s Best Books For Children

Time for Bed, Panda

by Jo Lodge (Campbell, £6.99.

Ages: baby to toddler). A charming, playful, interactive introduction to bedtime words.

10 Silly Children

by Jon Lander (Pavilion, £8.99. Ages 3-5). On the face of it, the children here are behaving impeccably. Lift the flaps, though, and it’s a very different story.

Lizzie and Lucky: The Mystery of the Stolen Treasure

by Megan Rix (Puffin, £6.99. Ages 5-8). A deaf girl and her puppy join forces to crack a case—and of course outwit the grown-ups.

Grimwood

by Nadia Shireen (Simon & Schuster, £12.99. Ages: 8-12). Very funny tale of two urban fox cubs who find out how strange the countryside can be.

All Our Hidden Gifts

by Caroline O’Donoghue (Walker, £7.99. Ages: 12+). A socially isolated girl discovers an apparently psychic talent. But will it help to find her vanished ex-best friend? Gripping story, great teenage voice.

READER'S DIGEST RECOMMENDED READ:

Festive Traditions

The origin of the famous Trafalgar Square Christmas tree is beautifully drawn in this historical read

EVERY DECEMBER, Trafalgar Square is famously dominated by a Christmas tree donated by Norway in gratitude for Britain's help during the war. Indeed, it's become such a familiar sight that the poignant and stirring story behind it is often forgotten. Now, the ever-prolific A N Wilson's latest book—aimed at “young and old alike”—gives that story its full due.

He begins on the night of April 8-9, 1940 when Germany launched a surprise invasion of neutral Norway, firmly expecting that it would do the same as other invaded countries: agree to terms that gave the Nazis full control. Things didn't, however, work out that way. King Haakon VII and the Norwegian government managed to escape to Britain (Haakon's English wife Maud was George VI's aunt). They took with them not just Norway's gold reserves to fund anti-German resistance but, as Wilson puts it, the idea of Norway itself. Their country's merchant navy



helped keep the Allies fed during the Battle of the Atlantic. Norwegian commandos fought on too—most spectacularly by destroying a heavy-water plant that threatened to lead to a Nazi atom bomb.

Wilson tells the tales of derring-do—including the king's

escape with the Germans in hot pursuit—in a suitably exhilarating way. But he also fills in the fascinating historical background to Haakon's reign, which began in 1905 when Norway became independent from Sweden and established itself as an unusually committed liberal democracy.

The book does acknowledge that not all Norwegians approved of Haakon's refusal to surrender—among them the country's would-be Fuhrer, Vidkun Quisling. At heart, though, this is a moving study in heroism, from both monarch and people.

And as for how that Christmas-tree tradition began...

“When Haakon reached his 70th birthday in August 1942, there was an outpouring of affection and admiration, from Norwegians in Norway, in Britain and all over the world. The exiled Prime Minister, Johan Nygaardsvold, broadcast in Norwegian from the BBC, ‘I believe we must go back far in time before we find—if we do—a Norwegian king who stood so high in the esteem of the entire Norwegian people as Haakon VII does today.’

It was a particularly gruesome year of the war, with the Barbarossa Campaign causing tens of thousands of Russian and German deaths, the battle for North Africa at its fiercest. In February, Singapore had surrendered to Japanese forces,

‘the worst disaster in British history’, according to Churchill. On the Burma-Thailand Railway, British prisoners of war were compelled to work as slaves of their Japanese conquerors.

This year of horrors was a very dark time world-wide, but towards the end there occurred one of those seemingly small events which shone a light in the darkness. A brave Norwegian resistance fighter, Mons Urangsvåg, was taking part in a commando raid on the tiny island of Hisøy. In the 1890s Dr Christian Heitmann had come here and established an arboretum, so it is a densely forested place, today popular as a bathing resort. Urangsvåg cut down a Norwegian pine, intending it as a gift to his exiled King. It was taken on board a tanker and transported to the British Isles.

The King's decision, taken jointly with his Government, that a free Norway still existed, in defiance of the miserable observable realities at home, had at the time been regarded

The King and the Christmas Tree by AN Wilson is published by Manilla Press at £9.99



as a defiance of common sense. The sensible thing, as he was told by the King of Sweden, was simply to give up. But the story of the Second World War is one where doing the sensible thing usually led to disaster. France did the sensible thing in the summer of 1940 and gave up on the struggle. The British, utterly routed in Northern France, and with no powerful allies, defied common sense and refused to stop fighting.

Mons Urangsvåg's Norwegian pine was not a sensible thing. It was, however, a palpable, organic part of Norway. It had grown out of Norwegian soil and was now making its way to Norway's King, the man who had demonstrated the unconquerable potency of not doing the sensible thing.

The tree was taken to Foliejon Park [in Berkshire] where the King was now living.

George VI remarked, 'I so wish dear Auntie Maud could have lived to see this beautiful tree, which seems, in a strange way, a symbol of all our hopes in these dark days.'

It was Haakon who thought, after taking appropriate consultations from the British Government and the Greater London Council, of passing the tree on to Londoners. So it was first erected in Trafalgar Square in the middle of the war. No electric lights—there was still a blackout—but evergreen with defiant hope. ”

The Feeling is Mutual: *Britain's Wartime Gratitude to Norway*

"I often wonder how things would have gone if Norway had not resisted German occupation—if Norway had done as stronger nations did, and said: 'What's the use?' I can well imagine that Great Britain would not have been able to hold out when things were at their worst, if it had not been for the help from the Norwegians, not least from the Norwegian Merchant Navy... I know what dangers the Norwegian crews are exposed to, and I also know that two fifths of the petrol that reaches the country comes in Norwegian tankers. I know that Norwegian tankers are playing the same role in the Battle of the Atlantic as Spitfires played in the Battle of Britain. Great Britain will never forget what Norway has done."

— Philip Noel-Baker, *British Ministry of War Transport*

Noel-Baker, incidentally, is the only person in history to have won both an Olympic medal (1500m silver in 1920) and a Nobel Prize (for Peace in 1959).

And the name of the author is...

Stephenie Meyer— whose vampire-romance *Twilight* series is informed by her Mormonism, with no smoking, drinking or sex before marriage. It has sold more than 100 million copies



Books

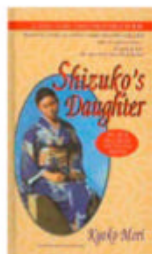


THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

American-Korean author Renée Ahdieh is best known for her *New York Times* best-selling series *The Wrath & the Dawn*. Her latest novel, *The Righteous*, is published December 7 by Hodder & Stoughton

The Queen of the Damned by Anne Rice

I fell in love with vampires the day my father forbade me from reading Anne Rice. Naturally, that very night I snuck his weathered copy of *The Queen of the Damned* beneath my covers to read by torchlight, and I was transported. I never forgot that feeling of being hypnotised by words as I was lulled into Rice's dangerous world. It was the first time I thought to myself, *I want to do this*. One of the things I bought for myself with my first royalty check was a first edition of this book. I took it with me to New Orleans so that Anne Rice could sign it. For me, her work was life-changing.



Shizuko's Daughter by Kyoko Mori

As a mixed race child, I often found myself wanting to hide half of who I was. When I was with other Korean children, I desperately wished to be less

American. When I went to school, I wanted to eat turkey sandwiches instead of the lovingly prepared doshirak lunchbox my mother gave me. I think so much of my desire was rooted in that sense of not seeing myself anywhere, and especially not in the books I loved. Even though *Shizuko's Daughter* is about a Japanese girl, I remember when I saw the cover and realised there could be a story about someone just like me. It was the first step for me to gain the confidence I needed to write the books I wanted to read, for children from all walks of life.

The Book of Three by Lloyd Alexander

This book was the first to whet my appetite for fantasy stories filled with dragons, magic baubles and mythical quests. Before this, I often found myself daydreaming about what it might be like to suddenly have a magical power. Perhaps the power to predict the future, or fly through the air, or spin silk from straw. When I read about Taran the assistant pigkeeper, I knew I'd found a story that would fill my head with more possibilities. These books made me close my eyes and hope I might find myself in Prydain, listening to a wandering bard or learning to fight with a sword.



More Power To You

James O'Malley on how battery technology has revolutionised the fight against climate change

AS THE POLITICIANS made clear at last month's COP26 [United Nations Climate Change Conference], in Glasgow, now is the time to act on climate change. We need to cut carbon emissions, and knowing this, it is easy to be pessimistic: Will people really be prepared to make changes in their lives? Can we really remake society to be much greener than it is now?

Strangely, I'm feeling optimistic. Especially compared to if you'd asked me a few years ago. And that's mostly because of one factor: Batteries. It isn't obvious but over the last decade or so, just as we've watched our computers get faster and screens get thinner, batteries have dramatically improved too.

According to the European Patent Office, the number of battery patents filed grew by an average of 14 per cent every year between 2005 and 2018. In other words, battery innovation is exploding. Energy storage is getting



better and better, as more companies are discovering new chemistry and processes to make them work more efficiently. And the results of all of this work are astonishing. According to Bloomberg, energy density—the amount of power that can be stored in the same sized battery—has tripled in the last decade. And the cost of batteries has dramatically fallen too.

Today, battery power per kilowatt hour costs around only ten per cent of what it did a decade ago. And the expectation is that the costs will continue to fall, both as battery chemistry improves and because manufacturing lots of batteries on a massive scale makes the production of individual batteries cheaper.

You can be forgiven for thinking that this might only be of interest to accountants, but the implications of this are enormous, and will benefit all of us.

First and most obviously, it had made the batteries in electric cars cheaper and longer-lasting. For example, back in 2011 a new Nissan Leaf had a range of only around 70-80 miles. Today, the 2021 Leaf is capable

of upwards of 230 miles without needing to recharge. This is a big deal, as it doesn't just make electric cars more useful (you can go further!), but it also reduces the "range anxiety" worry that you will run out of charge before you can find a charger on a

IT'S CONCEIVABLE THAT IN THE NEAR FUTURE WE MIGHT HAVE ENORMOUS **BATTERIES IN THE GARAGE**

long trip. And brilliantly, because electric batteries are improving so dramatically, we can already see the results. Last September, 15 per cent of all new vehicle registrations were pure electric vehicles. So the change is starting to happen.

Better batteries does not just mean better cars, however. They can also help us decarbonise the entire national grid. Storing energy has always been a problem for the grid. Today, only a tiny amount of generated electricity is stored for later use, which leads to lots of power going to waste. But better batteries make it technologically and economically viable to store large amounts of energy from the grid.

It's conceivable that in the not-too-distant future, alongside other essentials in our homes like a boiler

and a fusebox, we might also have an enormous battery in the garage. This would take power from the grid (or maybe even solar panels on the roof), and power appliances and lights in our homes at the times when demand for electricity is high. And this is good for two reasons. First, it would save us money, as our home batteries could charge up overnight when electricity is cheaper and save the electricity for the day time. But more importantly, it would help "load balance" the grid. Battery storage can be used to smooth-out demand on the grid, making it more consistent across the day. This means that instead of energy going to waste, we can generate less electricity in the first place and just use it more efficiently—meaning fewer power stations are needed.

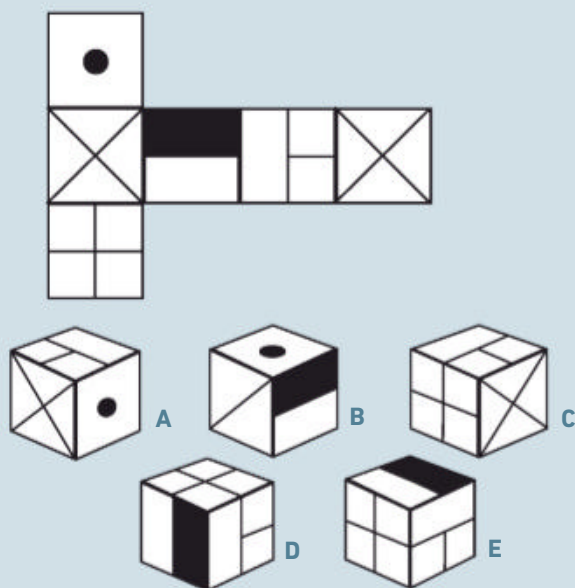
Home batteries are not yet as established as electric cars, but they are also growing in popularity. For example, Tesla, the electric car company, already sells a product called "Power Wall", designed for the home, and makes use of old car batteries in a sleek new shell to power our homes.

So, given how much technology has improved batteries over the last decade, I can't help but be strangely optimistic about the future. Batteries may not be as flashy as phones, rockets or other new technologies. But when it comes to technology to fight climate change, they're definitely leading the charge. ■

£50 PRIZE QUESTION

CUBED

When the shape below is folded to form a cube, which is the only one of the following that cannot be produced?



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ANSWER TO NOVEMBER'S PRIZE QUESTION

COLOURFUL CHOICE

Yellow. Reading left to right, row after row, every third circle is yellow.

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My husband is a fire-fighter and last Halloween he had to go out with his colleagues to a big house that had recently had a chimney fire to give the owners a talk about fire safety. He stood outside with another colleague holding his helmet upside down in his hands and the man of the house came to the door. He took one look at the fire-fighters and proceeded to put some sweets in their helmets muttering under his breath, "They're getting a bit too old to be doing this these days..." and promptly closed the door on them.

SUZANNE S ROSWELL, *Norfolk*

My poor mum was standing in front of a full-length mirror looking at herself in a new Christmas outfit and complaining bitterly about her weight and her looks.

"I really could do with a compliment right now," she told my dad, Joe.

Without looking up from the



"YOUR NORTH POLE FACTORY IS NOT CARBON-FREE"

newspaper he retorted, "Your eyesight is clearly not a problem."

JOANNE AITCHISON, *Wirral*

Using my Lenovo tablet, I sent an email to my surgery asking the secretary to arrange my repeat prescription. She replied saying that I should pick it up from Boots, the chemist. I replied saying thanks. I couldn't stop laughing when I read her next email asking me what that other medicine called "Lenovo tablet 10" was.

MAYA KARMARKAR, *London*

My friend Katie texted me and asked if my partner Lee could change her contraceptive coil for her!

I read the text again and thought, *How strange*. I rang her, and it turned out it was the coil in her vape she wanted changing. Thank goodness it was just a typing error, but we all had a good laugh.

JANE WHITAKER, *Kent*

An infant school nativity play will always reduce me to tears, but they were tears of laughter when my pride and joy was playing the role of innkeeper.

In response to Joseph's knock, he suddenly forgot what he was supposed to say and simply gave our family's standard response when visitors arrive:

"Come on in. Mum's just putting the kettle on."

Only in Yorkshire? Well, I wouldn't know about that.

MAGGIE COBBETT, *North Yorkshire*

One day, I saw a mechanical sweeper being driven along our estate road, weaving around parked cars but making no impact on large weeds growing in the gutters.

I then spoke to a local councillor about it, who kindly explained that this is part of the council's "re-wilding project".

BRIAN BUCKLE

Last Christmas
you gave Mum
a book to read

This year
give her
one to write

Life
Book

The gift of a lifetime

A perfect
gift,
A lasting
legacy

Her very own private autobiography. LifeBook is the world's leading autobiography and memoir service, helping people tell the stories of their lives. Your Mum's, or your Dad's, story begins with 12 interviews and ends up as a beautiful hardback book. A unique piece of family treasure to be shared by generations to come. Find out more by calling Tess, our memoir expert today on [0808 278 8477](tel:08082788477) or visiting lifebookuk.com/digest

IT PAYS TO INCREASE YOUR

Word Power

The goose chase for the perfect gift, the crush of crowds, the overbearing family—the Christmas holidays can drive us to extremes. Do any of these words match how you sometimes feel?

BY GEORGE MURRAY

1. compunction—

A: inability to concentrate.
B: guilt.
C: low energy.

2. boggled—

A: loss of sex drive.
B: distrustful.
C: bewildered.

3. roisterous—

A: noisy in a high-spirited way.
B: sweaty and dishevelled.
C: erratic.

4. jaundiced—

A: ill-tempered.
B: cynical.
C: paranoid.

5. solicitous—

A: combative.
B: strong feelings of distaste.
C: concerned.

6. harried—

A: vindictive.
B: stressed from too little time.
C: displaying reluctance.

7. enervated—

A: frenzied.
B: drained of energy.
C: spiteful.

8. gluttoned—

A: filled to excess.
B: boastful.
C: apathetic.

9. uxorious—

A: emotionally unstable.
B: believing all is for naught.
C: doting on wife.

10. bellicose—

A: combative.
B: exhausted.
C: depressed.

11. treacly—

A: overly sentimental.
B: emotionless.
C: regarding something as worthless.

12. mercurial—

A: imprudent.
B: volatile.
C: fearful.

13. daunted—

A: worn in appearance.
B: the state of being deluded.
C: intimidated.

14. agape—

A: strong dislike of yourself.
B: state of wonder.
C: undergoing drastic change.

15. implacable—

A: sleepy.
B: dismayed.
C: impossible to appease.

Answers

1. compunction—[B] guilt. Feeling *compunction* about his snarky comment at dinner, Chan apologised to his sister after the meal.

2. boggled—[C] bewildered. Alfonso promised his grandson Pokémon cards but was so *boggled* by the variety of packs that he asked the salesperson for help.

3. roisterous—[A] noisy in a high-spirited way. Our office parties always end on a *roisterous* note, as Fyodor leads us in a singalong.

4. jaundiced—[B] cynical. Kiri's *jaundiced* view of the holidays was cured when she had her own kids.

5. solicitous—[C] concerned. Sadie's *solicitous* mum would always pack a banana cake in her luggage when she returned to university after Christmas.

6. harried—[B] stressed from too little time. Despite being *harried* by the long queue, the cashier handed the little girl a free book of stickers.

7. enervated—[B] drained of energy. When the last guest left, Dani flopped, contented but *enervated*, into her chair.

8. gluttoned—[A] filled to excess. Uncle Martin pushed back from the table and loosened his belt, revealing his *gluttoned* stomach.

9. uxorious—[C] doting on wife. The Caribbean cruise that John gave Astrid was seen as yet another of his *uxorious* acts.

10. bellicose—[A] combative. The stressed parents became *bellicose* when neither wanted to let go of the toy—the last one on the shelf.

11. treacly—[A] overly sentimental. Manuela could never avoid getting all *treacly* when sending out Christmas cards to friends and family.

12. mercurial—[B] volatile. Since it was his first Christmas with her family, Ebba warned her fiancé about her dad's *mercurial* moods.

13. daunted—[C] intimidated. Millie adored seeing her family but felt *daunted* by the amount of dinner planning still left to be done.

14. agape—[B] state of wonder. Talya was *agape* when she saw, on TV, 80,000 people gathered in St Peter's Square for Christmas mass.

15. implacable—[C] impossible to appease. One year after dropping gravy on my brother-in-law's suede shoes, his *implacable* hostility toward me has started to thaw.

VOCABULARY RATINGS

7-10: fair

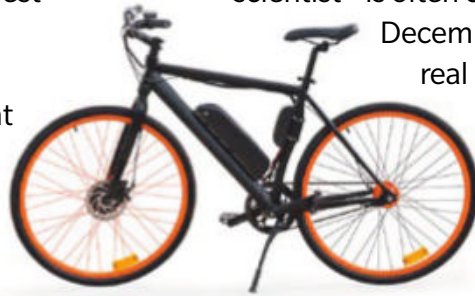
11-12: good

13-15: excellent

TRIVIA

BY *Beth Shillibeer*

1. What was the first Christmas carol performed in space in 1965?
2. Governments around the world have offered such prizes as a \$1.4-million Hong Kong apartment and a cow as incentives to do what?
3. Which Fauvist painted "Le Bateau," before it was accidentally displayed upside down for 47 days?
4. What South American country starts celebrating Christmas on December 7 with *El Día de las Velitas*?
5. What colour were the earliest cultivated carrots?
6. What sparkling adornment are some scientists trying to ban, due to its harmful effects on the environment and human skin?
7. Scuba diver Hiroyuki Arakawa developed a friendship with what during his work at the Shinto shrine in Japan?
8. Which people likely explored Antarctica long before British and Russian explorers claimed to be the first?
9. Which population segment is projected to increase eightfold by 2050?
10. Vishwaraj Jadeja hopes to become India's first Winter Olympic medallist in what sport?
11. A small swatch of the Wright Brothers' first airplane wing took another historic flight in 2021. Where did it go?
12. The birthday of which famous scientist is often celebrated on December 25, despite his real birthday being January 4?
13. Who was the first and only English pope?
14. Who wrote 96 books and died while working on his 97th, all in an effort to "spread sweetness and light"?
15. **The French government is proposing to give residents an e-bike voucher worth 2,500 euros in exchange for what?**



Answers 1. "Jingle Bells." **2.** Get vaccinated against COVID-19. **3.** Henri Matisse. **4.** Colombia. **5.** Purple. **6.** Giltter. **7.** A fish (Asian sheepshead wrasse). **8.** The Maori. **9.** Centenarians. **10.** Speed skating. **11.** Mars (on NASA helicopter *Ingenity*). **12.** Isaac Newton. **13.** Adrian IV (Nicholas Breakspear). **14.** P.G. Wodehouse. **15.** Trading in old, inefficient cars.

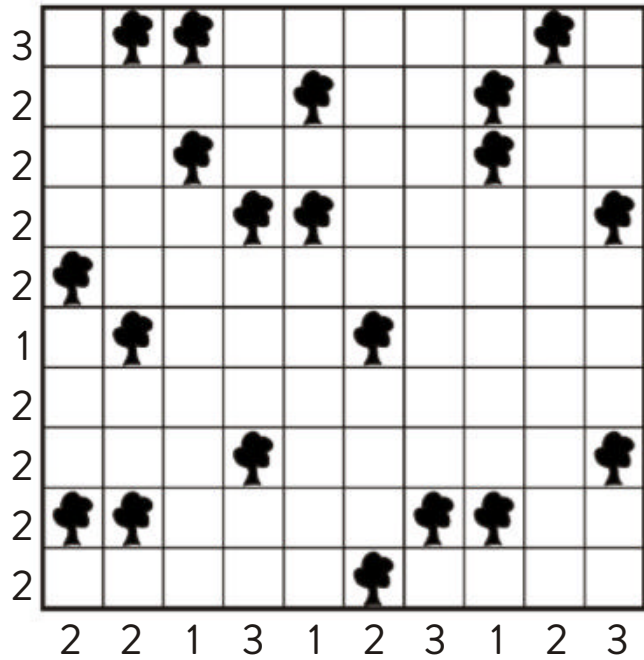
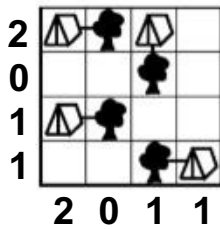
BRAIN TEASERS

Tents & Trees

HOW TO PLAY:

At this camping site each tent is adjacent to its own tree, either horizontally or vertically. Tents are not adjacent to each other, not even diagonally. The numbers outside the grid indicate how many tents are in that row or column. Locate all tents.

EXAMPLE:

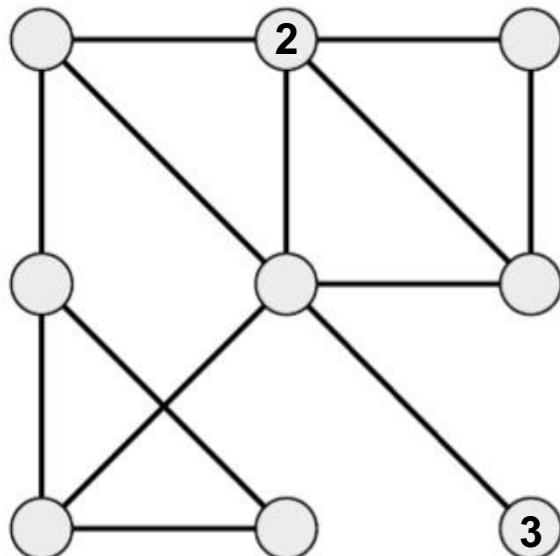
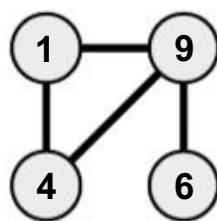


Numbers

HOW TO PLAY:

Enter the numbers 1-9 into the grid, so that any two numbers connected with a line will have a difference of at least 3. Two numbers are given.

EXAMPLE:



SIXY SUDOKU

1

HOW TO PLAY:
 Insert the numbers 1 to 6 just once in each a) row, b) column, c) bold outlined area and d) white or grey rectangle.

2

3

EXAMPLE:

1	2	6	5	3	4
3	5	4	1	2	6
6	4	2	3	5	1
5	1	3	6	4	2
2	3	1	4	6	5
4	6	5	2	1	3

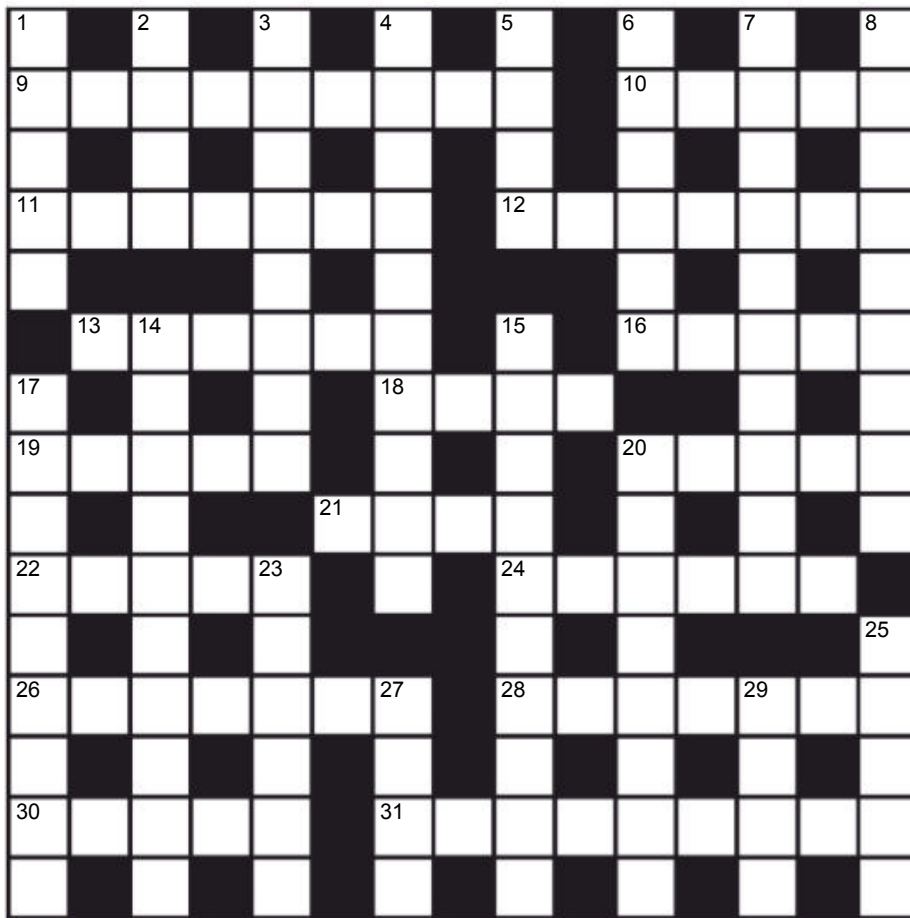
4

5

BEWARE!
 The bold outlined areas are no longer 2x3!

6

BRAINTEASERS



CROSSWISE

Test your general knowledge. Answers on p142

ACROSS

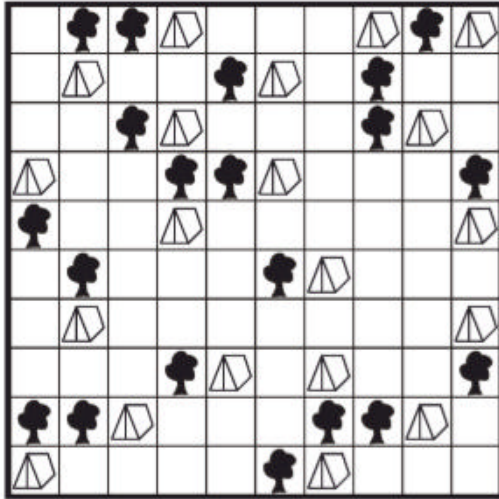
- 1 Cloudburst (9)
- 10 Move stealthily (5)
- 11 Possibly (7)
- 12 Glitter (7)
- 13 Reach one's destination (6)
- 16 Eddy (5)
- 18 Thick cord (4)
- 19 Overturn (5)
- 20 Long stories (5)
- 21 Seethe (4)
- 22 Irritably impatient (5)
- 24 Passenger ships (6)
- 26 Dental filling (7)
- 28 Out wooing (2,1,4)
- 30 Run up (5)
- 31 Christian festival (9)

DOWN

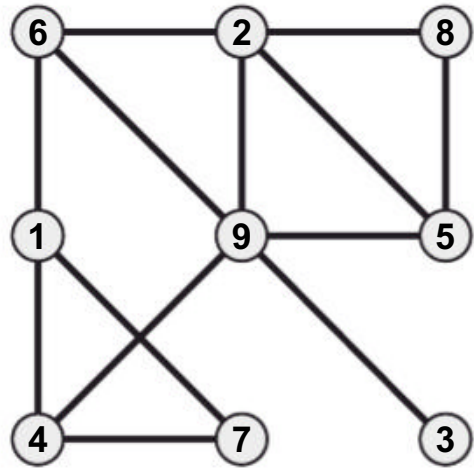
- 1 Burst forth (5)
- 2 Coffin stand (4)
- 3 Betrayer (8)
- 4 Crustacean catcher (7,3)
- 5 Little devils (4)
- 6 Squirts (6)
- 7 Minstrel (4,6)
- 8 Insomniac (9)
- 14 Opposition (10)
- 15 Enchanted (10)
- 17 Smallest continent (9)
- 20 Parched (3-5)
- 23 Curdled milk (6)
- 25 Cults (5)
- 27 Brood (4)
- 29 Speck (4)

BRAIN TEASERS SOLUTIONS

Tents & Trees



Numbers



SIXY SUDOKU SOLUTIONS

1

2	5	3	1	6	4
4	1	6	5	3	2
6	3	2	4	5	1
1	4	5	6	2	3
5	2	1	3	4	6
3	6	4	2	1	5

2

1	3	6	2	5	4
2	4	5	3	6	1
5	6	1	4	3	2
4	2	3	6	1	5
3	1	2	5	4	6
6	5	4	1	2	3

3

1	3	2	6	4	5
6	5	4	1	2	3
4	2	5	3	6	1
3	1	6	4	5	2
2	6	3	5	1	4
5	4	1	2	3	6

4

2	1	4	6	3	5
6	5	3	1	2	4
3	4	5	2	6	1
1	2	6	4	5	3
4	3	2	5	1	6
5	6	1	3	4	2

5

2	5	1	3	6	4
6	4	3	1	5	2
3	2	6	5	4	1
5	1	4	6	2	3
4	3	5	2	1	6
1	6	2	4	3	5

6

1	3	6	5	2	4
4	5	2	1	6	3
5	2	3	4	1	6
6	4	1	2	3	5
2	6	4	3	5	1
3	1	5	6	4	2

Laugh!

WIN £30
for every reader's joke we publish!

Go to readersdigest.co.uk/contact-us
or facebook.com/readersdigestuk

Every morning I go outside and get hit by the same bike. Every single morning. What a vicious cycle.

Seen on TikTok

A horse walks into a bar, so the barman says, "hey".

"No, thanks," the horse replies.
"Just a pint." *MATT BIBBY, Brighton*

I bought a wig for only 25 pence. It was a small price toupee.

Submitted via email

My girlfriend and I met through a dating agency for dolphin impersonators. The minute we met we just clicked.

Comedian GLENNY RODGE

Regarding the rumour that I've made the world's largest bouncy castle, I'd just like to say that it's been blown up out of all proportion.

Comedian GARY DELANEY

What's the fastest growing city in the world? The capital of Ireland—it's Dublin every day. *Submitted via letter*

Did you hear about the chameleon who couldn't change colour? He had a reptile dysfunction. *Seen on TikTok*

They all laughed when I told them that I had face blindness, but who's laughing now?

Comedian GLENN MOORE

How did Mary and Joseph know Jesus' weight when he was born? They had a **WEIGH IN A MANGER!**

Seen online



I've been handing out my CV at IKEA because sometimes it's just good to get your foot in the Slorgensfläugh.

Comedian GLENN MOORE

I'm listening to a great ASMR book on Barely Audible.

Seen on Twitter

Could I do an impression of a flamingo being arrested?

Easy, I could do it standing on one leg with my hands tied behind my back.

Comedian JAKE LAMBERT

I lost my job at the hospital for stealing a neck brace but at least I can still hold my head up high.

Submitted via email

Typos make me sic.

Comedian OLAF FALAFEL

Meryl Streep's siblings are called Quality, Coronation and Miracle-on-34th.

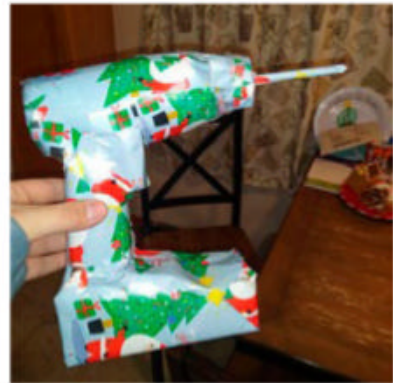
Seen on Twitter



It's A Wrap!

THESE HILARIOUS
CHRISTMAS WRAPPING
CHOICES ARE MORE FUN
THAN THE GIFTS

via boredpanda.com



My girlfriend has left me because of my insecurities. No wait, she's back. She just went to make a cup of tea. *Seen on Twitter*

I dreamed that I put too much mixer in my gin and tonic last night.

I must have overschwepped.

Comedian DARREN WALSH

An Irish dad calls his son in London the day before Christmas Eve and says, "I hate to ruin your Christmas son, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing."

"Dad, what are you talking about?" the son asked, shocked.

"We can't stand the sight of each other any longer," the father says. "We're sick of each other and I'm sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Leeds and tell her."

The son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone. "Like heck they're getting divorced. I'll take care of this!"

She calls Ireland immediately, and screams at her father, "You are NOT getting divorced. Don't do a single thing until we arrive. We'll both be there tomorrow," and hangs up.

The old man hangs up his phone and turns to his wife, grinning. "Sorted! They're coming to us for Christmas—and they're paying their own way." *Seen on Reddit*

Jingle Hells



Twitter users add one word and ruin a Christmas song

@JimmyFallon: Feliz Navidad-bod

@CeeTeeAch: All I Want For Christmas Is My Two Vaccines

@HamillHimself: Little Drummer Boy George

@ConstantGriper: Silent M Night Shyamalan

@albot76: Away In A Pret A Manger

@DesignOutLoud: Baby Yoda, It's Cold Outside

@ScanDurro: I'll Still Be Home For Christmas

@alynn1888: Jolly Old Saint Nicholas Cage

@Alana_Spellman: Silent But Deadly Night

CROSSWORD ANSWERS

Across: 9 Rainstorm, 10 Prowl, 11 Perhaps, 12 Sparkle, 13 Arrive, 16 Swirl, 18 Rope, 19 Upset, 20 Sagas, 21 Boil, 22 Testy, 24 Liners, 26 Amalgam, 28 On a date, 30 Incur, 31 Pentecost

Down: 1 Erupt, 2 Bier, 3 Iscariot, 4 Lobster pot, 5 Imps, 6 Sprays, 7 Folk singer, 8 Sleepless, 14 Resistance, 15 Spellbound, 17 Australia, 20 Sun-baked, 23 Yogurt, 25 Sects, 27 Mope, 29 Atom

IN THE
JANUARY ISSUE

Beat the Cartoonist!



Think of a witty caption for this cartoon—the three best suggestions, along with the cartoonist's original, will be posted on our website in mid-January. If your entry gets the most votes, you'll win **£50**.

Submit to captions@readersdigest.co.uk by January 7. We'll announce the winner in our February issue.

OCTOBER WINNER



Our cartoonist's caption, "**Track or treat?**" failed to beat our reader Vince Spiteri, who won the vote with his caption, "**If you don't have any sweets, we will gladly take card payments.**" Congrats, Vince!



Don McLean **I REMEMBER...**

The US musician behind the iconic song "American Pie" looks back on his life and career



MOROCCO'S GRAND TAXIS

Saying goodbye to the battered but beautiful old diesel Mercedes and the cultural legacy it leaves behind

Richard Armitage

The star of *North & South* and *The Hobbit* opens up about acting and his latest project

GOOD NEWS

FROM AROUND THE WORLD



A MOTHER'S TRIBUTE

In March 2017, Susan Happel Bohrnstedt tragically lost her 19-year-old son Benjamin Parker. As his 20th birthday on the 9th of September approached, she found herself increasingly withdrawn and anxious about how she and her family would honour his life.

Then, she came across a Facebook post for “EvansvilleRocks!”, a group of people in her town of Evansville, Indiana, who paint and then hide rocks to bring happiness to others. She joined and after a few weeks of seeing all the joy being shared, Susan decided this was the way she would honour her son. On Ben’s birthday, “my family and I got together, shared stories, laughed, cried and painted 20 rocks. Most had special meanings, and all were painted with love”, she says.

Susan did not expect “Rocks4Ben”, as she calls the painted rocks, to have had such a wide impact. People from Evansville have taken the rocks on their travels around the world.

“I can’t even explain how awesome it is to see a photo of a rock I painted in Evansville, Indiana sitting on the steps of the Sydney Opera House, in front of the Great Pyramid in Egypt or mortared into the doorway of a family home in the Dominican Republic.”

She adds: “In painting rocks I’ve found healing, inspiration and, some days, a purpose—a reason to keep moving forward. There is peace because Ben is with me as I paint. Each rock is a tribute to him, and his name is on the back of every one.”

BY MARCO MARCELLINE



BRAND NEW SEASON
SIXTEEN OF
MEDICAL DETECTIVES
AND ANNIVERSARY
SPECIAL
**TO PREMIERE ON
CBS REALITY**



The ***Medical Detectives Anniversary Special*** brings viewers clips from the most popular episodes. The special includes exclusive interviews with the original production team, offering unique insights from the show, whilst the behind-the-scenes segments reveal how the seminal reconstructions were made. This one-off special takes a deep dive into why the series was the first of its kind and how its introduction of cinematic qualities and storytelling transformed the true crime genre.

THE ***MEDICAL DETECTIVES ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL*** WILL AIR ON THURSDAY 4TH NOVEMBER AT 7PM



The long-running true crime series, that examines the extraordinary forensic techniques used to catch some of America's most infamous murderers, returns to CBS Reality this autumn. ***Medical Detectives*** (produced as "Forensic Files" in the US), features expert testimony and dramatic reconstructions to reveal how science helps pave the way to a potential criminal conviction.

The cult investigative series is as popular as its ever been, with celebrities such as Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, Regina Hall, Demi Lovato and Octavia Spencer all confessing their love for the show, with the latter quoted to have seen "every Forensic Files [episode] known to man".

The new season will explore a huge range of historic cases, including the mysterious murder of a young teacher's aide in Massachusetts, the death of a 51-year-old father under suspicious circumstances, and the killing of a single mum, which leads detectives to look at her online dating history. Can forensic evidence connect the dots and lead to a conviction in each case?

THE SEASON SIXTEEN PREMIERE OF ***MEDICAL DETECTIVES*** WILL FOLLOW ON THURSDAY 4TH NOVEMBER AT 10PM

**CBS REALITY IS AVAILABLE ON
FREEVIEW (66), SKY (146), VIRGIN (148) AND FREESAT (135)**

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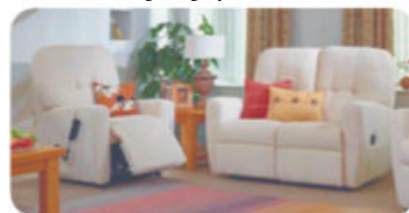
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