

Reader's Digest

**RD
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OUR STORIES
AS PODCASTS

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Lasting Overture*

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Reader's digest



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BY KATE LEAVER



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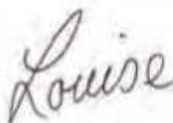
EDITOR'S NOTE

Timeless Music

I CAN CLEARLY REMEMBER the first time I watched *The Sound of Music*. I was nine, and it was being screened on TV as a Saturday night family film special. My dad was keen for me to watch it, and I was happy to oblige as it meant staying up beyond my usual 8.30pm bedtime. I loved it! My favourite scene was the grand ball and the von Trapp kids' performance of 'So Long, Farewell'. Needless to say, 'Adieu, Adieu, to Yieu and Yieu and Yieu!' soon became my signature nightly motto. It still is (when the mood is right!). I'm sure many of our readers can similarly recall their first encounter with this family and their fondness for singing through the extraordinary wartime challenges they faced. If you have a similar von Trapp memory, write to us at editor@readersdigest.com.au. In 'The Story Behind the Songs' (page 112), by Reader's Digest writer Robert Kiener, we meet the last remaining member of the von Trapp family, Johannes, now 81, who shares how the film and the music shaped his family's future.

This issue also has tips to make your day easier, including how to respond to people who dwell on the negativity in their lives ('How to Deal with Complainers', page 104), the latest treatments for back pain ('New Help for Aching Backs', page 96), as well as how to make the best cup of coffee ('Coffee Maker's Roadmap', page 100).

Thank you to all our loyal readers, old and new. Happy reading!



LOUISE WATERSON
Editor-in-Chief



Reader's Digest

Vol. 199
No. 1182
July 2020

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**PUBLISHED UNDER LICENCE
BY DIRECT PUBLISHING PTY LTD**

CUSTOMER INQUIRIES

Online
www.readersdigest.com.au
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LETTERS

Reader's Comments And Opinions

Ever So Clever

Who would have thought that little nylon 'hooks' clawing into fabric would be a useful or even possible way to close a jacket or secure a shoe ('Accidents That Changed History', May)? I suppose it makes sense then that the inspiration for Velcro's creation was an accident. Either way, as someone who mastered tying shoe laces later than most, I'm very thankful for this particular invention.

JAMES EDWARDS



Credible Medical Advice

Thank you for an excellent magazine. I have been a reader of Reader's Digest for over 50 years. It has changed over time, as we all have, but recently it has evolved into a contemporary magazine that is attractive to all age groups and is excellent value.

I am a GP in Sydney and the magazine is of value, personally

– as it is relaxing – and as a 'pass-on' to my patients. In addition, the online information that Reader's Digest provides on its website regarding Covid-19 is excellent, credible and concise.

Keep up the good work, I am not sure that I can promise another 50 years of loyal readership. However, I will try to do as many as I can!

DR STEPHEN HOWE

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

DNA Discoveries

Your May article ‘Reunited by Science’ reminds me of a story last year from the US. A couple decided to marry and went through the required paperwork and blood tests. It was only then they discovered that they were brother and sister. **BRUCE CARTY**

Of a Criminal Mind

I am a keen crime-fiction fan so it’s no surprise that I loved ‘Word Sleuth – 10 Terms Every Crime-Fiction Fan Should Know’ (April). The ‘Locked Room’ scenario is the one I will be looking out for!

Thanks for always including something quirky and light-hearted, it’s very important in these disturbing times. **PAT ALLEN**

WIN A PILOT CAPLESS FOUNTAIN PEN

The best letter each month will win a Pilot Capless Fountain Pen, valued at over \$200. The Capless is the perfect combination of luxury and ingenious technology, featuring a one-of-a-kind retractable fountain pen nib, durable metal body, beautiful rhodium accents and a 14K gold nib. Congratulations to this month’s winner, James Edwards.



IN THE DRIVER’S SEAT

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

What? A No Barking Zone.

MERRAN TOONE

Paw Patrol. **VIRGINIA GREEN**

Who accused me of being a paw driver?

LEIGH DUFFETT

The Fast and the Furriest.

MICHAEL GOATHAM

My steering is pawfect and my tail light is also working.

JOSEPH BAKER

Congratulations to this month’s winner, Leigh Duffett.



CAPTION CONTEST

Come up with the funniest caption for the above photo and you could win \$100. To enter, see email details for your region on page 8.

The Food on Your Table

I have to tell you just how much I enjoy these articles by Kate Lowenstein and Daniel Gritzer. They are so cleverly written and informative. I love the recipes, too. Please pass along my best wishes to those two talented people and tell them to keep up the good work. I think, next to the jokes, their articles are my most favourite.

KAY FALERIOS

What a Treat

With a little more time on my hands than usual, I have been able to catch up on my reading. 'I Am Chocolate ...' (Food on Your Plate, May) was just what a chocoholic like myself needed to read. I can now enjoy it without guilt as it is giving my brain a boost.

MIRIAM LOHANN

Millennium Debate Continues

I had no intention in entering the debate on 2000 versus 2001 for the beginning of the second millennium, but one letter 'Mathematical Reasoning' (May) changed my mind. I feel you cannot apply all mathematical rules to life. There is no such thing as a 'zero' year. The minute your bottom is slapped by a midwife, you start to live your first year. The second millennium finished on December 31, 2000, and the third millennium started on January 1, 2001.

GEORGE GOÓR

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CONTRIBUTE

Anecdotes and jokes

Send in your real-life laugh for Life's Like That or All in a Day's Work. Got a joke? Send it in for Laughter is the Best Medicine!

Smart Animals

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

Reminisce

Share the tales of an event from your past that made a huge impact in 100–500 words.

My Story

Do you have an inspiring or life-changing tale to tell? Submissions must be true, unpublished, original and 800–1000 words – see website for more information.

Letters to the editor, caption competitions and other reader submissions

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ONLINE

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CULTURE

When will things go back to normal?

What a post-coronavirus life could look like and how we'll navigate the world differently.

SCIENCE

12 of the most amazing space discoveries

Each day we're learning more about our amazing universe.



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PETS

CUTE PHOTOS OF WET DOGS YOU CAN'T HELP BUT SMILE AT

These water-loving pups can't wait to splash about.

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PLUS SIGN UP TO OUR FREE NEWSLETTER FOR MORE HOT OFFERS, TOP STORIES AND PRIZES!

NEWS WORTH SHARING



Orchestra Brings Beethoven to the Deaf

A Hungarian orchestra is helping deaf people to enjoy the music of Beethoven through touch.

Budapest's Danubia Orchestra Óbuda holds concerts for hearing-impaired people who quite literally feel Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*. Beethoven himself battled with hearing loss and wrote some of his greatest music while going deaf.

Audience members sit next to the musicians and place their hands on the various instruments to feel the

vibration. Others hold balloons that convey the vibration of the sounds or are given special hyper-sensitive hearing aids.

"When I sat next to the musician who played the double bass, I started crying," says Zsuzsanna Foldi, who has been deaf all her life.

Conductor Máté Hámori says the aim is to bring music to people who otherwise have no chance to enjoy it, and to call attention to hearing difficulties that are often ignored.

COMPILED BY VICTORIA POLZOT

Edible Landscaping

The University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) is using its edible landscaping garden model as a way to provide nutritious, sustainable food during community quarantines and, potentially, as a way of life once the lockdown is lifted.

Edible landscaping is the growing of organic vegetables, fruit, herbs and medicinal plants in open spaces such as backyards, schools and office blocks.

The university's edible landscaping team has been delivering freshly picked papaya, bananas, eggplants, lettuce and edible flowers to the Office of Student Activities, which in turn provides approximately 1500 students, stranded in campus accommodation, with meals.

The team has also been providing the students with planting materials for their own needs.



Animal Business as Usual

Although zoos and wildlife parks around the globe have been temporarily closed because of the coronavirus lockdown, it's life as usual for the residents of Billabong Sanctuary in Townsville, Queensland.

Owner Bob Flemming says his staff have plenty to do, and are maintaining the normal routines of the sanctuary's 200 animals. This includes the daily bird shows.

Bird manager Elyse Thomas says the bird show is still running without spectators because if the birds stop flying, even for a week, there could be a decline in their behaviour.

The park learned a lot about animal behaviour following the ten-week shutdown caused by Cyclone Yasi in 2011. Flemming says it became very clear that animals appreciate routine, attention and visitors.

So, the koalas get hugs, the wombats get back scratches, and the pythons and crocodiles are brought out and handled. "Sometimes the koalas walk up to us to demand cuddles," Thomas says.

MY STORY

After the cake and the goodbyes, how do you replace the old with the new?

BY Tricia Fiddymment



Farewell, My Responsibility

IT'S 8.30 IN THE MORNING. I put on my fine high-heeled shoes and a 'nice' outfit and then think of somewhere to go. I head to the shops and buy another pair of casual three-quarter length trousers; sometimes I go to the coffee shop and order a large cappuccino, a triple-choc chip muffin and sit there and read the paper trying to appear important.

So, what am I talking about? I

hear you ask. Retirement. As of November 1, 2019.

"Wonderful!" my work colleagues exclaimed. "What will you do now? Are you going to travel? Catch up on all those novels? Loaf around in your pyjamas?"

"Oh yes!" I said enthusiastically. After all, isn't that what retirement is all about? What I didn't count on was the following facts (and I call them facts because for me they are



immutable): all the people I know are people I have met through work or because of work, and they are still at work, they have not yet retired; the novels I wanted to read over the years no longer hold any interest for me; travel is unrealistic at the moment as I have some health challenges to overcome and as for my pyjamas, well ... I don't actually own any. Pretty sure I could find a passion-killing flannel nightgown somewhere, though.

Back in September last year, I suffered two minor strokes which, after further tests and a pot load of money, revealed that I have a faulty mitral valve in my heart causing my blood flow to regurgitate - I like to think of it as my heart farting.

So I had to re-evaluate my lifestyle and working hours and make the life-changing decision to opt for early retirement. It seemed like an obvious decision - I wanted to be able to live long enough to enjoy the benefits of my retirement savings.

So, I put in the paperwork to the

Tricia Fiddymment lives in Alice Springs with her daughter and grandson, two dogs and a struggling garden. She enjoys painting and crafts of all sorts.

human resources team and another voluminous amount of paperwork to the pension fund, then submitted my resignation. The office threw me a great morning tea and gave me some presents. I cleaned out my desk, then passed all my projects onto someone we'll call 'Miss Replacement'.

I live with my eldest daughter, Kathleen, and her son, Wyatt, who knows everything about anything.

My daughter is currently renovating her house and, in my glee to be free of the work noose, I willingly tossed myself into sanding,

scrubbing, painting and polishing. The walls have all been repainted and look fantastic. The downstairs wooden chairs and table have been revamped. The rumpus area is just stunning - now with every wall a different vibrant colour, it looks like a Mexican cantina.

Then, one day, it was all done. No more painting was needed, no more garden to dig, no more chairs to sand. And I found myself at a loose end.

Kathleen decided that I should do some study and collected some wonderful information for me, before then suggesting a direct-selling opportunity that

**“WONDERFUL!”
MY COLLEAGUES
EXCLAIMED.
“WHAT WILL YOU
DO NOW?”**

I could do from home. Next, she found some brochures on cruises to the Antarctic and Egypt and other places that have fascinated me for years.

She also decided that as I was no longer working, I could do the school run in the morning and the afternoon and volunteer at the school canteen. Oh, and also collect her from work and do the laundry and the housework.

Oh dear! I began to think. None of this is what I expected from retirement. Where is my happy-ever-after fairy tale where I suddenly have all the money I need and can go line-dancing around the countryside in my new Reebok trainers, and meet some devilishly handsome man to spend my sunset years with? Where is the bingo game and the fancy tea set with Earl Grey tea and cucumber sandwiches? Where are the friends?

My get-up-and-go got up and left. Without me. And so I continued in this state for about five weeks until one day something dawned on me. I am not missing work. Or the people and friends. I am not in need of retraining my mind or a new hobby. I am suffering from the demise of My Responsibility.

I am no longer a responsible

person – I'm a retiree. I no longer have 24 staff, two apprentices, four program lines and a boss clambering for my attention. I no longer have to squeeze my social life in around my job, or arrange hair appointments on Saturdays. And I realised I am missing all that Responsibility. Not the job, or the people or the stress. But My Responsibility. The being valued. The being important. The being needed.

WHERE IS THE BINGO GAME AND THE FANCY TEA SET WITH EARL GREY TEA?

So, I have packed up all those ancient novels, cleaned out the wardrobe of all the 'office attire', though not all my shoes, and I have joined a craft group run by our local cultural centre – I am learning watercolour painting. I'm not very good, but I am having fun. I am getting out of the house and I am being challenged by something new and different.

I still miss My Responsibility, and I'll probably end up joining the committee for the craft group, but not just yet – right now I am enjoying rediscovering who I am and, so far, I like what I see.

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



WHAT'S NEW IN RD TALKS

Sit back and enjoy the audio versions of the most engaging stories to have appeared in Reader's Digest magazine.



ONE KIDNEY, THREE LIVES

Both her husband and father needed a kidney transplant. Julie Stitt had only one to give. Or did she? And what were the odds of one donor being able to save two lives?



SECONDS TO SAVE EMILY

With no time to stop, a heavily laden freight train was bearing down on a toddler who had wandered onto the tracks. A Reader's Digest classic that will make your heart race.



ARE YOU STILL IN THERE?

She survived the crash, but would her mind ever be the same? Her boyfriend was willing to take that chance. A woman's incredible story of survival following internal decapitation.



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SMART ANIMALS

Pets really know how to get our attention



Hello There

ALANA YEARBY

Early one morning, my father woke up to the strangest sound – still half asleep, he wondered if someone was calling out ‘hello’ to him. As he attempted to go back to sleep, he heard the strange greeting echoing out into the still, dark morning once more. Who could it be? Then he realised the strange ‘h-e-l-l-o’ was coming from our cat, Slinky.

She was pacing around the verandah and when she heard dad move she repositioned herself outside his window and repeated the

strange sound: a meow mixed with a loud drawn-out ‘h-e-l-l-o’.

When dad told us about the strange sound Slinky had made over and over, my brothers and I didn’t believe him. Our cat saying ‘hello’? We figured Dad was pulling our legs.

Then, one evening when we were eating dinner and had forgotten to feed Slinky first, we heard it. Slinky had figured out the best way to gain

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

our attention was to start with a hearty chorus of ‘h-e-l-l-o-s’. She sounded exactly like our mother, who for years had been greeting Slinky every morning with a deep, theatrical drawn-out ‘H-e-l-l-o-!’”

Eye on the Time

JEFF LEWRY

When I was working as a butcher back in the 1960s, I had a red kelpie cattle dog named Buster. Every Wednesday, I’d bring him along with me to work, so he could join me at the weekly sheep sales. We’d arrive at the butcher shop at 5am, where I would leave Buster in the small backyard behind the shop to wait until 9.10am, when I was generally ready to head off to the sales.

Buster would sit, wait and listen as the nearby clock at the post office ticked by, chiming loudly with the arrival of the passing hours – 6am. 7am. 8am. 9am.

If I was delayed by something and I hadn’t collected him from the yard just after 9am, he would jump the gate, go out into the back lane, turn right into the street at the end, take another right turn and come to the front of the shop. He’d worked out that route all by himself. Then, he’d peer through the door and wait patiently for me.

Somehow, he had learned how to tell the time. He was a uniquely clever dog.

Buzzy Bee

DOREEN FOY

One summer day, I was painting a brick fence in my garden, working happily and pleased to be doing a good job when a bee came buzzing around. It must have been very curious as it continued flying around my pot of paint. Not afraid of bees, I kept shooing it away.

Then, to my horror, it dived into my pot of white paint. No buzzing now. Mortified, I carefully picked it up by the wings and ever so gently swished it around in the water bucket.

Still holding on, I placed the sodden bee on the ground. I felt really bad and, fearing the worst, I went back to my painting.

Then, ten or so minutes later, I could not believe my ears. The little bee started buzzing and flew away. I was so pleased to have saved it and felt good all day.



PETS

5 Important Things to Teach a Puppy

Learning good routines will lead to good behaviour

BY Dr Katrina Warren



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

PUPPIES ARE DELIGHTFUL and full of fun. They can also make a mess, cry at night and chew things they shouldn't. Veterinarian Dr Katrina Warren shares her advice on the most important things to teach a puppy so it grows into a friendly, well-behaved dog.

1. TOILET TRAINING Observation, patience and positive reinforcement are the key to toilet training your puppy. Puppies usually want to toilet whenever they wake and after eating, drinking and playing. Take the puppy to wherever you want them to toilet, give them a command, then praise them afterwards. It's important to be consistent – same place, same command, same praise. Puppies may need to urinate every few hours, so don't expect them to be able to hold on all night.

2. SOCIALISATION The first few months are the most critical behaviour development period in a dog's life. Socialising is a term describing activities that introduce puppies to a wide range of experiences in a positive and safe way. These experiences help puppies become confident, friendly dogs. Expose them to as many people, places and experiences as possible – loud noises, unexpected objects, vehicles, children, other species, umbrellas, bicycles, etc. Puppy classes can teach them to play with other puppies appropriately.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES



3. REWARD GOOD BEHAVIOUR

Some behaviours that might be amusing in a tiny puppy can become a real problem in an adult dog. Try to ignore bad behaviour and reward good behaviour. Be aware as to what constitutes a reward for your puppy; often they will see attention as a reward, so by paying attention to your puppy's poor behaviour you may be accidentally reinforcing that behaviour. Reward calm, relaxed behaviour by giving them an occasional treat or praise for sitting quietly, this will reinforce their understanding that calm and quiet is good.

4. PROVIDE ONGOING TRAINING

Dogs, like humans, can experience behavioural changes through adolescence, sometimes resulting in behaviour issues from six to 18 months of age. Keep up the training as it will provide mental stimulation.



What can be cute in a puppy may be destructive in an adult dog

5. ALONE TIME

You might be tempted to let your cute little puppy follow you about or to carry them around all day, but this can lead to them becoming overly dependent on you and potentially anxious when left alone. Allow them to spend time on their own. Leaving them alone in a playpen or crate with a few favourite toys can help keep them secure when you're not around to supervise.

5 TOP TIPS TO MANAGE NUISANCE BEHAVIOURS

CHEWING Provide safe, indestructible chew toys to discourage puppies from chewing inappropriate items.

DESTRUCTIVENESS Pick anything up from the floor, or separate the puppy from

whatever you don't want destroyed. If it's accessible, expect it to be chewed.

JUMPING UP Ignore your puppy when they jump up, make them sit nicely for attention instead.

BOREDOM Interactive toys that dispense treats help to keep puppies occupied and stimulated.

BARKING/WHINING Ignore, unless there's a reason for the puppy to cry (hungry, toilet, etc).



HEALTH

7

Types of Leg Pain (And Which Are Serious)

Leg pain may indicate you need to rest – or signal a more serious issue

BY Nancy Dunham

1 IS YOUR LEG PAIN SERIOUS?

“The key with leg pain is the context,” said Dr Casey Humbyrd, a foot and ankle orthopaedics specialist. “If someone just got off a plane and says ‘My leg hurts,’ go to the hospital. We truly see a spike in deep vein thrombosis (DVT) during holiday travel season. Of course, many other kinds of leg pain are just signs of overuse and respond to ice and anti-inflammatory pain medications.” DVT occurs when there is a blood clot in a vein, and requires immediate medical attention.

2 SHIN SPLINTS If you have pain in the front of the leg or knee, this is often a sign of shin splints and is

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

almost always related to overuse. “You often hear people say ‘I just started walking or running and started out at about five kilometres a day,’” says Dr Humbyrd. “Their bodies aren’t ready for that increase in activity. “Rest your legs, use ice to reduce swelling, and take anti-inflammatory painkillers,” she advises.

3 LEG CRAMPS Spasms or cramps in the leg muscles that don’t relax for at least several seconds may be caused by overuse or dehydration, says Dr John-Paul Rue, an orthopaedic sports medicine surgeon. Sometimes just walking much longer than usual may trigger leg cramps. Routine muscle cramps generally last just a few seconds or minutes and ease with warmth, rest and stretching, he says. Another cause of ongoing cramping in the legs could be peripheral artery disease, a clogging of the arteries (much like heart disease) that can reduce circulation to the limbs.

4 KNEE PAIN If the knee pain increases when you move the joint or press on it or the joint is swollen or looks red, you may have bursitis, says Dr Rue. Rest, ice and over-the-counter pain relievers can treat bursitis. It’s also advised to cushion your knees if you need to repetitively kneel or if the knee is in contact with hard surfaces.

5 SCIATICA A shooting pain down the back of the leg may be caused by pressure on the sciatic nerve that runs from the lower back through the buttocks and into the legs. “We see that in gentlemen who carry heavy wallets in the back pocket of their pants,” says Dr Rue. Relieve the pressure on the nerve and the pain will often heal.

6 ACHILLES TENDON INJURY Pain above the heel bone is a common sign of an Achilles tendon injury, one of the most common leg pain causes, says Dr Humbyrd. Wearing high heels and overuse can cause these injuries, especially for people with flat feet. Rest and ice can help the tendon heal. Don’t ignore the pain and continue running, power walking, or doing other exercises or athletics.

7 THIGH PAIN Builders, police officers and others who wear heavy belts often complain of thigh-specific leg pain. The reason may be that the belts cause pressure on a nerve that surrounds the hip. The pain radiates down the thigh, says Dr Rue. The long-term solution is to reduce the weight of the belt to relieve the pressure on the nerve.

Only doctors can truly diagnose leg pain causes, though, so if home treatment doesn’t ease discomfort fairly quickly, seek medical advice.



Wipe the Wrinkles Away

Some innocent habits can sabotage even the healthiest complexions

RUBBING YOUR EYES The skin around your eyes is super delicate and prone to damage. “Rubbing this sensitive area stretches skin and breaks down collagen and elastin, which can result in wrinkles,” says dermatologist Dr Sejal Shah. The more you do it, the worse it gets. Have you ever pulled your lids taut to apply eyeliner? This has the same damaging effect.

LEAVING YOUR SUNGLASSES AT HOME Squinting at the sun – or even your phone or computer – forces the muscles between your brows and around your eyes to contract, which causes the overlying skin to crease. “Initially you may see the wrinkle only when you make the movement, but over time the collagen will break

down and the wrinkles will become deeper and fixed,” explains Dr Shah. The most common symptom of squinting? Crow’s feet. The best way to prevent them is to wear sunglasses. Be sure to see your optometrist if you notice you’re squinting to see – it could be a sign that you need glasses.

EATING TOO MUCH SUGAR

According to Dr Shah, excess sugar intake can result in the formation of ‘advanced glycation end products’ (AGEs), which can damage collagen and elastin, leading to wrinkles and sagging skin.

SLEEPING ON YOUR STOMACH

“When you sleep on your stomach, your face is squashed into the pillow, pushing the skin into creases,” says Dr Shah. Stomach sleepers may also notice increased puffiness around the eyes, as this position makes it more difficult for fluid to drain. Instead snooze on your back with your head slightly elevated.



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES



WORLD OF MEDICINE

TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR PTSD

In the short term, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) tends to respond similarly to psychotherapy such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), medication (certain SSRIs) or both combined. However, compared to medication by itself, psychotherapy – with or without drugs – appears to be more likely to lead to long-lasting improvement, according to a meta-analysis of 12 clinical trials. In real life, people commonly wait for weeks or months to access psychotherapy. Medication alone isn't useless, especially if you need support right away. "Patients just need to know what outcomes to expect from the different treatment approaches," said co-author Heike Gerger.

DOG WALKING FRACTURES

Taking a furry friend out for a stroll is a great way to exercise, although the benefits may not outweigh the risks for everyone. A *JAMA Surgery* study of data from around 100 emergency departments concluded that

dog walking has been causing an increasing number of broken bones among older people. Seventeen per cent were hip fractures. It's not that seniors as a group shouldn't own dogs, the researchers said, but they should consider their individual risk factors, such as low bone density. Accidents are less likely if you choose a smaller breed and train your pooch.

BENEFITS OF SELF-KINDNESS

If your inner voice is too hard on you for your faults, then your health could be the worse for it. In a UK study, participants who listened to a recording designed to make them feel self-critical showed signs of a stimulated threat system in their bodies: increased heart rate, more sweating and so on.

Another group listened to a recording that guided them to offer friendly wishes to themselves and others. Their hearts slowed and their perspiration decreased, suggesting cultivating self-kindness helps emotional and physiological regulation.





The School of THOUGHTS

An innovative programme is teaching kids about the human brain to help them manage their own behaviour

BY Zoë Meunier

As a topic taught in school, the human brain, and all its inner workings, is more likely to be on the curriculum of a senior high school biology course than it would be in a class focused on helping kids with behavioural or emotional challenges. But that is exactly

what a unique programme at Stanton Lodge in Townville, Queensland, is teaching – and it’s having outstanding results on the kids involved.

“We teach the students about their brains and how they work, so they can then understand how to work with what their brains are doing to achieve the goal they’re

READER'S DIGEST

after,” explains Kevin Butler, the programme’s creator and head. He says the goal is to improve personal and social capabilities, and to build resilience and emotional intelligence. “The kids need to be able to control what their brain is doing, to understand that their amygdala is lighting up when they’re very upset, and how to calm themselves down, so they can use their pre-frontal cortex and think of responses rather than simply reacting.”

PERFECT MAN FOR THE JOB

When 52-year-old Kevin was asked to develop a programme at Stanton Lodge for at-risk students, it followed three decades’ experience of teaching and working with kids, largely in the area of behaviour. “I found out early on in my career that I was able to build relationships very quickly with children, particularly those at risk or exhibiting significant behaviours at school,” he says, admitting his affinity comes in part from experiencing his own adversities early in life which he overcame.

“I don’t take their behaviours personally and never have,” he says. “Ninety-nine per cent of the time their behaviours are more a result of what the kids have lived themselves and the circumstances they find themselves in and they’re just exhibiting how they feel in those situations.” For Kevin, it’s not about

“The kids need to be able to control what their brain is doing ... so they can use their pre-frontal cortex to think of responses”

Stanton Lodge in Townsville (right) and Kevin Butler (far right)

holding grudges towards students, rather it means helping the youngsters under his care recognise why certain unpleasant behaviours towards others aren’t acceptable.

When kids first arrive at Stanton Lodge, nine out of ten of them are very apprehensive. They may suffer from anxiety as they don’t know the staff or other participants, and this leads to feelings of nervousness.

The staff all work very hard to make the kids feel safe, valued and important, by sharing details about their own lives and encouraging the kids to do the same. By the end of their first session, Kevin says almost all the kids feel at ease and ‘can’t wait to come back the next week’, allowing them to get stuck into his favourite topic – the inner workings of the human brain.



A COMPLEX SUBJECT MADE SIMPLE

While the brain and its elaborate processes are not straightforward subject matter, the programme has been devised to make it easy for kids to understand. It incorporates everything from practical learning, to YouTube videos on topics such as the Marshmallow Experiment – which teaches about delayed gratification – TED talks, apps and activities that use drums as part of a wellbeing programme. Working in small groups, the welcoming classroom becomes increasingly filled with colourful artworks and projects created by the kids as the term goes on.

Anecdotes are another mechanism loved by both teachers and students.

“I’ll have a Pepsi can and I’ll say, for example, ‘I didn’t get to sleep early enough last night because I was

on Facebook’ and I’ll shake the can,” says Kevin. “I woke up late as a result and didn’t get a warm shower because my kids used up all the hot water’ and I’ll shake the can again. It’s basically demonstrating how pressure builds up within your head, and eventually, you get too much pressure and it might only be one little thing that pops it at the end. Everyone thinks you’ve popped at that one little thing, but it’s all the pressure that’s built up leading to that.”

When it comes to teaching kids about neuroplasticity, Kevin says what they need to know is simple. “Neuroplasticity is the brain’s ability to develop new pathways, but we need to give it the opportunity to do that,” he explains. “I use a resource called Brain Talk Therapy, an animated programme that helps them



First taking a breath, thinking, and only then responding, helps in a stressful situation

see what's going on in their brain, using a mouse as an example."

According to Kevin, the main thing for kids to learn is that their brain is working correctly and doing what it's supposed to do. "They often have no control over their situation, they've been born into it or have a medical diagnosis or a verified disability," he says. "It's important for them to realise their brain is doing what it's supposed to do, but we can teach it new pathways."

OUTSTANDING RESULTS

It's a bold and groundbreaking approach to helping at-risk kids, but it's changed the behaviour of around three-quarters of the students at Stanton Lodge. Many parents and carers even notice significant changes almost straight away.

"When I first started the programme, I walked up to the first little fellow that ever came in the room and said 'G'day mate, how are you?' recalls Kevin. "His introduction to me was to kick me in the shins. We worked with him for the full term and three years later I received an email from his carers, saying he is now an outstanding student and having no problems at school and is also going really well at home."

Last year, the Stanton Lodge programme led by Kevin was awarded the winner of the 2019 Queensland Premier's Award for Excellence in the Giving All Our Children a Great Start category. Kevin was also nominated as a finalist for the Queensland College of Teachers TEACHX Awards for Innovation in Teaching.

While Kevin says these public accolades are great – and help spread the word about the programme and the success it's having – for him, the true reward is the work, however challenging it might be. And it might be something as small as watching one of his students take a breath and calm themselves down using the techniques they've learnt. "When

you see a student starting to escalate who'd normally explode, in whatever form their explosions take, if that student then stops, takes a minute, then comes back to you without having any negative impact, that's outstanding for me."

It shows that the techniques the kids are learning are working, that they've learnt to identify when they need to step away and take a moment to calm down.

This simple skill is something Kevin believes every family can learn – both children and adults. "If you're in your amygdala – your 'flight, fight or freeze' response – you're not thinking," he says. "You're just reacting. It would be

great for parents to understand that kids just need a situation where they feel safe and calm so they can relax and then thinking can occur."

First taking a breath, thinking, and only then responding, helps if you are in a stressful situation, he says.

Aside from the satisfaction of watching his young students develop strength, resilience and emotional intelligence, Kevin has also learned a lot about himself along the way. "The biggest thing I've learnt is that the more strings you can add to your bow and the bigger your tool kit is, the more you can help people and the more options you have to be able to make a difference." **R**

Musical Mosquito Repellant

Female mosquitoes apparently don't care for the music of Skrillex, an American electronic dance music artist. A rather strange research study published in March found that the pests suck less blood and mate less after listening to the song 'Scary Monsters and Nice Sprites' in ten-minute spurts, compared with mosquitoes left in silence. The team of insect researchers wondered whether loud music could be used to manipulate mosquito behaviour as an 'environmentally friendly' alternative to insecticides.

The loud music may have distracted the mosquitoes, preventing them from homing in on a nearby food source and potential mates, the team suggested.

Other odd research and suggestions to the mosquito problem over the years include: letting a fungus kill them; using dogs to sniff out larvae; and distracting them with certain cheeses, the smell of which resemble odorous feet.

LIVESCIENCE.COM, SCIENCEMAG.ORG



SAY HELLO TO YOUR NEW CARER

*The robots are coming...
to look after us. And they
are already helping out
in nursing homes
and beyond*

BY *Susannah Hickling*





TECHNOLOGY

Justin Santamaria moves his fingers across his iPad and suddenly the creature comes alive. The size of a baby, Zora rises from the floor onto her feet, flexing her white plastic limbs joint by joint. She stands there, her eyes round and appealing, and the five elderly ladies seated in a semi-circle in front of her are full of anticipation.

“She’s giving me the eye,” laughs a lady in a wheelchair. But that’s impossible,



because Zora is a robot. Since February 2019, the management of this nursing home in Paris’s 15th arrondissement have been using her to complement the care they offer their elderly residents.

Zora leads her class through a gentle workout. She moves her head up and then down to her chest, then from side to side, all the while accompanied by calming

**Robot Zora
is a valuable
addition to
conventional
care**

music. Her five students follow her every movement.

The next exercise gets the participants working their arms. Everything, including Zora's speech, is pre-programmed by Justin on his tablet.

But Justin is no mere puppet master. He is a specialist fitness instructor for the elderly and disabled, and while Zora shows her students the moves, Justin is free to give them individual attention. He walks over to a lady in a wheelchair and encourages her to stretch her arm fully. "I know you find it difficult," he says sympathetically. He explains to the group that circling their arms will help with picking things up.

The members of this chair-based gym class at Villa Lecourbe obviously adore Zora. All have poor mobility, some have cognitive problems, too. But they do as Zora tells them and when she – they always refer to the humanoid robot as a "she" – plays 'La Vie en Rose', they sing along, smiling.

"It's like a toy," one 90-year-old lady says after the session. "It's like being a child all over again. At our age we have a lot of childhood memories."

"No one has the impression they're working," volunteers another senior. "It's a welcome little distraction."

But for Maisons de Famille, the chain of private nursing homes which has adopted Zora across its 16 centres throughout France, she's much more than a bit of fun. She's the future.

Robotic technology is all around us. We're already used to autonomous devices that vacuum clean our homes. We may even have come across robots that help surgeons operate or disinfecting bots that clean operating theatres afterwards. But increasingly robots – especially ones that look like mini humans – are being used to help care for people and improve their quality of life.

"Zora brings a fresh approach to the activities and overall care we offer to our elderly residents," explains Delphine Mainguy, director general of Maisons de Famille.

At Villa Lecourbe, that translates into a set of personalised care

and activities for each resident. They might be exercises for strength and balance, singing, dancing or reading books or newspapers aloud in a group setting, or individual sessions for those with cognitive problems who are not at ease in the company of others.

Zora might help staff coax residents to get up when they might

ZORA'S PRESENCE HELPS RESIDENTS BE LESS ANXIOUS AND MORE RELAXED



Zora leads a class at a Maisons de Famille retirement home

prefer to stay in bed, or entertain a resident who dislikes having her hair done. “Her presence helps them be less anxious and more relaxed,” explains Elisabeth Bouchara, manager of Villa Lecourbe. “We try our best to find solutions that do not involve medication.”

Studies have suggested that Zora and other social robots add value to conventional care. But, because their use is still in its infancy, most of the evidence to date is anecdotal. Maisons de Famille tells of elderly people who don’t talk but have begun to use gestures to communicate after copying Zora.

“In a centre in the south of France, one resident wouldn’t allow anyone to touch him to change a dressing.

Thanks to Zora, who was able to distract him, he finally accepted treatment,” says Boris Prévost, head of marketing and innovation at Maisons de Famille. “Some residents with dementia manage to concentrate twice as long in sessions involving Zora.”

Zorabots, the Belgium-based robotics company which designs and develops the software for several different humanoid robots, has brought Zora to life in almost 400 healthcare establishments in countries including Australia, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, the US and some countries in Asia.

The company reports how one elderly person with dementia, who no longer spoke, rediscovered his taste

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for conversation thanks to his robotic carer, and how another, who had forgotten the notes in a piece of music, managed to remember the whole work while interacting with Zora.

The disadvantages? Residents at Villa Lecourbe complain that Zora's voice is tinny, a drawback for the hard of hearing. Justin Santamaria feels that the technology still needs refinements. "It's not difficult to program," he says, "but it takes time."

Staff and some relatives were concerned at the outset that robots were being recruited to take the place of nursing staff. Not so, insists Elisabeth Bouchara. "The robot accompanies, it does not replace," she explains. "Zora is a little character who becomes familiar to our residents, but she is programmed by a professional. On her own she is nothing."

Justin Santamaria agrees. "It's another tool, like a ball or a stretch-band," he says. "It encourages contact with residents but it's not going to replace humans."

In the UK, the Southend-on-Sea council in Essex has also successfully integrated a robot into its social care team. Going by the name of Pepper, the child-sized humanoid is used both with elderly people with dementia and with children who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Maxine Nutkins, the council's community engagement manager,



professes amazement at the transformation she has seen in both groups. She was present at a recent session in a dementia care home when Pepper prompted the residents to talk about their memories by asking them questions.

One lady in her 90s wasn't participating, but when she had a one-to-one session with Pepper, she suddenly got up, started dancing, talking and holding hands with the robot, even caressing its face. Her daughter, who was present, said: "I wish you'd seen my mother before. She's never done this. This is unbelievable."

But Nutkins has seen the most benefit with children who have ASD. Pepper goes into two schools for children with special educational needs and runs creative writing workshops. The robot is programmed with

Say Hello to Your New Carer

Programmed to help: Pepper (far left) and the Probo, for kids



information about each child; they are thrilled that Pepper knows them.

“The children are captured straight away,” says Nutkins. “He encourages them to communicate and tell Pepper more. He motivates them to maintain concentration. No one gets distracted.” Soon the children are working together, crafting illustrated stories based on their own experiences and the things that are important to them. All too often they are unable to communicate these passions to others, let alone work in a team.

Thanks to Pepper’s creative writing sessions, Jacob, one teenager with ASD, has undergone a remarkable

change in the space of a year. Previously, he would hide under headphones and rarely speak, but now he is a confident business student at a local college. “He’s a busy young man,” says Maxine Nutkins. “And that’s great, because he wasn’t a busy young man before.”

Nutkins believes the value of Pepper lies in the fact that the robot does not have human emotions, can’t communicate unconsciously and so doesn’t put people off.

“There’s no pressure – that’s been one of our main observations,” she says. “Pepper is consistent. If you’re finding it hard to engage with Pepper, Pepper’s not going to pressure you to talk. Pepper will still be there two hours later with the same offer, speaking in the same tone of voice,

still looking at you, still engaged with you – and that is really important for these young people.”

Clinical psychologist Professor Daniel David agrees with Nutkins’s observations. “In the case

of ASD, there is an openness for interaction with artificial beings and technologies, often more so than in interacting with humans,” he says.

Professor David believes that robots’ contribution to the treatment of mental health issues could go

“PEPPER ENCOURAGES THE CHILDREN TO COMMUNICATE. NO ONE GETS DISTRACTED”

further still. Rather than the so-called 'Wizard of Oz' method used both for Zora and Pepper, where operators have to program the robot's actions and reactions, he is working on a European Commission-funded project to develop a supervised autonomous robot to work with children who have ASD.

"We have already used it in real-life settings in about ten centres in Romania for 79 children with ASD with good results," he says.

His team have been using two robots. One is a soft, elephant-like robot called Probo that models communication skills, such as asking for things and saying thank you. The other is called Nao. Outwardly identical to Zora, but driven by different software, Nao is used for role playing so that the children learn how to imitate, take turns and develop other social skills.

The exciting thing about this work is that it is aimed at developing the next generation of robot therapy, using artificial intelligence.

Robots will be able to learn from their experiences in order to assess behaviour and select the appropriate therapeutic response. They will also act as a diagnostic tool by collecting data during sessions with a child.

The project team hope to publish their findings shortly.

Professor David is convinced that robots have a role in the future of mental health treatment, whether for children with ASD or for elderly people and other adults who need emotional and cognitive support at home when therapists aren't available.

"Technological development is inevitable and robot-based technology is unstoppable," he says. "That is why psychologists should be proactive and be those who design this future."

The innovations are coming thick and fast. In Toulouse, French start-up New Health Community is developing a medical care robot called Charlie for use in hospitals. He not only keeps patients company but can entertain them with games or dispense information from a touch screen. There's even a video conferencing facility so that patients can talk to a doctor. Medical data is stored securely.

Charlie's creator, Dr Nicolas Homehr, a family doctor, came up with the idea after his young son was seriously ill in hospital: it occurred to him that it would be beneficial for children in such a position to have a robot companion.

Meanwhile, AV1 from Norwegian company No Isolation is available to

**"ROBOTS
WILL ALWAYS
COMPLEMENT
HUMANS, AND
WILL ONLY EVER
BE AN EXTRA
SUPPORT"**


rent for children with chronic illnesses who miss a lot of school and feel isolated. The small desktop robot can go to school in their place and enable the student to join in lessons remotely thanks to its live-streaming technology.

Technology giant Samsung will shortly be introducing its Bot Care robot which will help and monitor sick, disabled and elderly people in their own homes. Bot Care is a moving, talking robot with a screen that doubles as a face with cute digitalised eyes. It can measure blood pressure, heart rate and breathing, remind users to take their medicine, tell them what's in their diary for the day, play music and even alert family members if there's an emergency, such as a fall.

Autonomous caregivers like this could be a boon in years to come. UN projections indicate that in 2050 people aged 80 and over will number 434 million, having more than tripled in number since 2015, when there

were 125 million people over age 80. But the founders of Zorabots insist that robotic technology is there to help and not to take over. "So-called social robots have already made all the difference by encouraging people to stay fit, by being involved in the care journey, as a tool for physiotherapy, by finding new ways of detecting pain or communicating with people with autism, for example," says Tommy Deblieck, who co-founded the company with Fabrice Goffin.

"But robots will never replace human warmth and expertise. Even if tomorrow artificial intelligence can help with care or diagnosis, robots will always complement humans, and will only ever be an extra support for patients."

Back in Paris at Villa Lecourbe, Elisabeth Bouchara is very happy with the way Zora, her 'magic little robot', has already improved the lives of elderly residents. "It was a great decision," she says. 



Clownish Calls

A British police department has had to remind the public not to call the emergency numbers for non-emergency situations after someone reported their taps weren't dispensing hot water. Other recent calls to UK police departments included someone reporting a 'snoring neighbour', callers who missed their alarm and were going to be late for a flight wanting officers to take them to the airport and a woman who had seen a clown in London selling balloons for £5 each, which was much more than other clowns

were charging. UPI.COM, HEART.CO.UK

LIFE'S LIKE THAT

Seeing the Funny Side



Why, Grandmother, What a Sharp Tongue You Have!

Sure, they look sweet, but some grandmas just don't have a filter.

- My first year of university, my grandma posted me sugar biscuits for my birthday but wrote in the card that she'd put chilli pepper in them so that I would know she was thinking of me "but wouldn't gain the weight".
- When my older sister told my family she was pregnant and not in a relationship, my grandma sighed,

looked at me, and said, "We always thought it would be you."

- I had just met my boyfriend's family for the first time. As I was leaving, his grandmother gave me a hug and said it was wonderful to meet me. I said, "Thank you. It's nice to know I have approval." To which she replied, "Oh, now, dear, just because we like you doesn't mean we approve."
- I once got a Christmas card from my granny, signed, "Maybe next year you'll make us proud." thechive.com



Wooden Go

A local woodyard was having a sale and my mother really wanted to go. Dad, though, had no interest. After badgering him with no luck, she finally said, "If you don't go, I'll be the only woman there."

Dad shrugged. "If I go, you'll still be the only woman there."

SUBMITTED BY GERALD E. BRONNENBERG

Hard to Explain

After my beloved dog Lucky passed away, my daughter tried to explain to her four-year-old son what had happened in terms he might understand.

"Remember that baby bird we found on the footpath the other day?" she asked.

As the truth sank in, Ian grew alarmed: "Lucky fell out of a tree?"

SUBMITTED BY LAURIE NAVIN

GAME CHANGER

After my kids bragged about what levels they'd attained in a video game, I decided to give it a try. Soon, it was my turn to boast that I'd already managed to get to level 11. That's when my youngest son pointed out that the '11' I was seeing on the screen was actually the game's pause button.



SUBMITTED BY FRAN BROWN



THE GREAT TWEET OFF: SLEEP EDITION

Tweeting comes so naturally to the folks of Twitter, they can do it with their eyes closed.

Any job is a dream job if you fall asleep in meetings.

@SOMADDYSMITH

I sleep with a knife under my pillow. You never know when someone is going to break in and give you a cake.

@SHAVI67

People in sleeping bags are the soft tacos of the bear world.

@LONGWALL26

I used to be able to pull all-nighters but now I can barely pull all-dayers.

@WOLFNEYDA

There are many theories on why humans even need to sleep, but I'm pretty sure it's to charge our phones.

@ALISPAGNOLA





I Am the
**FOOD ON
YOUR TABLE**

Citrus The Great Illusionist

BY *Kate Lowenstein*

Gather round, one and all; our show is about to begin. Prepare to be dazzled, prepare to be dazzled, but we warn you – we citrus are masters of disguise and experts at sleight of hand. You think you know us, but no, you do not.

Behold this deck of cards. Pictured on each card is a different one of us: kumquat, kaffir lime, eureka lemon; satsuma mandarin, tangelo, star ruby grapefruit and Valencia orange. What names! What flamboyant colours and sweet, bright juiciness! Not to boast, but have you ever met one of us you didn't like? OK, there was that bitter orange you had the poor

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES



sense to bite into once – we admit, we can be astringent.

But all that variety is just an illusion. Here, pick a card. Ah! You got grapefruit, as large as a softball in your hand and bittersweet on your tongue. So distinctive and yet – what’s this? Your grapefruit is nothing but a cross between the pomelo and the sweet orange!

This sleight of hand, you see, is our greatest trick. All the variations, colours, shapes and flavours of us are nothing more than a shuffling of our four basic building blocks – the spade, club, diamond and heart of citrus, if you will. And, dear audience, can you guess the fab four? Not a chance, not a chance! They are pomelo, mandarin, citron and papada.

They all have their roots in Asia, before nature and humans crossed them over and over again to create citrusy variety. Love to squeeze lemon on your fish dinner? It is actually a citron crossed with a bitter orange. Like a blast of lime in your guacamole? Nothing more than a lemon bred with a key lime, itself a papada-citron hybrid. And that grapefruit-begetting sweet orange? It’s merely a combo of mandarin and pomelo.

Truth be told, we simply can’t help ourselves, folks. We cross-pollinate all too easily. Grapefruit pollen can fertilise the flowers of an orange tree; lemon pollen can mingle with clementine blossoms. One of our favourite

pranks is when an unsuspecting human plants a lemon seed only to get a different kind of citrus tree altogether. Or one adorned with thorns and no fruit at all! We are remarkably unpredictable, in part because our pollen contributes different genes to every seed (similar to how two human parents can create an infinitely varied set of children). Forget pulling a rabbit out of a hat – with me, you have no idea what the hat holds!

You clever humans haven’t been completely fooled. To bypass the unpredictability, you learned to graft branches – say, of that desired lemon tree – onto rootstock to breed the exact varieties of us you wanted. Nifty!

You also decoded the mystery of our juice. Our fresh-squeezed nectar actually becomes undrinkably bitter in less than a day’s time. This was a persistent problem until World War II. Then some smarty-pants US Army scientists, keen to protect troops from scurvy, offered a contract to anyone who made a portable, portable frozen orange juice rich in vitamin C. (Simply freezing fresh orange juice turns it into a foul brownish liquid.) The US Department of Agriculture discovered how to concentrate the liquid without heating it, then – presto! – adding a touch of fresh juice for flavour before freezing the whole concoction.

By this time the war was ending, so orange juice was marketed to the public. But get this, dear audience: no

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one went for it. That was when that old Hollywood crooner Bing Crosby worked some magic of his own. In exchange for company stock and cash in Minute Maid, the US company behind the orange juice, Crosby agreed to put in a good word for it every morning on his CBS radio show. "Ken, what's on the shopping list for today?" he'd ask his sidekick. "Well, it's Minute Maid fresh frozen orange juice, ladies," Ken would reply, "and your frozen food store has it." Sales went from US\$3 million to US\$30 million in three short years.

And that's how I became a staple on breakfast tables across the world.

Your attempts to preserve fresh orange juice without freezing also were cunning. As juice loses its freshness, its sweetness does a vanishing act – it literally disappears as the juice turns bitter. But your technologists had something up their own sleeves: additives that approximate the taste of freshly squeezed for that 'not from concentrate' stuff in your fridge.

One last trick to close out the show, friends. This whole time we've had you

riveted on our juicy segments, distracting you from noticing ... the citrus peels in our palms all along. Now watch as we deftly squeeze them to release a fine spray of oils. Smell that? Those are our scents. Enjoy them by scraping our exterior or squeezing a twist of skin into a cocktail. Honestly, ladies and gents, that's the ziestiest bit of magic there is. R

CREAMY ORANGE-FENNEL DRESSING

In a small bowl, whisk together

- ◆ 1 finely minced shallot
- ◆ 2 tsp Dijon mustard
- ◆ 1 tsp ground fennel seed
- ◆ zest of 1 navel orange (about 1 tsp)
- ◆ 2 tbl red wine vinegar
- ◆ ¼ cup freshly squeezed navel orange juice
- ◆ 1 cup thick plain Greek yoghurt (preferably whole milk, but non-fat and low-fat work too).

Season with salt and pepper.

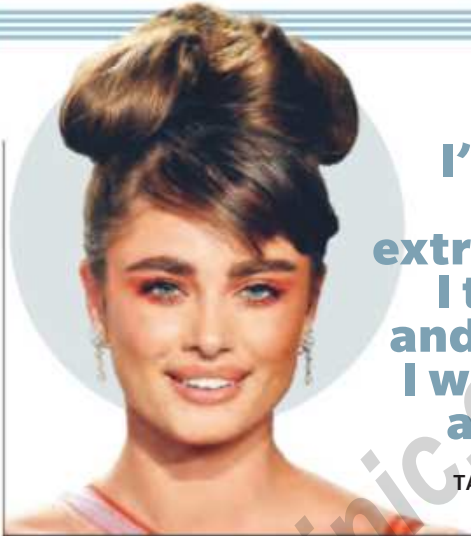
Serve as a cold or room-temperature sauce with cold poached salmon; cold roast pork loin or tenderloin; or roasted carrots, butternut squash, or beets.



QUOTABLE QUOTES

I know a lot of us are confused and hurting from the tremendous amount of suffering in the world right now. Don't let the bad news distract you from your kindness and compassion.

K.D. LANG, ON TWITTER



I've always been an extreme athlete. I tried yoga and was bored. I wanted to do a backflip.

TAYLOR HILL, MODEL

A PARTY WITHOUT CAKE IS REALLY JUST A MEETING.

JULIA CHILD, CHEF

Human beings, who are almost unique in having the ability to learn from the experience of others, are also remarkable for their apparent disinclination to do so.

DOUGLAS ADAMS, WRITER



When I was younger, I had an ego. But it gets in the way.

ANTHONY HOPKINS, ACTOR



A Birthday Like No Other

*I was dreading my lockdown birthday.
How would I celebrate my milestone year
sans party, cake and gifts?*

BY Stacey Marcus

An old saying notes that ‘man makes plans and God laughs’. I imagine God cracking up when he heard my husband and I outlining our game plan to celebrate our milestone birthdays. Hiking Mount Kilimanjaro was one option. Riding elephants in Thailand ran a close second. Sitting in our backyard during a pandemic didn’t make the top ten, surprisingly enough, but that’s where we ended up. I will always remember

my quarantine birthday as the day I made eye contact with a red cardinal bird, my heart cracked wide open, and for one stunning moment, I saw the world and all its wonders in high definition. Equipped with my new superpowers, I got a front-row seat to see a few things that had eluded my pre-pandemic eyes.

A friend surprised me by getting up at 4.30am to place a sign outside my house that read, ‘Honk to wish Stacey Happy Birthday’.

My dog put his head on my lap





when I logged on to read the dreadful daily news.

My family got me fluffy slippers and a pink bathrobe that looked like the ones I used to wrap around them when they were babies.

Every act of kindness made my heart go thump.

Sitting in my backyard listening to a bird concert, I noticed how tall the pine trees had grown over the years. I saw a red cardinal staring at me with the gaze of someone I missed. I wondered why I had been staring at

a screen for so much of the time when there is a magic show on my patio?

My official birthday outfit was my favourite pair of yoga pants and a hoodie with a heart, the perfect wardrobe to march around my neighbourhood and greet the nearby trees and flowers. No make-up, no shapewear, but I felt resplendent in my unapologetic freedom.

That may be an exaggeration, but I did feel the sadness in the world pulse through my body and shed a shower of tears. I belong to a world

that is going through a difficult time. I am glad to be part of the human race and pledge to be an agent of light and hope in its transformation.

As I sat on the patio in my backyard, I realised that outside of my inner circle of true friends and family, no one cares what I am doing. They are too busy curating their life on social media to read my latest post. While no one was looking, I let my eyes close in the soft spring breeze. When I opened them I saw the blue sky in high definition. In lieu of a cake, my daughter rolled a small ball of biscuit dough and stuck a candle in it. I gobbled it up quickly, then remembered no one was watching. Now, I am writing about it with pride.

What am I waiting for? I need to bid

adieu to people that can't shine until they blow out my light. I must toss those high school hip-hugger jeans that are not meant for a grown woman. I promise to look at my phone less and see how I can help repair the world more.

Up until my quarantine birthday, my prior celebrations were carefully choreographed, brimming with people and presents. This year I awoke with no specific plans and let the day unfold slowly and spontaneously. I shared stillness, serenity, laughter and tears with family.

At the end of the day, my dog looked up at me with eyes that said, *She finally gets it.* I really don't know what the next day or the rest of my life will bring. And that is just fine. **R**



THIS YEAR I AWOKE WITH NO SPECIFIC PLANS AND LET THE DAY UNFOLD

◆ ◆ ◆

Coming Back From Extinction

A giant fibreglass dinosaur called Big Kev has escaped extinction – much to the delight of the local community. The future of Big Kev, a brachiosaurus that had guarded a landscaping supplies store outside Darwin since 2007, was in jeopardy as the store moved to make way for a hardware outlet. The 18-metre tall model of the leaf-eater lay in bits and pieces for a year until *Jurassic Park* fan and site supervisor Rory Milner and his team reassembled it. “The boys struggled for a few days but they got there in the end,” he told the media. “We had to move the legs a few times.” ABC.NET.AU

An Ocean of **Letters**

*A simple letter that forged a lifelong
Trans-Pacific friendship*





Starting at school, two strangers on opposite sides of the world become friends

BY *Molly Jasinski* FROM **COUNTRY WOMAN**

When Char's seventh grade teacher asked her class to sign up for pen pals, they were given a list of countries to pick from. Char originally wrote to a student in Japan but never heard back, so she returned to the list, this time writing to an Australian student.

"I just really wanted to know if she had kangaroos in her backyard," she says.

Julie Polich Sapienza received the letter in Perth a short time later, and the two have been writing ever since.

They transitioned from handwritten letters to emails to Facebook, but they've never fallen out of touch.

Always writing

Since they began in 1972, Char and Julie marked many of life's milestones - school graduations, first jobs, weddings and the birth of children - through letters.

One of those children born along the way was me - Char is my mother, and I can't remember a time she wasn't writing to Julie. "People are pretty fascinated, especially since it's been going for so long," Julie says.

At the start, 'snail mail' earned its



name, Julie says. “It took the letters about two weeks in transit.”

“She kept me on my toes!” my mother says. “I probably was a little slower, writing back every month or two once we were in our 20s.”

Julie recalls Mum sending her a gift of painted snail shells early in their friendship. Later they exchanged wedding photos, party invitations, popular foods and souvenirs.

One of my mother’s stand-out memories was the year my grandfather let her call Julie as her Christmas present. Mum quickly wrote to Julie, asking her to send her phone number back. After waiting anxiously for weeks, they were able to talk long-distance for three whole minutes, something they both remember fondly.

They meet at last

Though they often discussed how they would love to visit one another, neither could make it work for decades. But in early 2018, Julie wrote to Mum to say she and her husband, Basil, had booked tickets to visit the US for several weeks, with an intended stop to visit my mother’s home in New Berlin, Wisconsin.

After touring Los Angeles, Las Vegas and Dallas in August 2018, Julie

and Basil made their way to Wisconsin, where the pen pals finally met in person.

“It was thrilling, exciting,” Julie says. “We had a nice hug. It didn’t feel like it was the first time I had met her; it was quite natural.”

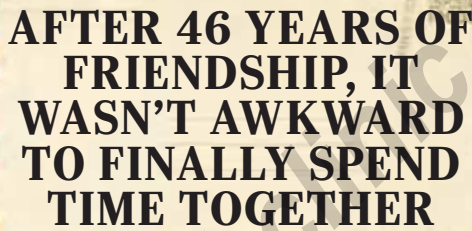
After 46 years of friendship, they agree it wasn’t awkward to finally spend time together.

“We’ve known each other’s lives for so long,” Mum says. “But we did learn little things we didn’t know before.” For example, my family discovered Basil’s name isn’t pro-

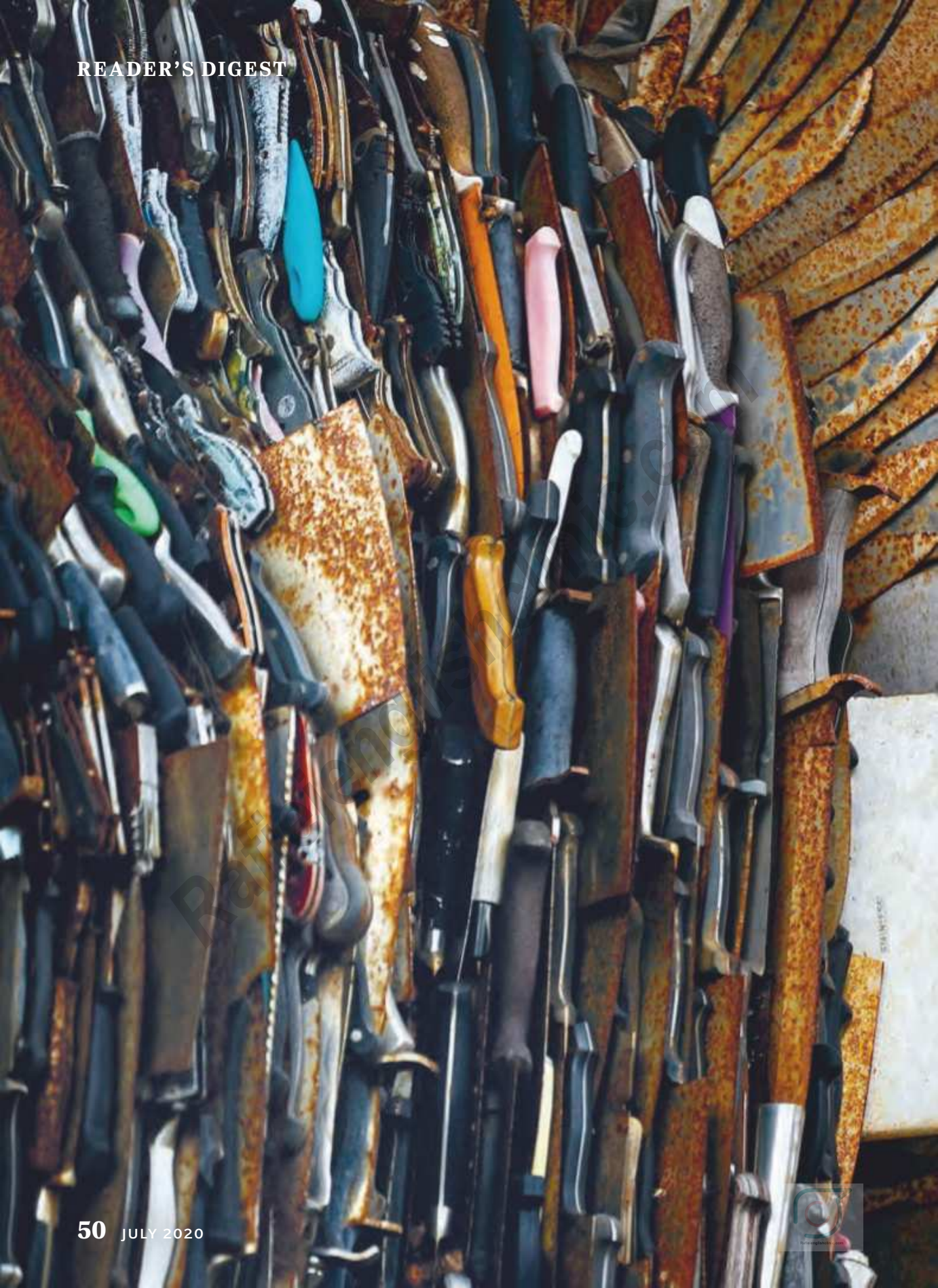
nounced the way Americans refer to the common herb (he pronounced it bah-zeel), and Julie always referred to Mum as Charlene, her full name she used in school but not as an adult.

Mum and Dad spent several days introducing Julie and Basil to my siblings and me, their friends and our favourite Wisconsin treats, including frozen custard and cheese curds. When it was time for Julie and Basil to catch their flight to New York, the two friends shed a few tears.

They continue to keep up on Facebook, but both hope they can reunite in the near future. “Hopefully she can visit me in Australia!” Julie says. **R**



AFTER 46 YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP, IT WASN'T AWKWARD TO FINALLY SPEND TIME TOGETHER





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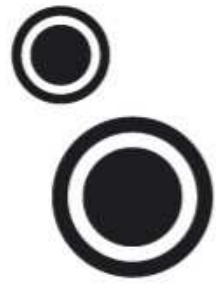


...DIFFERENTLY

What do you do with 100,000 confiscated knives? In March of 2019, sculptor Alfie Bradley exhibited his solution to this riddle outside Coventry Cathedral in England. His 8.2-metre-high *Knife Angel* was designed to call attention to the impact of knife crime while also remembering its victims. The knives were surrendered and collected during a special police amnesty programme initiated across Britain.

PHOTOS: CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/
GETTY IMAGES





HOLEY

TERRIFYING

Trypophobia is the fear of clusters of holes and cracks. Its origin may be evolutionary but as awareness spreads online, is it becoming a social contagion?

BY *Chrissie Giles*

FROM **MOSAIC**

Julia was around 11 the first time it happened. She let herself into her dad's apartment, dropped her school bag and flopped on to the sofa. She switched on the TV to her favourite channel in time for the cartoons. The screen filled up with a cartoon man with a huge head. On his chin were huge cracks. Suddenly, she felt like she was going to throw up in disgust.

She screwed up her eyes and fumbled for the button to turn off the TV.

Almost every three or four months she'd see something that she just couldn't stand.

Something that made her feel disgusted and terrified. Sometimes it was cracks, but other times it was patterns of holes or dots, or scenes from underwater nature programmes showing groups of barnacles. She'd

shake, pour with sweat and end up lying on the floor in tears.

One time Julia was chatting on the phone when she saw something so awful she threw her mobile across the room. No one else she knew seemed to have this strange reaction. What was going on?

Then, one day when she was in her early 20s and living in London, her boyfriend came bursting through the front door after work. "Julia!" he shouted. "I know what you have!"

TRYPOPHOBIA is an aversion to clusters of holes or cracks that's associated with feelings of fear and disgust. You might not have heard of it. But don't worry: you won't be able to forget it now.

Psychologists recognise a number of phobias that can have a huge negative impact on people's lives. The new kid on the block, trypophobia, is not yet widely accepted as one of them. There is even debate about whether it is a phobia at all. That's because while most phobias are synonymous with abject terror, a number seemingly provoke disgust as well as fear. Some researchers think that trypophobia is based only on disgust.

Asked what first triggered their trypophobia, people describe everything from a Christmas bauble to a picture of a wasps' nest, pitted bricks in a wall, or bubbles in cake batter.

As well as such triggering objects in real life, many people with

trypophobia describe certain images as being particularly problematic. Pictures involving lotus seed pods are often cited as initial triggers. If you haven't seen one, the lotus plant produces large green seed heads that look almost like a shower head, with many large seeds.

Trypophobia is more powerful when holes are shown on skin than on non-animal objects like rocks. The disgust is greater when holes are superimposed on faces.

The internet has been linked to the rise of other conditions that have physical or behavioural symptoms but, many believe, have their origin in the mind - so-called psychogenic conditions.

Julia's boyfriend grabbed his laptop and typed furiously into a search engine. He picked a video from the results and clicked play. She lasted ten seconds before bursting into tears and running out of the room.

The video was one of many you can find today that 'tests' if you have trypophobia. They tend to be a series of triggering images - everything from lotus flower seeds to washing-up sponges.

Once she'd had time to calm down, Julia thought about what this moment meant. "I was really surprised but also kind of happy," she says. "It felt comforting that other people had the same thing."

There was just one catch. She couldn't search online for more



SOME RESEARCHERS THINK TRYPHOBIA IS BASED ONLY ON DISGUST

information because the first thing you see when you search ‘trypophobia’ is triggering images.

So her boyfriend became her designated googler, reading aloud anything he could find on the condition. This was also how Julia discovered and joined one of the two main Facebook groups for people with trypophobia.

Skimming through the groups, it doesn’t take long to realise that trypophobia creeps into all aspects of life.

People affected live in constant fear of being accidentally or deliberately triggered by any number of seemingly innocuous pictures or objects. From crumpets to brake-lights.

A massage therapist tells me: “I can’t look at certain things... I have to send some clients away if they have triggering skin issues.”

“The hairs on my arms rise whenever I see MANY holes,” writes another. “I would come to think that I’m gonna die if I keep on looking...” They’re also troubled by anything with ‘hairy spikes’.

Talking about Facebook, one person says they’re “always wondering if I’m about to get slammed in the eyes with pods, or holes in rocks...”

One user, who describes himself as a 1.9-metre-tall “big guy”, was “absolutely flattened” by one picture.

ONLINE AND IN REAL LIFE, trypophobic people say they are also deliberately shown triggering pictures by people looking to elicit a reaction. “It’s never going to be funny to surprise me with a photo of tiny holes,” writes one. “Making me panic is just cruel.”

For these people, trypophobia is a question that no one wants to have to answer: *What is in those holes?*

Think of the last time you were disgusted, I-need-to-bleach-my-brain-and-wash-my-hands-forever disgusted. Whenever it was, and whatever was behind it, we have something in

common. The face that you would have made is the same as mine when I last stepped in warm cat sick.

Your eyebrows contract, your eyes narrow, your nose wrinkles and your upper lip curls. That disgusted snarl is controlled by a muscle called the *levator labii superioris* – the movement of which is seen as the unique facial expression for disgust.

Researchers suggest that we have evolved disgust to help us avoid pathogens – things that can cause disease – found in everything from spoiled food to poisonous plants, from vomit to dead bodies. Faced with things we associate with disease or decay, we instinctively screw up our faces, to try and stop them entering our bodies through our mouth, nose and eyes. We retch, say ‘yuck’, and back off to protect ourselves from exposure to them and their disease-laden possibilities.

This pathogen avoidance reaction is now being seen as a key part of what’s called the behavioural immune system. This describes our thought processes and behaviours when we try to avoid parasites and infectious diseases. Tom Kupfer, an emotions researcher at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, thinks that trypophobia is linked to our evolutionary adaptations to avoid parasites that live on our skin – things such as head lice and sand fleas.

Just as the typical disgust response evolved to stop us consuming things that could make us ill,



IT MAY BE LINKED TO OUR EVOLUTIONARY ADAPTATIONS TO AVOID PARASITES

skin-based responses like feeling itchy or that our skin is crawling may have evolved to protect us from these ectoparasites. A study co-led by Kupfer suggests that you don’t need to feel parasites on your skin to get that response. “Just those images [of parasites] can trigger the skin-protective response, even though that would normally be triggered by something actually crawling on your skin,” he says.

While people without trypophobia were grossed out by disease-related images such as ticks clustered on a dog's ear but not by images of an innocuous thing like holes in bread, people with trypophobia reacted in exactly the same way to both sets of images. Kupfer suggests they could be overreacting in response to things that resemble pathogens or parasites but that are, in fact, harmless. Like someone scared of snakes getting a fright when they see a garden hose out of the corner of their eye.

THERE'S AN AMBIVALENCE within trypophobia. Some online support groups ban the posting of images that could trigger people, but over on Reddit, the subreddit for trypophobia is quite the opposite. As 'Rat-terstinkle' told another user: "So the way it works in this sub is that people post pictures that trigger trypophobia." This was in a thread called "That'll do it". Below was an image of a screengrab showing a man with ragged, holey skin on his face.

Could clusters of holes actually appeal to some people? Just as there are tarantula owners as well as arachnophobes; skydivers as well as people too terrified to climb up a stepladder? Perhaps. On one of the two main trypophobia Facebook groups, one user explains their own love-hate relationship with trypophobic material: "Since I realised I wasn't alone I tried to desensitise myself to the images

that affect me horribly. In trying to do that I came across a YouTube video of a vet clinic in Gambia. Now I've become obsessed with watching their videos of a specific condition. I'm not exaggerating when I say I'm obsessed; it's one of the first things I watch when I wake up. I have to watch it several times throughout the day."

Another writes: "I almost feel drawn to look at the images of it because maybe my brain is telling me that if I look at it enough it will stop bothering me."

There is a fair bit of discussion about this kind of exposure therapy in the online groups, especially given that different forms of it are used to treat psychiatric issues including phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder. However, there doesn't seem to be any published research on its success or not in treating trypophobia.

There is an aspect of social contagion to these online communities, says communications Professor Adrienne Massanari, who says the sharing of such experiences is "profoundly human". We can feel this sense of connection even if the thing we're sharing is something that seems revolting at first glance.

Julia doesn't go online much, for fear of seeing something triggering. "It takes a long time to let go of it afterwards," she says. She's careful about triggers offline, too. She loves TV and movies but avoids anything


READER'S DIGEST

with underwater scenes in case she sees barnacles or animals with patterns of dots that look like holes. She doesn't swim in the sea for the same reason. She once made a friend change a jumper because it was full of holes.

Once you know about trypophobia, whether you have it or not, you start to spot potential triggers everywhere. For many, it sounds too strange to be true. Just another socially contagious internet non-disease. Media coverage plays up populist angles – a Kardashian who goes “public with her trypophobia battle”, a celebrity chef who posts trypophobia-inducing images of beef Wellingtons, or

the student too scared of bubbles to do the washing-up.

What you don't see – unless you go looking – is the debilitating power of one picture to ruin someone's day or week. A compulsion to look at images that make you feel sick or panicky. Having to vet the movie you want to see with your child, the new boxset you've downloaded, the adverts on the bus, just in case something holey terrifying is waiting there.

Whether or not it's officially recognised as a phobia or another kind of condition, trypophobia is real for the people experiencing it. 

EDITED FROM MOSAIC (NOVEMBER 12, 2019).
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Mobster Machine

Want to drive like a powerful mafia boss? You can. But it comes at a high price. Infamous Chicago gangster Al Capone's former vehicle, a bulletproof 1928 Cadillac, is about to roll onto the auction block for a cool US\$1 million. The mobster's car is among the earliest surviving bulletproof vehicles, according to Celebrity Cars, the company selling the vehicle. It is fitted with glass almost three centimetres thick and lined with nearly 1400 kilograms of armour plating. The four-speed manual transmission vehicle has clocked 1800 kilometres. It has a rear window rigged to drop quickly, “allowing occupants to fire upon would-be pursuers”. The windows are modified so the glass can be raised an extra three centimetres or so, revealing a circular cut-out large enough to accommodate the muzzle of a machine gun. Capone's multimillion-dollar operation in bootlegging liquor, prostitution and gambling dominated organised crime during the height of Prohibition in the US. Also known as ‘Scarface’, Capone was finally arrested on tax evasion charges and sent to prison in 1932. CBSNEWS.COM

ONLINE

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PETS

25

Funny photos of cats 'working from home'

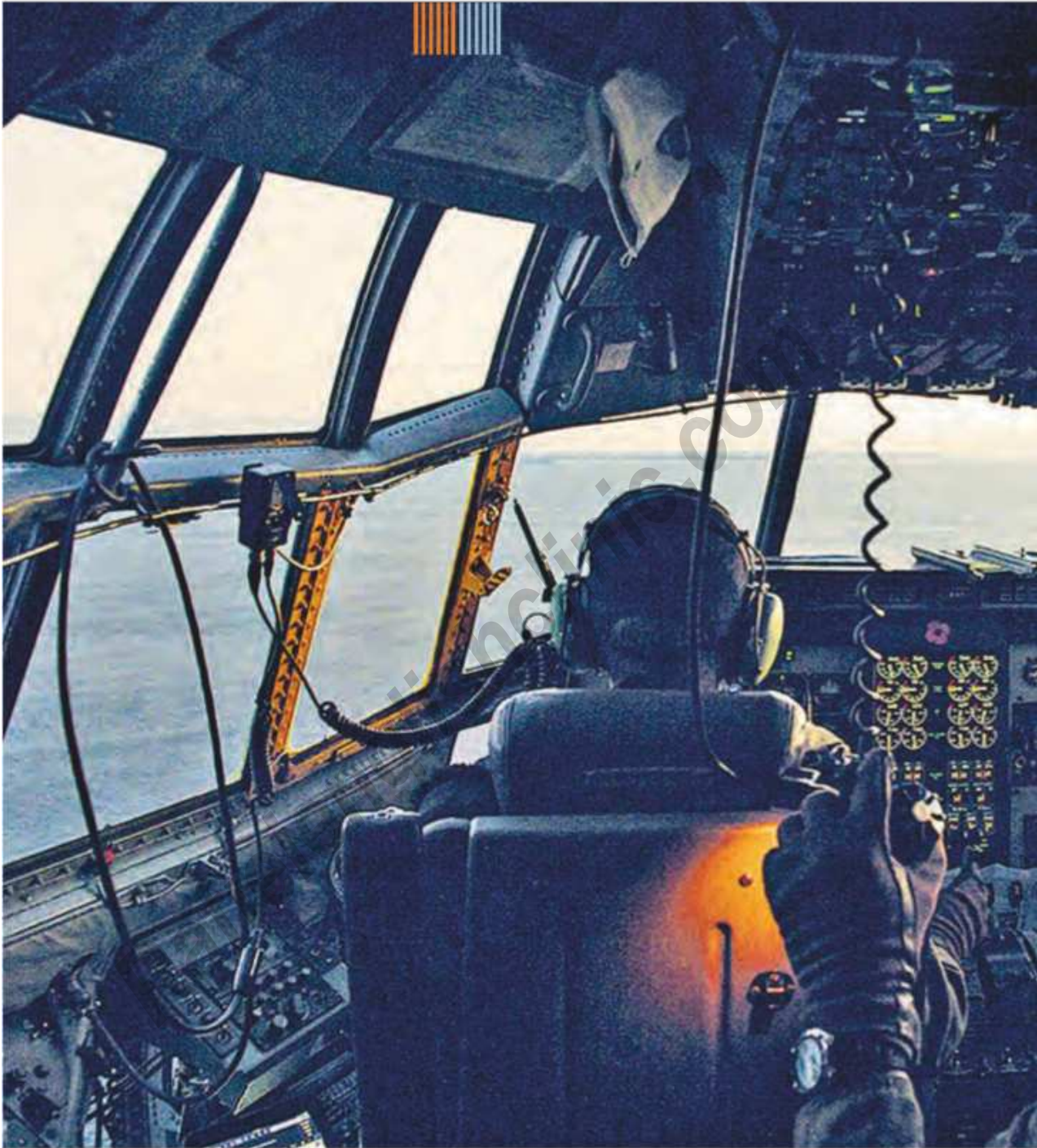
These cat colleagues might be adorable, but they're very serious about completing their daily tasks (and helping their owners, too).

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DRAMA IN REAL LIFE



LIVES ON



**They are
the last
hope for
fishers
working
in one
of the
world's
deadliest
industries**

BY *Quentin Casey*

FROM **THE DEEP**

**Inside the cockpit of
a CC-130 Hercules**

THE LINE

It's still dark on Nova Scotia's South Shore, the water indistinguishable from the land when viewed from a Canadian Air Force CC-130 Hercules. Seen from the air, the white lights shining below look to be the familiar glow of verandah lights, street lights and cars. But as the sun rises above the horizon, it's clear these white specks are actually floodlights streaming from hundreds of fishing boats heading out to sea from their ports.

"This is completely insane," says flight commander Major Gregory Boone, who's seated next to Captain Joseph Dobson at the controls. "It's all the way to the horizon."

The team on board the Hercules this morning is watching closely for an emergency. There are six in the cockpit, and the rest of the team - including two search-and-rescue technicians, a couple of civilian volunteer spotters and a military photographer - is gathered back in the plane's hold. They're perfectly at ease, even as the plane banks in stomach-churning motion left and right over and over again.

It's November 28, 2017, and today is the first day of lobster season - or 'dumping day', the most dangerous day in one of Canada's most deadliest industries. On the water this morning are roughly 1500 lobster boats totalling more than 5000 crew, from ports spanning near Halifax, all the way around the tip of Nova Scotia's South Shore, and up to the Bay of Fundy. These are lobster

fishing areas 33 and 34, the busiest in Canada, and the boats, typically with a crew of four, are heading out to drop traps for the areas' lucrative six-month season - which runs from the last Monday in November until May 31. During that period in 2016-2017, licence holders in areas 33 and 34 landed 30,703 tonnes of lobster, worth half a billion dollars.

In the pre-dawn hours of dumping day, all these boats, loaded high with traps, make a mad dash for the most coveted positions. If a fisher wants to set their traps near a certain shoal or in a particular patch of water, they have to beat everyone else to that location. It's a frenzy that often leads to serious injury, and occasionally death.

Despite some recent safety improvements - such as the use of larger, more powerful boats that can plough through rough conditions, CCTV cameras for monitoring dangerous work areas, and deckhands increasingly willing to wear life vests - fishing maintains the highest fatality rate



Traditionally, Nova Scotia's lobster boats head out to sea shortly after dawn on 'dumping day'



of any employment sector in Canada. More than 200 fishers have died on the job in Canada since 1999. That's an average of almost one death per month. And according to a 2017 *Globe and Mail* investigation, deckhands are more likely to die at work than pilots, loggers or oil-and-gas drillers. Being a deckhand is 14 times deadlier than being a police officer.

This knowledge puts a lot of pressure on the rescue teams that keep fishers safe. Many people are simply not aware just how dangerous the lobster fishery is, or the lengths to which the Canadian government must go to provide protection and assistance. On dumping day, aircraft monitor them from above, and Coast Guard ships stay close, ready to act, though the hope is always that none of these measures will be needed.

While they waited for coffee and breakfast omelettes at the Canadian Forces Base (CFB) in Greenwood,

Nova Scotia, before take-off this morning, the Hercules's flight crew discussed the tragic events of dumping day 2015, as if preparing themselves for the worst-case scenario.

The wind was moderate from the north on Monday, November 30, 2015, and the seas about a metre high – decent conditions for setting lobster pots. Nathan King and Wayne Atwood were crewing for King's father that morning on the *Nomada Queen I*. The pair were standing on a tall stack of traps, tossing the first line of 20 traps over the stern of the boat when a rail, which had been supporting the stack on the starboard side, suddenly broke off. Gear, including the traps King and Atwood were standing on, spilled over the side. An avalanche of traps, heavy anchors, buoys and line plunged straight into the six-degree water, taking the two men down with

READER'S DIGEST

it. "My first thought was, *This is going to be cold,*" King says.

Underwater, King couldn't swim because rope was tangled around his feet. He grabbed a knife he kept strapped to his boot and began frantically cutting, but the water was so filled with bubbles that it was impossible to see if he was actually slicing the line. Then, just before he ran out of breath, his life vest inflated, propelling him to the surface, where he emerged in the mess of gear. "It all happened so fast," he says. "When I came to the top of the water I didn't really know what was going on."

King was shocked by the cold. He couldn't breathe. Heavy gear was still falling all around him from the boat. And he could hear Atwood in the water nearby screaming: "We're gonna die! We're gonna drown!"

The two men managed to swim to each other, and then cling to the hull near the wheelhouse at the front of the boat to avoid the traps falling off the side and stern. They both stayed there, in the near-freezing water, for more than 30 minutes before their crewmates were able to haul them aboard. King was OK, just soaked and cold. But Atwood needed medical attention for shock and mild hypothermia.

A Cormorant helicopter flew over, lowering two search-and-rescue technicians to retrieve Atwood and take him to shore. He spent the night in hospital and resigned the next day.

Around an hour after King and Atwood fell from their boat, about 35 kilometres away from that accident, Captain Todd Nickerson was at the wheel of the *Cock-a-Wit Lady* as his crew set their first string of traps off Cape Sable Island. Veteran crew member Keith Stubbert was at the stern when a trap snagged on the port-side guardrail. As Stubbert went over to free it, he stepped on a coil of fishing line just as it started to pull tight. The rope coiled like a snare around his leg, and as the traps and the line went into the water, they pulled him down, too.

Like King and Atwood, Stubbert was wearing a life vest, but this time it didn't matter: the weight of the traps held him underwater. And when the crew tried to pull him up, the line snapped. After some effort, they managed to grab the other end of the line, hauled up three traps and then Stubbert. He'd been underwater for ten minutes and didn't have a pulse.

The crew sent out a distress call, which was picked up by a patrolling Hercules. But there were around 30 similar Cape Sable Island lobster boats in the area, and rescue technicians ended up parachuting down to the wrong one.

The rescuers eventually made it to the correct boat, but it was too late. Stubbert was airlifted to hospital, and pronounced dead shortly afterwards.

In mid-November of 2017 at the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (JRCC) in Halifax, Major Mark Norris, a 37-year-old Hercules pilot with the Canadian Forces' search-and-rescue unit, was poring over the plan for dumping day. "We want to be able to respond as quickly and as efficiently as possible," he says of his preparation.

The Halifax JRCC is one of three rescue centres run jointly by the military and the Canadian Coast Guard. It's staffed day and night by five

During emergencies, the JRCC Halifax team collects and distributes information, investigates and coordinates the deployment and movement of rescue assets – typically Coast Guard vessels and Air Force Hercules planes and Cormorant helicopters, two of which are permanently on standby at CFB Greenwood for missions.

Norris says JRCC's planning for dumping day begins six months before, when rescue personnel meet with local fishing associations to talk about safety preparations. All

ON DUMPING DAY, SEARCH AND RESCUE PERSONNEL STAND READY. "WE'RE ANTICIPATING THAT SOMETHING IS GOING TO GO WRONG"

coordinators – a mix of Coast Guard and Air Force officers responsible for managing all air and marine search-and-rescue operations in an area totalling 5.5 million square kilometres, 80 per cent of which is covered by water. A large satellite photo hanging outside the JRCC's operations room displays that enormous expanse.

On that same wall, there's a list of Coast Guard and military personnel who died during search-and-rescue operations in the area since 1953: 29 Air Force members and seven Coast Guard officers. At the bottom of the list is a motto: 'That Others May Live'.

the ship captains are encouraged to register their emergency-position-indicating radio beacons with the Canadian Beacon Registry in Ontario. When set off by a crew, or activated automatically underwater, these notify rescue teams of a boat's location, giving information about the vessel and its crew. Then, in the weeks leading up to dumping day, JRCC personnel book planes and helicopters, and schedule extra Coast Guard crews.

On dumping day, Norris will have four Coast Guard cutters (vessels built for speed) on the water, along with two 'high-endurance' vessels, the 62-metre *Cape Roger* and the 68-metre *Sir Wilfred Grenfell*. And



Canadian Coast Guard officer Jim Newell (left); fisherman Todd Newell (right)

as the lobster boats in area 34 head out at 6am, a Hercules (which has a flying-time operating cost of \$13,350* per hour), and a Cormorant helicopter (which flies at \$21,150 per hour), will take off from CFB Greenwood. “We’re pre-positioning,” says Norris. “We’re anticipating that something is going to go wrong.”

On Friday, November 24, Jim Newell is sitting at his desk in the Clark’s Harbour Coast Guard Station on Cape Sable Island, 200 kilometres southwest of Halifax. He’s an ex-fisherman who grew up in Clark’s Harbour and started in the Coast Guard after a downturn in the fishing industry in the early 1980s. This time of year always makes him anxious. “I didn’t sleep the night before dumping day when I was fishing,” says Newell. “And I don’t sleep the night before dumping day now.”

The station’s crew has all their equipment double-checked, and

they’ve started monitoring the long-range weather forecast. All there is to do now is wait for the results of an upcoming conference call between various fishing, transport and environmental authorities; that discussion will decide whether dumping day will go ahead on Monday as scheduled, or whether they’ll have to postpone until Tuesday because of bad weather.

Newell gets up from his desk and heads to the wharf where he boards the *Clarks Harbour*, the Coast Guard Station’s cutter, and one of the two Coast Guard boats heading out on dumping day. Both boats will be stocked with extra pumps, a stretcher, bottles of oxygen and a first-aid station at the stern.

The events of 2015 stand out for Newell. Stubbert’s death, especially, lingers with him. Something became clear to him then: the drills, preparation and inspections sometimes just aren’t enough to keep every fisher



alive. “Accidents happen. It’s a sad reality of this business,” says Newell. “There are going to be times when everything is done perfectly and people are still going to die.”

Nearby, Todd Newell – a distant relation of Jim’s – is one of few captains at the West Head wharf loading his traps and baiting them with mackerel and redfish. The possibility of postponement has kept most of the fishers at home.

Todd admits he’s worried about the coming season. “I’m a nervous type,” he says. “I’m anxious to get going.”

This will be the 42 year old’s first year as captain, and his first fishing trip without his father, Teddy, who died that June at age 69. “He was one of them old-school fishermen,” he says of his father. “I just wish he was here, just to lean on him for advice.”

He’s trying to acquaint himself with a new boat called *Ted’s Legacy*. At \$550,000, it’s a massive investment in an industry known for up-and-down revenues. “On our old boat,” he says, “I knew exactly where to put every pot because we loaded it the same for so many years.” He turns to join a crewman, lugging the heavy traps into place. It will take them seven or eight hours to load their limit of 375 traps.

A Hercules plane is a military workhorse, capable of hauling nearly 45 metric tonnes of cargo. Today the plane is carrying

a slew of search-and-rescue equipment, including four pump kits, self-inflating life rafts and satellite locator buoys, which can be parachuted off the rear cargo ramp to boats below.

The belly of a Hercules is cold, loud and cavernous. The four propellers outside rattle the fuselage like a toy. Back in the hold, Master Corporal Ashley Barker, a search-and-rescue tech for five years, is waterproofing a medical kit. Her partner, Sergeant Robert Featherstone, fills an insulated mug with coffee. The pair appears completely relaxed, considering that they could get a distress call any given moment and be jumping out the back of the plane.

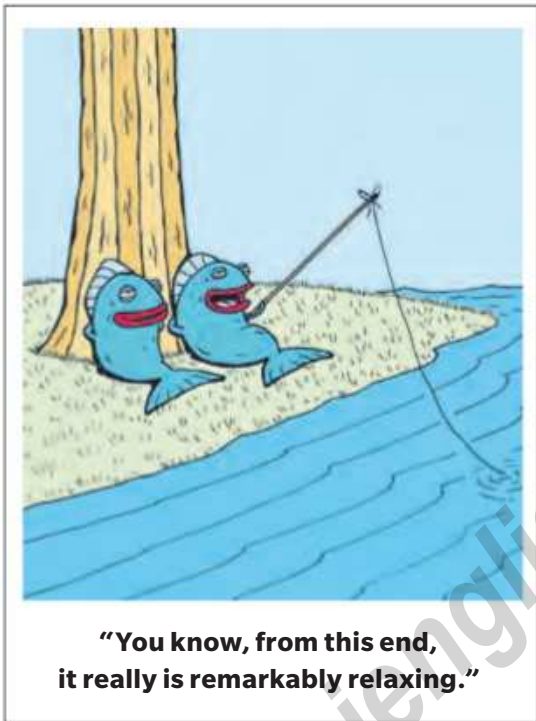
Up front, Dobson steers the plane side to side, so the crew in the cockpit and two spotters in the hold get a good view of the action below. At one point they spot a strobe light flashing on a boat below, and circle to investigate, but there’s no emergency. Later, they spot steam spewing from another vessel but, again, no crisis. And after six hours of flying, and no emergency calls, the crew turns the plane back towards home. The day ends without a serious incident – exactly what everyone was hoping for. But with six months of winter and spring fishing ahead, they know there will be plenty of distress calls to come. **R**

FROM *THE DEEP* © 2019, QUENTIN CASEY,
THEDEEPMAG.CA

*Canadian dollars

LAUGHTER

The Best Medicine



Still showing no emotion, the man replies, "Would you mind coming over here and putting it in my pocket?"

SUBMITTED BY JOSÉ J. ZULUAGA

Slow Mover

I ate dinner with a chess grandmaster last night. Problem was, we had a checked tablecloth. It took him two hours to pass the salt!

Chessninja.com

Carrying a Tune

"Doc, I can't stop singing 'The Green, Green Grass of Home.'"

"That sounds like Tom Jones syndrome."

"Is it common?"

"It's not unusual."

GruntDoc.com

Beating Them Hands Down

At an event famous for giving out awards in bizarre categories, the emcee enthusiastically announces, "The next prize will go to the laziest person in the audience. If you think you qualify, raise your hand." Everyone raises their hands except a middle-aged man who seems to show little interest.

"Congratulations! You are the winner," says the emcee to the man. "Your prize is this \$100 bill!"

Gone for All Money

One of the shortest wills ever written: "Being of sound mind, I spent all the money."

SUBMITTED BY ARTHUR BLAND

Is There an App for That?

I asked my daughter if she'd seen my newspaper. She told me that newspapers are old school. She said that people use tablets nowadays and



handed me her iPad. The fly didn't stand a chance. @DTWILLINGHAM

Human Speak

A scientist who made contact with aliens said, "They're nothing like us – all they keep saying is 'err. Err.'"

"Why should that mean they aren't like us?" his colleague replied. "To err is human."

SUBMITTED BY STEVE SMITH

GNOME GROUND

A garden gnome is busy destroying some plants when suddenly a house cat appears.

"What are you?" asks the cat.

"I'm a gnome. I steal food from humans, I kill their plants, and I raise a ruckus at night to drive them crazy. I just love mischief! And what, may I ask, creature are you?"

The cat thinks for a moment and says, "I guess I'm a gnome."

Newbloggycat.com



NEVER SAY NEVER

NEVER get between a female grizzly and one of her young, particularly if he's just told her that he intends to drop out of university to focus on his band.

ANDY G. IHNATKO, JOURNALIST

NEVER give up your seat for a lady. That's how I lost my job as a bus driver.

MILTON JONES, COMEDIAN

NEVER, under any circumstances, take a sleeping pill and a laxative at the same time.

DAVE BARRY, HUMORIST

NEVER get annoyed if your neighbour plays music at 2am. Call him at four and tell him how much you enjoyed it.

PETER DARBO, FILM DIRECTOR

FROM *NEVER! 750+ THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER DO*, EDITED BY GERD DE LEY.





Heart Numbers You Should KNOW

These measurements offer important clues to health risks you may face



BY *Stephen Perrine*

FROM **AARP THE MAGAZINE**

Debby Schrecengast knows she should have seen the warning signs. When she looks back at 2014, the year she suffered a stroke, Schrecengast, 57, sees a “stubborn old donkey” in denial about her health. “I had let my blood pressure go uncontrolled, and I remained overweight for so long,” she says.

Schrecengast joined a programme that eased her into an exercise routine. She took nutrition classes, dropped 14 kilograms and no longer needs blood pressure medication.

It's easy to measure how much weight you've lost or how much faster you can jog. It's harder to calculate whether your heart is getting healthier. But if you keep an eye on these numbers with your doctor, you can tell whether your ticker is getting stronger or weaker as time goes by.

Cholesterol

The body produces two main types of cholesterol: LDL, the ‘bad’ cholesterol, and HDL, the ‘good’ type. While the levels of total cholesterol, HDL cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, and triglycerides are important, they must also be considered along with your specific risk

factors for heart disease such as your age or blood pressure.

There are specific guidelines for target cholesterol levels in different people – talk to your doctor about this. In most cases your doctor will be focused on tamping down your LDL, which can clog up arteries – including those that feed your heart and brain. The good cholesterol can help eliminate the bad, but only to a degree.

You know the diet drill: limit red meat and full-fat dairy foods, and eat more whole grains and produce. Just one meatless day a week will help; next week, see if you can make it two. And get more exercise. Exercise appears to enhance your muscles' ability to use blood lipids for energy. Studies suggest that the ideal workout plan consists of 30 minutes of exercise five days a week, combining moderate aerobic

activity and moderate- to high-intensity resistance training.

Blood pressure

When blood pressure runs consistently high, it strains the heart and arteries. High blood pressure, or hypertension, is often called the silent killer because it usually lacks obvious symptoms. When left uncontrolled, it is a major risk factor for

CHOLESTEROL

Health authorities recommend total cholesterol levels should be between

**3.9-5.5
mmol/L**

if there are no other risk factors present. Consult your doctor for more information.

7 Heart Numbers You Should Know

heart attack, stroke, heart failure and kidney disease. Blood pressure is defined as high if the top number is 130 or above, or the bottom number is 80 or higher.

You're familiar with the link between sodium and blood pressure, and why it's important to cut down on salt. What you might not know is that much of it comes from food prepared outside the home – ordered in a restaurant or bought in a package.

Cooking with simple, healthy ingredients is the biggest dietary step you can take towards lowering your blood pressure and improving your heart health. While you're at it, look for sources of potassium, a mineral found in many fruit and vegetables, especially sweet potatoes, bananas, spinach and avocados. Increasing your potassium can help lower your sodium level.

Resting heart rate

A lower resting heart rate is associated with a lower risk of death. That's because a lower rate is usually a sign of greater cardiovascular fitness. Athletes, for example, are more likely to have a low resting heart rate because they're in better

BLOOD PRESSURE

is high if the top number is

130
or above

or the bottom number is

85
or higher

physical shape. (Certain medications, including beta-blockers used to control blood pressure, can also lower heart rate.)

A good time to check your resting heart rate is first thing in the morning, before getting out of bed. Take your pulse for 15 seconds and multiply by 4. Check it regularly; if you notice that the rate is trending upwards, you may need to boost how much you're exercising. A rise in resting heart rate over a ten-year period was associated with an increased risk of death,

according to a study of more than 29,000 participants that was published in *JAMA*.

For most people, a resting heart rate between 60 and 100 beats per minute is considered normal, but stress, hormones and medication can affect your rate. Although taking a brisk walk, swim or bike ride raises your heart rate temporarily,

these activities make the heart more efficient over time. They may also help you lose weight, which can reduce your risk.

Blood glucose level

Your blood sugar level can fluctuate depending on the time of day, what you eat

RESTING HEART RATE

Normal is between

60-100

beats per minute

READER'S DIGEST

and when you eat. That's why a fasting blood-glucose test is the most commonly used way to take a reading. You want to see a number less than 100.

The body's inability to regulate blood glucose is the primary component of diabetes. As the digestive system breaks down food into sugar, insulin – a hormone made by the pancreas – helps transport blood glucose into your cells. Diabetes develops when there is too much sugar in the blood because the body either fails to make enough insulin or because the body's cells become resistant to it.

A diet that is low in sugar, trans fats and saturated fats, but has plenty of protein, fruit, vegetables, whole grains and 'good' (monounsaturated or polyunsaturated) fats is the best dietary prescription for keeping blood sugar in check.

Body mass index

Body mass index, or BMI, is a screening tool used to determine whether someone is a healthy weight. It's a ratio of weight to height that, when too high, can classify someone as overweight or obese. The higher the BMI, the greater the risk for heart disease, stroke, high blood

BLOOD GLUCOSE LEVEL

A fasting blood-glucose test is the most commonly used way to take a reading. You want to see a number

less than
100

body composition. People with very muscular builds may have a high BMI but little body fat. On the other end of the spectrum, BMI may underestimate body fat in older individuals who have lost a lot of muscle mass.

If your BMI is too high, set realistic short- and long-term goals for dropping the excess kilograms through healthy eating and exercise. Shedding as little as five per cent of your body weight can result in significant changes to your health.

pressure, certain cancers and other chronic illnesses. To estimate your BMI, go to www.heartfoundation.org.au/bmi-calculator. Generally, a BMI score between 18.5 and 24.9 indicates normal weight. Someone with a BMI between 25 and 29.9 is considered overweight; a score of 30 or higher is considered obese – a major risk factor for heart disease.

But BMI does not always accurately reflect a person's

Waist circumference

Some experts consider waist circumference a better way to measure body fat than relying on BMI alone, and people who carry fat around their abdomen, instead of on the hips or elsewhere, are at greater risk of

BODY MASS INDEX

Generally, a BMI score between

18.5-24.9

indicates
normal weight

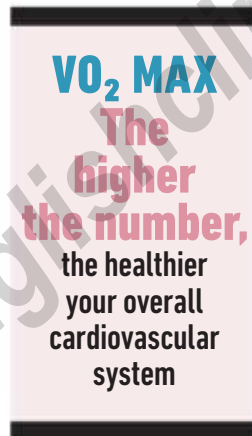
7 Heart Numbers You Should Know

heart disease and type 2 diabetes. To measure your natural waist, grab a tape measure and stand without pushing out or sucking in your belly. Wrap the tape measure around your torso just above your hip bones. Exhale, then measure. In general, men should aim for a waist circumference of less than 102 centimetres, while ideally women should have a circumference of less than 88 centimetres.

Studies have found that mixing brief bouts of fast walking, running or cycling with longer stretches of slower-paced exercise is more effective at burning abdominal fat than steady-state exercise alone.

VO₂ max

This measurement can give you a unique perspective on your aerobic



in numbers such as your waist circumference and resting heart rate to

fitness. The higher the number, the healthier your overall cardiovascular system.

VO₂ max is typically measured by having the subject run on a treadmill to the point of exhaustion. But researchers have developed a calculator (worldfitnesslevel.org) that allows you to plug in numbers such as your waist circumference and resting heart rate to determine your VO₂ max at home. It will tell you both your VO₂ max score and your 'fitness age', giving you an idea of whether you're as young as you feel.

Any kind of cardiovascular exercise – running, cycling, swimming, even weight training – done at a high enough intensity will help to improve your

VO₂ max score. 

FROM AARP THE MAGAZINE, FEB/MARCH 2019



Undressed for Court

A judge has one request for lawyers showing up for teleconference court hearings via Zoom: Get out of bed and put on some clothes!

“One male lawyer appeared shirtless and one female attorney appeared still in bed, still under the covers,” said Florida’s Broward Circuit Judge Dennis Bailey. “It is remarkable how many attorneys appear inappropriately on camera,” he said. AP



HISTORY

MYSTERY of the PLAIN OF JARS

The quest to solve one of
archaeology's greatest puzzles

BY *Bonnie Munday*

78 JULY 2020





**Ancient stone jar sites in Laos
recently received UNESCO
World Heritage status**



Shafts of sunlight

struggle to penetrate the mist hanging over the forest on a mountain-top in the northern reaches of the Annamite Range in Laos. It's a cold day in February 2017 and a metal pot of coffee simmers on a fire. Nearby, archaeologist Dougald O'Reilly, in a canvas stockman hat and army pants, black puffer jacket and Grateful Dead T-shirt, is crouched in a precisely cut, four-by-four-metre trench. At its edge is an oval stone disk roughly one metre across. It's lying flat near a huge stone 'jar'.

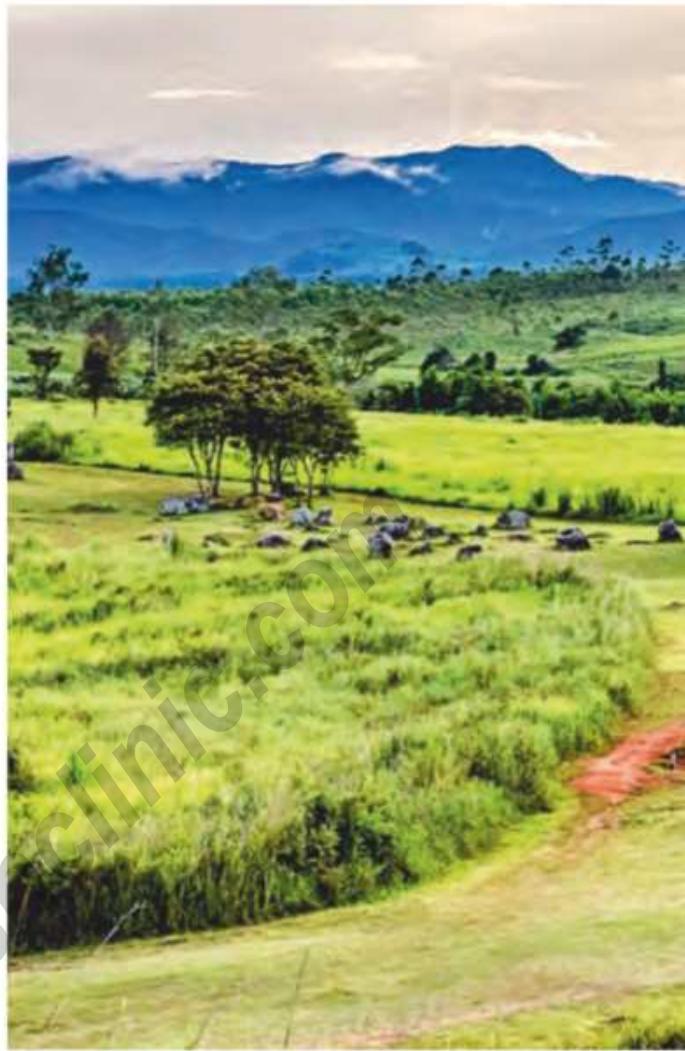
This is Site 52 of the Plain of Jars, so named for the plateau where the best-known group of jars, Site 1, is situated, near the city of Phonsavan. From Phonsavan, Site 52 is an hour's drive on a paved road, then another 45 minutes up a precipitous dirt track. Scattered all around this forest floor are some 400 stone vessels, one to three metres tall, some lying on their sides. A number of the jars are broken, with trees growing through them; a few disks, some of them perhaps lids, can be seen too. The jars are empty except for stagnant rainwater and spiders.

O'Reilly, 53, is an assistant professor at the Australian National University and chief investigator on this three-week field trip – part of a

These megaliths are found in some 80 locations scattered across northeastern Laos. Little is known about them, but they were likely made two thousand years ago

“That's what we're trying to find out.” It's a team effort that includes O'Reilly and his project partner, fellow archaeologist Louise Shewan of the University of Melbourne, together with Lao government and archaeologists led by Dr Thonglith Luangkoth,

five-year effort to solve the mystery of the jars. “The two most common questions I get are, ‘What were the jars for, and how old are they?’” says the dark-haired, blue-eyed O'Reilly.



PHOTO, PREVIOUS SPREAD: ALAMY IMAGES





PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

director of archaeology with Laos's ministry of information, culture and tourism. "We couldn't do this research without some amazing people on the ground," adds O'Reilly.

One of their main goals in this project – the first of its scale in some 80 years – is to map the sites and the jars with remote sensing and GIS (geographic information systems) technology.

This proved crucial in Laos's bid for UNESCO World Heritage status for the jar sites two years later. Laos is one of the world's poorest countries,

so the World Heritage status is hoped to boost tourist numbers and preserve the jar sites.

LITTLE IS KNOWN about the megaliths, which are thought to have been made a couple of thousand years ago. There are some 80 jar sites scattered around northeast Laos, and a handful in remote eastern India, thousands of kilometres away. Many were quarried a few kilometres from where they sit, further adding to the Stonehenge-like mystery: weighing as much as ten tonnes apiece, how did

they even get here from the quarries? Were they transported on log rollers, dragged by elephants, or somehow rolled to the sites? O'Reilly calls the search for answers "invigorating".

No major excavation has been done since the 1930s, when famed French archaeologist Madeleine Colani first studied these jars in what was then part of French Indochina. Then, in the 1940s came civil war and later the Vietnam War, during which the US bombed Laos for a decade. It's said Laos is the most heavily bombed country per capita in history. About 30 per cent of the 260 million bombs dropped never deto-

Site 1 was declared clear about ten years ago. During the 2016 excavations of that bomb-cratered plateau, home to some 300 jars, the archaeology team found human bones in smaller ceramic vessels buried underneath flat stone disks beside the jars. The theory is that the jars were for mortuary practice. "The people of perhaps the Iron Age – 2000 years ago – might have used them to rot their dead, then later transferred the bones to the smaller vessels for burial," says O'Reilly. Archaeologists including Colani (whom O'Reilly admires so much he named his daughter, Madeleine, after her) and Julie Van Den Bergh,

"IRON AGE PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE USED THEM TO ROT THEIR DEAD, THEN TRANSFERRED THE BONES TO THE SMALLER VESSELS FOR BURIAL"

nated, so the unexploded ordnance, or 'UXO' has been a deadly obstacle – not just for archaeological work, but for everything from road building to farming. The British non-profit Mines Advisory Group (MAG) has been in Laos since the mid-1990s to remedy that. It's slow, painstaking work, but the group has now cleared UXO from various locations for a total of about 60 square kilometres, indicating cleared areas by embedding the ground with bricks engraved 'MAG'. It has helped keep about one million people safe.

a Belgian who mapped some of the jar sites in the early 2000s, believed this. "But until we get lab results from samples we've taken, that remains unproven," says O'Reilly. So far there aren't really any other plausible theories. A fanciful one is that some villagers believe the jars were used to store rice wine for a mythical giant.

Back at Site 52, which had no UXO, only machine-gun shells, eight of O'Reilly's and Shewan's team members have been using mattocks – pickaxe-like tools – to dig a precise



trench into the crumbly red soil beside an oval disk. They want to see what's underneath; O'Reilly suspects human bones, as at Site 1. But the disk is thicker than expected – about 25 centimetres – and too heavy to lift without the help of levers. O'Reilly walks off into the forest with his machete, cuts a couple of tree limbs and drags them over.

As they use the levers to lift the lid, the moment of truth reveals ... nothing. They take a few more hours to dig down another third of a metre or so – and still nothing.

“Oh, that's very interesting,” remarks O'Reilly dryly, rubbing his chin in faux contemplation. Sure,

Members of the research team at Site 52 – reached by a steep dirt track winding up into the mountains – have marked jars with orange tags for the project's inventory

he's disappointed, as is the team, but “sometimes you find things, sometimes you don't,” he says with a shrug. He's been doing this kind of work for more than 25 years, including leading an excavation

in Cambodia at the 12th century Angkor Wat – the world's largest religious complex – at which he and his team made a major discovery in 2010, another temple underneath. “Even when what you're hoping for isn't there, in this case anthropogenic material, it's still about gathering information. And you just keep going.”

OVER THE THREE WEEKS at Site 52, the team didn't find bones but, significantly, they discovered four



In the spring of 2020, the team discovered ancient skeletons.

Left to right: Thonglith Luangkoth, Laos's director of archaeology; Louise Shewan and Dougald O'Reilly; and Viengkeo Souksavatdy, deputy director of the Laos heritage department

previously unknown quarry sites. They also tried a new type of testing. In simple terms, says Shewan, stone can't be dated, "so we took core samples from the bottoms of the jars for 'optically stimulated luminescence' testing." They hope it will reveal when the jar bottoms were last exposed to sunlight - therefore, when they were placed on the ground where they sit. The process of taking those stone samples was tricky, as no light can be present: black lightproof tarpaulins were tented over the extraction site, and O'Reilly held a torch covered in a red filter while he used a drill to extract the core.

Back at their base in Australia, O'Reilly and Shewan can 'visit' Laos any time they like thanks to the CAVE2 3D facility at Monash University in Melbourne. Drone photos gathered in 2016 have been used to create a virtual Site 1. They also collected drone photos at Site 52. CAVE2 is the world's largest virtual

reality facility of its kind - no VR goggles required. "We can return to our excavations to do things like take measurements and interpret data," says O'Reilly. And thanks to drones, they'll have a safe way to check out jar sites that may not yet be clear of UXO. "Of course, you can't excavate without being there, but you can gather a lot of information on site location and the surrounding landscape."

It could be a year until the team has results from soil and other physical samples - including a human tooth - that they gathered at Site 52, and up to two years for the optically stimulated luminescence results. But O'Reilly hopes the data will finally provide some answers about these massive megaliths on remote mist-shrouded mountaintops. "Archaeology," says O'Reilly, "is largely about untangling mysteries, and the Plain of Jars is one of the world's enigmas."

HERITAGE WATCH

Helping to preserve Cambodia's past

Heritage Watch was founded by Dougald O'Reilly in 2003, when he was working in Cambodia and witnessed looting of ancient antiquities across that country. "I felt the looting was an incredible tragedy," says O'Reilly. "One can't blame folks for digging near their homes to find anything of value, since poverty is what drives looters. But the sites give us clues to the rise of civilisations."

Sites include Angkor Wat (right) near Siem Reap. The 12th-century temple dedicated to the Hindu deity Vishnu covers 208 hectares and is the world's largest religious complex. "When I was a kid, *National Geographic* dedicated an issue to Angkor Wat, and I was in awe," recalls O'Reilly. He went on to do archaeological work there, and to author the excellent digital book, *An Interactive Guide to Angkor*.

In the early 2000s, he resolved to help preserve prehistoric sites across Cambodia. From his flat in the capital, Phnom Penh, he mobilised his former archaeology students, paying them with his own money. "We began with projects like village training sessions, to educate locals on the importance of preserving the past."

The non-profit, which O'Reilly believes is the first of its kind, also



promotes responsible tourism: visitors are discouraged from buying antiquities; businesses are certified with signage to help travellers identify ethical companies; and locals are employed to work on excavations.

And Heritage for Kids teaches children about the issue. "We have a pilot programme in schools in northwest Cambodia involving hundreds of kids," says O'Reilly. "The government loves it, and the kids love it."

In 2009, O'Reilly won the prestigious Archaeological Institute of America's Conservation and Heritage Management Award for his work with Heritage Watch.



*Old advice: pain pills, high-tech tests,
injections and surgery. The latest
science: harness your brain, lace up
your trainers and go low-tech*

**NEW
HELP
FOR
ACHING
BACKS**

BY *Sari Harrar*

ILLUSTRATIONS BY *James Steinberg*



She started by researching chronic pain-management and rehabilitation programmes. Huggins enrolled in several classes on how the brain and body interact. She learned how to relax with mindfulness meditation and to tame her fear and anxiety about her back pain with cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). She also discovered the importance of good sleep and overcame her hesitation to start exercising again.

After Marty Huggins fractured her lower back four years ago, she says she spent “two years lying on a fuzzy brown sofa in our family room. I was afraid I would hurt my back if I moved even a little.” The pain forced the 65 year old to retire from her job as a physical education teacher, and she stopped going to the gym completely. But despite countless visits to specialists and doctors, who performed tons of tests, gave her dozens of steroid shots, and regularly offered her opioid pain relievers, nothing helped.

What did it take for Huggins to finally tame her pain? She changed her brain.

Huggins even began taking an antidepressant, not because she was clinically depressed but because the medication helped turn down the volume on the pain messages sizzling through her nervous system.

Huggins is now able to go hiking, boating and fishing with her husband. “You really can calm your body down and change your brain to lessen the pain,” she says. “I’ve never spent another whole day on that sofa!”

Could the cure for chronic and short-term back pain start with simply changing your attitude? Low back pain is the leading cause of disability worldwide, affecting an estimated 540 million people at any one time. Billions of dollars are spent on

treatments such as high-tech scans, spinal cord injections, opioid painkillers and surgery. And yet the evidence continues to mount that these approaches may not help – and could even make things worse.

In the first study of long-term opioid use for back pain, published in March 2018 in *JAMA*, participants who took opioids had higher pain levels a year later compared with those who took paracetamol or a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory.

“Long-term use of opioids can actually worsen pain, along with causing dependence,” says Dr Xavier Jimenez, medical director of the Cleveland Clinic Chronic Pain Rehabilitation Programme. Meanwhile, the latest research from prominent pain experts is revealing how surprisingly effec-

COULD THE CURE FOR BACK PAIN START WITH CHANGING YOUR ATTITUDE?

tive low-tech strategies can be. In a 2016 University of Washington study, for example, 342 people with chronic lower-back pain were randomly divided into three groups. Patients in one group got ‘usual care’ – whatever treatment and advice their individual doctors provided. Along with receiving any medical care needed, a second group practiced mindfulness

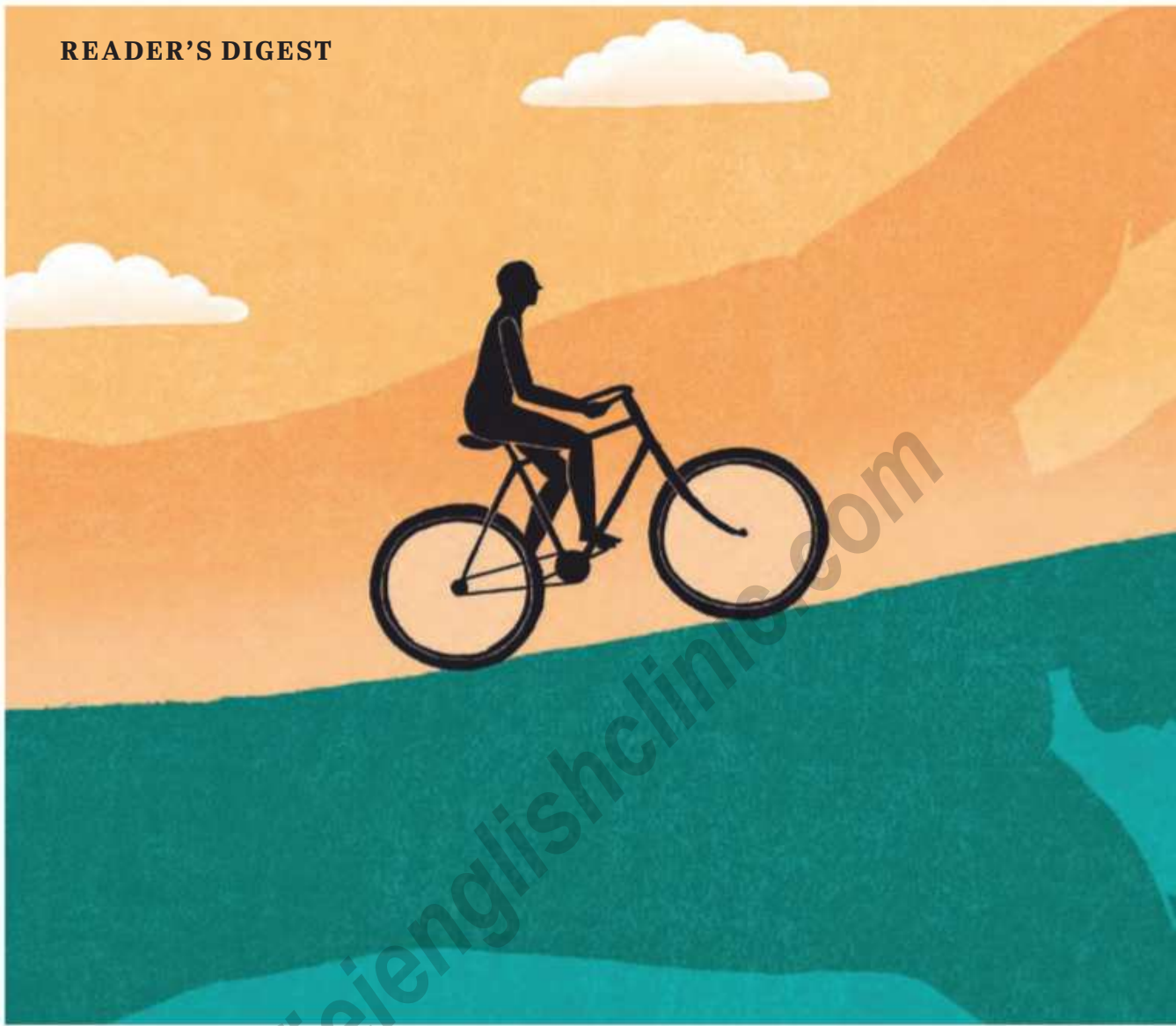
meditation and yoga and the third went to CBT classes for eight weeks. About 44 per cent of people in both the meditation and the CBT groups had significant pain improvement after six months, compared with just 26 per cent of the ‘usual care’ group.

“Mind-body therapies and physical therapy are often as effective, or more effective, than surgeries and injections, despite seeming less ‘medical,’” says Dr Jimenez. “They’re also safer.”

They’re not recommended in every case, of course. Some pain does require more invasive and immediate treatment. If your back pain comes with bowel or bladder problems, or if you have progressive muscle weakness in your legs – for instance, if your knees keep giving out or you keep tripping – call your doctor right away or go to the emergency department.

“If the pain radiates down your leg or causes numbness and tingling in your leg or foot, see your doctor. It could be a compressed nerve root that needs attention,” says Professor Anthony Delitto, an expert in nonpharmacological management of pain.

Back pain that lasts 12 weeks or more is considered chronic. If the cause isn’t obvious (a fall or a car accident, for example), don’t just treat the symptoms with, say, a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), such as ibuprofen. It’s important to work with your doctor to figure out what’s going on. “Pain can



be a signal of ongoing tissue or nerve damage or spinal problems that need to be addressed,” says pain scientist and psychologist Beth Darnall.

If your back pain is new, continue your daily activities, but take it easy when exercising. Most of the time, you’ll start feeling better within three days. Once you’re on the upswing, talk to your doctor about incorporating the following strategies to help you stay pain-free.



Exercise on Your Own or in Physical Therapy

Walking and other activities can improve your back by strengthening muscles, relieving tension and stress, helping with weight control, and – bonus! – triggering the release of feel-good brain chemicals. In a 2013 Israeli study of 52 non-exercisers





New Help for Aching Backs

15 minutes. Then reassess how you feel a few hours later. Chances are, you'll feel better than before your exercise session."

Other research suggests that yoga may be as good as physical therapy for chronic lower-back pain. In fact, yoga and tai chi are among the non-drug therapies that the American College of Physicians recommends back-pain sufferers try before turning to pain relievers, especially prescription-strength ones. In one recent national survey of people with back pain, 90 per cent who tried yoga or tai chi experienced relief, compared with 64 per cent who simply followed their doctor's advice.

If you're nervous about exacerbating your back pain when you exercise, ask your doctor for a referral to a physical therapist. In a May 2018 study, researchers found that people with lower-back pain who tried physical therapy before other treatments were 89 per cent less likely to need opioids and 15 per cent less likely to end up in the emergency department.



Harness Your Mind

Pain scientists are looking closely at an all-too-common mindset called catastrophising. "It's normal to protect your back when it hurts," Professor Delitto explains. "But for some

aged 18 to 65 with lower-back pain, a treadmill-walking programme did as much as back exercises to bolster supportive 'core' muscles and improve the patients' ability to perform day-to-day activities.

Don't like walking? "Try an elliptical trainer, a bike, swimming, or any other activity that's fairly easy on your back but lets you move," Professor Delitto suggests. "If you feel some discomfort, try to continue for ten to



people, this leads to worry that any movement will do more damage. So people stop exercising, stop going to work, stop doing everyday activities. That leads to weaker muscles, stiffer joints, weight gain and depression and anxiety.”

Catastrophising plays a major role in whether acute back pain becomes chronic and how well people respond to treatment. It has also been linked to greater dependence on opioids. Catastrophising may even feed into ‘central sensitisation’, a cruel feedback loop in which the brain interprets little twinges as agony.

“Research shows that when catastrophising is treated, pain intensity decreases. Daily functioning improves. And the structure of the brain in areas involved with pain processing actually changes, so that the benefits persist,” Darnall says.

Mind-body therapies such as meditation, progressive muscle relaxation and deep breathing help calm your nervous system so it doesn’t react as strongly to pain. CBT, which helps you spot negative thoughts and craft positive alternatives, can stop the cycle of fear.

“Thoughts like, *I can’t do any of the things I love because of my pain*, can be replaced with thoughts like, *There are many things I can do today despite my pain*, and *Even though I feel challenged right now, I can use several strategies to help calm and soothe myself*,” Darnall explains.

It doesn’t take much time to make a difference. In a 2014 study of 76 women and men with a variety of chronic pain problems, Darnall found that just one two-hour session of CBT helped participants catastrophise less within a month.



Make Deep Sleep a Priority

Nearly six in ten people with back pain say it interferes with sleep, which sets off a vicious circle. “Sleep is our body’s way of natural recovery,” notes Kevin Ho, lead researcher of the University of Sydney’s Musculoskeletal Research Group. “Emerging evidence suggests that disrupted sleep may upset body processes, including pain sensitivity and inflammation in the brain and spinal cord.”

A recent University of Sydney review of 24 studies involving more than 1550 women and men took a closer look at how much sleep can help back pain. It found that people who tried CBT or took medication had a 35 per cent improvement in sleep and a 14 per cent improvement in pain.

Just adjusting your sleep position could help. In a 2016 Portuguese study of 20 women in their 60s with

DISRUPTED SLEEP MAY AFFECT PAIN SENSITIVITY AND INFLAMMATION

lower-back pain, those who slept on their sides with a pillow between their legs or on their backs with a wedge pillow under their knees reported significantly less back pain after four weeks than a control group that didn't change their night-time positioning.


In other research, exercises that strengthen core muscles in the torso reduced back pain, improved sleep, and helped relieve depression and anxiety.

••••

Add Low-Tech Soothers

Recent research has confirmed that massage and heat not only feel good but also can deliver lasting relief for chronic lower-back pain. In a study published in the journal *Pain Medicine*, participants got ten massages over the course of 12 weeks. Half reported clinically meaningful pain improvement during that time, regardless of the type of massages they enjoyed, and most continued to feel better at 24 weeks.

Similarly, by boosting blood flow to the area, heat wraps, patches and creams help ease back pain caused by muscle aches, according to a 2016 analysis in the *Journal of Chiropractic Medicine*. In addition, studies have shown that massage and heat help people get and stay more active, which also eases pain.

Over-the-counter transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) devices use a low-voltage electrical current to increase blood flow. In a 2019 Harvard University study, back-pain sufferers who used a TENS device experienced a significant drop in pain and improved quality of life. 



Social Distancing

I heard my neighbour in the hallway so I went back inside, and for the first time in my life it wasn't rude, I was a hero doing my part for public health and safety. @JENNGRANNEMAN

Beautiful **BRIDGES**

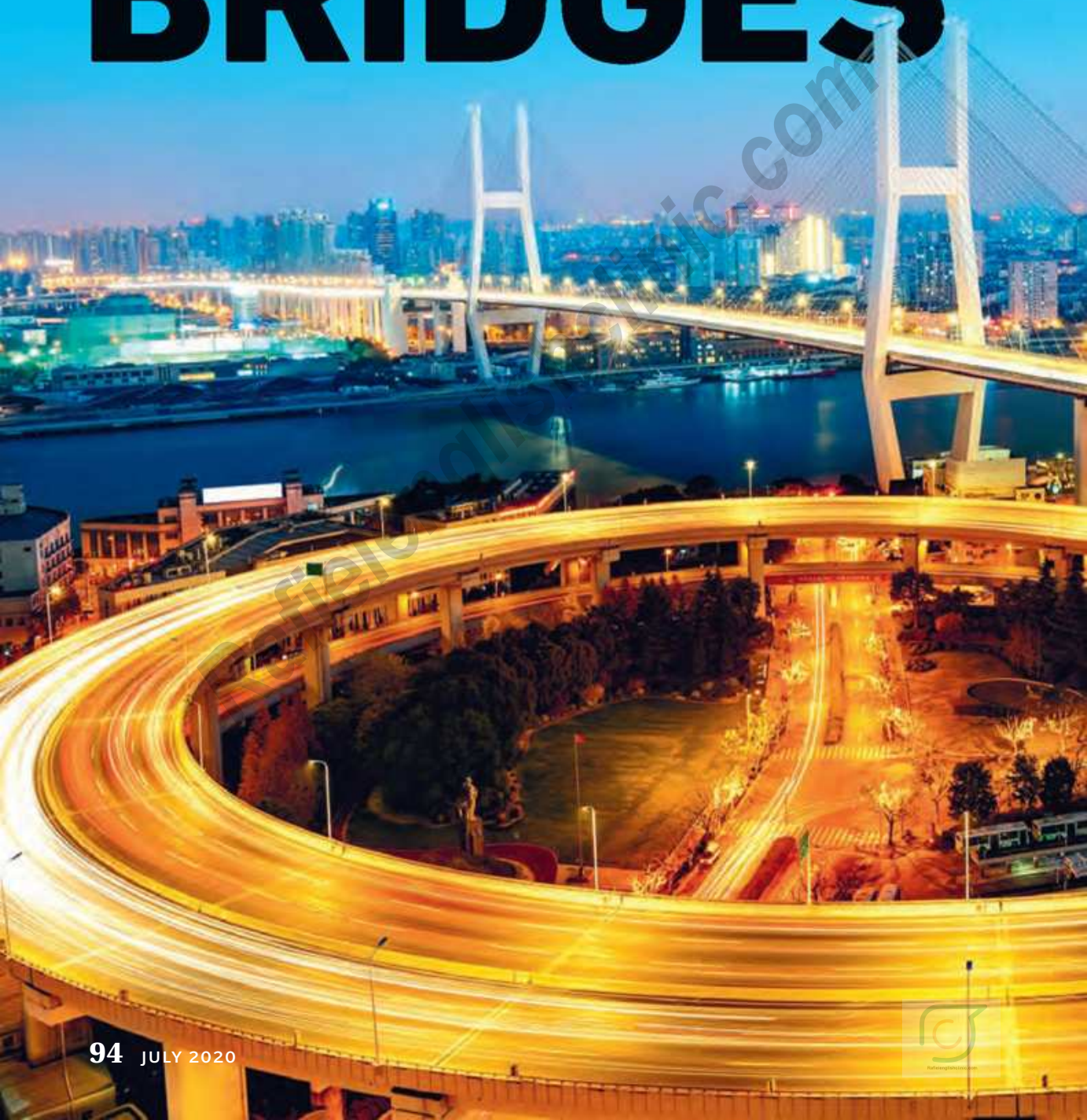




PHOTO FEATURE

Landmark, work of art or just a way to get to the other side – cross six extraordinary bridges with us

BY *Cornelia Kumfert*





▲ **Spanning the Huangpu River** in Shanghai like a mighty dragon, the six lanes of the cable-stayed Nanpu Bridge carry as many as five million cars every day. With its spiral-shaped entry and exit ramps, the unusual design makes it one of the most visually arresting bridges of its kind.

◀ **Supported by** 1060 wooden piles, the U-Bein Bridge across Taungthaman Lake in Myanmar is 1.2 kilometres in length, making it the longest teak bridge in the world. But don't even think about crossing the 170-year-old tourist attraction by bike. It is open only to foot traffic, so you'll have to get off and push your bike across.

▶ **The most famous** suspension bridge in the world can sway eight metres from side to side in strong winds and sags around five metres when fully loaded. This flexibility explains how the 2737-metre-long Golden Gate Bridge in northern California can withstand the earthquakes that have hit the San Francisco region since it opened in 1937.

◀ **The attractions** of the Charles Bridge in Prague are set in stone. Forming a guard of honour for pedestrians, the dozens of sculptures that line the bridge across the Vltava River boast saints, angels, kings and sinners among their number. The bridge's original statues have been replaced by replicas to protect them against vandalism.

PHOTOS: (PREVIOUS SPREAD) YONG NIAN GUI/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; (TOP LEFT) KUMAR SRISKANDAN/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; (BOTTOM LEFT) LUCVI/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; (RIGHT) GETTY IMAGES/MATTEO COLOMBO







PHOTOS: (LEFT) GETTY IMAGES; (RIGHT) ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Beautiful Bridges

▲ **The Hussaini Bridge** in northern Pakistan is thought to be the world's most dangerous bridge. Set one foot on this span made of old boards and ropes and you will immediately understand why. The rickety structure, however, is the only way for people from nearby villages to get to the other side of the Hunza River.

◀ **The Tower Bridge** is one of the most important traffic arteries in London – more than 40,000 people use it to cross the River Thames every day. But even the most famous drawbridge in the world has to give way to shipping traffic. Its two bascules, or leaves, open just wide enough for waiting ships to pass through.



Coffee Maker's ROADMAP

For centuries, we've been enjoying the simple pleasure of home-brewed coffee. Here are six popular brewing styles to try

If you ask any coffee connoisseur, they'll tell you that the way the beans are brewed makes a big difference to the final taste, freshness, aroma and texture of the drink. The style of brewing used to extract this goodness from the coffee beans also makes a difference to the drink's nutritional value. From a simple plunger to an electric espresso machine, it's easy to find a brewing method that suits any budget.

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES; FROM READERSDIGEST.CO.UK



1. Plunger

This is one of the simplest coffee-brewing methods. It works by steeping coffee grounds in boiled water before pressing the grounds down with a plunger. One of the main benefits of making coffee with a plunger is that the strength of the brew is very easy to customise. This preparation method produces a stronger cup of coffee because the coffee beans don't pass through a filter but come into contact only with the hot water and coffee grounds.

2. Cold Brew Coffee

Just as the name suggests, this is coffee that is brewed cold. However, this coffee differs from regular coffee in that it is smoother and less acidic. Actually, it is about two-thirds less acidic compared to normal hot

coffee. The lower acidity of cold-brewed coffee produces a naturally sweeter taste.

3. Espresso Machines

There are different variations on how espresso machines work; steam, piston, pump and air-pump-driven. Despite the variation in sizes, the basic function of this type of coffee preparation works by forcing pressurised, near-boiling water through a 'puck' of ground coffee to produce a thick, concentrated coffee shot, also known as espresso. Most commercial espresso coffee machines you see in cafés operate using this method.

4. Drip Coffee Maker

This coffee-brewing method uses the force of gravity to extract the rich flavour from the coffee grounds.


Coffee prepared by the drip method has a higher PH compared to drip coffee; in other words, it is less acidic. The advantages of using a drip coffee maker is you greatly reduce brewing time, as it only takes 30 seconds to make a cuppa, and the equipment is inexpensive.

5. Moka Pot

This is a stovetop coffee maker which uses steam pressure to make strong, espresso-like coffee. It brews the coffee by passing boiling water pressurised by steam through ground coffee. Advantages of using a moka pot – besides making an excellent cup of coffee – are, the pot is made from aluminium, which helps keep the coffee warm, they are relatively cheap to buy, and can be used on either electric or gas stovetops.

6. Turkish Coffee

This type of coffee preparation typically only works for very finely ground coffee. The coffee grounds are prepared in a brass pot over a very low heat, resulting in a stronger coffee profile. The lower brew temperature used in preparing Turkish coffee helps in eliminating the bitter taste that is found in boiled coffee.

So whether you're at home enjoying a brew made from a moka pot, or savouring a barista-made latté from your local café, expect the different methods to produce different outcomes. 



CLASSIC ICED COFFEE

Ingredients

- ◆ ½ cup espresso coffee
- ◆ 2 teaspoons caster sugar
- ◆ 1 cup milk
- ◆ 6 ice cubes
- ◆ 4 scoops vanilla ice-cream

Method

Place coffee and sugar in a jug. Stir until sugar has dissolved. Add milk. Stir to combine. Divide ice and ice-cream between two tall glasses. Pour the coffee mixture into the glasses. You can also decorate with coffee beans, or top with chocolate syrup for a treat.

THAT'S OUTRAGEOUS!

BY *Gabrielle Drolet*

COSTLY MISTAKE After selling two vehicles for nearly US\$23,000 in cash last August, a man in Oregon placed his haul in a shoebox. The low-security solution was temporary – he planned to spend the cash on a new vehicle a few days later. Unfortunately, his wife didn't get the memo and chucked the container in the recycling bin, then brought it to the kerb. By the time the couple realised their mistake, the money had travelled to a recycling centre in California. After the facility received a panicked call explaining the situation, an employee spotted stacks of \$20 bills moving along a conveyor belt and called the waste-management facility in Oregon to alert them that the cash had been recovered.

SNACK BANDIT Police officers were called out last August to an unusual burglary: a raccoon was stuck in a vending machine at a local Florida high school. Students and

staff spotted the creature behind the glass, looking guilty. Though the raccoon appeared happy in vertical-snack heaven, the vending machine was wheeled outside and propped open, and the masked bandit eventually emerged snack-free. It hastily sped off to plan its next heist.

SCREEN TIME Last year, homeowners in Virginia woke to find that old televisions had been left on their verandahs during the night. The eerie delivery only got creepier when home security footage revealed that they'd been delivered by an ominous visitor: the figure sported a navy tracksuit and gloves, and masked its face with what appeared to be an actual TV.

Before leaving, it turned to the security cameras and waved. Police have collected 52 TVs but are still baffled as to what the motive might have been. Hopefully the masked figure brings flat screens next time.



How to **DEAL** *with* **Complainers**

*You can change the tone
of the conversation*

—
BY *Lisa Fields*

We all know someone – or maybe more than one person – whose constant barrage of negativity can add stress to your life. Some people, it seems, thrive on finding the cloud instead of the silver lining.

Listening to a chronic complainer

spout off about anything (and everything) can be stressful, especially if you can't figure out how to get him to scale back his stream of negativity. But there are ways to get a complainer to taper off without offending him – although it might make him start complaining about you.





WHY PEOPLE COMPLAIN

Even the kindest, most considerate people complain. Researchers estimate that the average person – whether male or female, young or old – expresses dissatisfaction between 15 and 30 times daily.

“It’s not a quantitative difference, it’s a qualitative difference among groups,” says psychology Professor Robin Kowalski, one of the first researchers to study complaining. “People in their 70s, for example, differ in what they complain about, but I don’t think they differ in the amount that they complain from somebody who’s in their 30s – there’s just different things to complain about.”

Not all complaining has a negative impact. Some people complain to get results, because they’re tired of a partner coming home late for dinner every night. Others complain to strike up conversations or bond with people they don’t know well.

“If there’s bad weather and you’re talking to a neighbour or passing someone on the street, no one is going to disagree,” says communications coach Dian Killian, who teaches a course to help people deal with chronic complainers. “It’s an easy thing to agree on.”

People also use complaints to confide in others, which may deepen relationships.

“It’s like, *Oh, wow, this person’s trusting me to share this information with,*” Professor Kowalski says. “There’s

something empowering about knowing that the person is trusting you with this self-disclosure.”

A CHRONIC HABIT

Many people who complain frequently don’t realise that they do it. Complaining can become the default mode, much to the dismay of everyone around them.

“Reasons for chronic complaining differ much across people,” says Professor Ruut Veenhoven, an expert in social conditions for human happiness. “For some, it may be deep self-justification. For others, a mere superficial way of conversation.”

Some people, consciously or unconsciously, make complaining a way of life, railing about not just what’s wrong but also about things that may go wrong. This may be an attention-getting technique, or it may be a way to shift blame away from themselves.

“When something goes wrong, they say, ‘It’s as usual,’” says social psychology Professor Charles Martin-Krumm. “You say that everything will go wrong, but in fact, this is a strategy to avoid those emotions you would feel if you would really fail.”

Some complain consciously and frequently, and they’re typically never satisfied by any suggestions to address the problems that they highlight.

If they’re a help-rejecting complainer, I won’t be able to offer a solution that they haven’t already thought of,



says Professor Kowalski. “As long as they’re getting attention, even if it’s negative attention, they’re OK with that.”

Chronic complainers often repeat themselves, grumbling about the same issues time and again.

“That’s an indication, by the way, that they also have a need to be heard,” Killian says. “It’s a kind of counter-intuitive thing we do as humans: when we have a need to be heard, we repeat ourselves, we get louder, sometimes become more emphatic. They’re not often successful strategies, but they seem to be hard-wired, or to be culturally learned, at least in Western culture.”

HEALTH PROBLEMS

Chronic complainers may be pessimistic, and some research shows that pessimists may be more likely to develop chronic conditions, such as heart disease or diabetes.

But the health effects of chronic complaining are often felt more significantly by the people who get stuck listening to the complaints. It’s stressful being subjected to the stream of negativity, and the barrage over time may affect an area of the brain related to memory and learning.

“Daily stressors certainly take a toll on the function of the hippocampus,” says neurology Professor Robert Sapolsky, who studies the effects of chronic stress. “Half a dozen hours of stress, or stress-hormone exposure, and the hippocampus isn’t taking up as much glucose or oxygen as usual, isn’t learning as well.”

**OFTEN
CHRONIC
COMPLAINERS
GRUMBLE
ABOUT
THE SAME
ISSUES
TIME AND
AGAIN**

STRATEGIES THAT WORK

When you realise that you complain too much and want to curtail the habit, you can strive to become more aware of your tendencies, then cut back. It’s harder when you’re hoping to curtail someone else’s

complaining habit to make your existence less stressful, but there are solutions.

Change the subject. Some complainers can easily switch gears if you shift the conversation in a direction that interests them. If he’s complaining about the phone company, tell him about an unexpected phone call you received from an old friend. If he’s complaining about your boss, ask if he heard about the new employee.

“It’s that lack of awareness – they’re just mindlessly venting,” Professor Kowalski says. “Using distraction is a great tool. And keep using it; don’t

just try it one time ... Get them off the focus that they're currently on."

Summarise the complaint. If your complainer keeps repeating the same comment while venting, he may stop if you demonstrate that you're listening, because he may simply want attention and understanding.

"Say, 'Hey, I noticed I'm hearing you say things I heard you say a couple of minutes ago - I'm wondering, can I tell you what I've heard so far, so you know that I've understood it?'" Killian says.

To use this technique, use an 'I' statement - like 'I'm hearing you say things' - rather than a 'you' statement - like 'you keep repeating yourself' - because it shows that you're interested in learning what the complainer said, rather than trying to shut him down.

Once you paraphrase, ask if you've understood the main points. This may move the conversation along, allowing you to discuss the subtext or possible solutions, rather than listening to the same comment over and over.

Challenge someone to act. When someone tells you about his latest problem, ask what he's done to improve it. This isn't the usual direction

that a complaint-laced conversation takes, and it may help to abruptly end a rant.

"For your chronic complainer, typically, it's not about a strategy to fix it; they just really want to keep talking about it and keep complaining about it," Kowalski says. "If you break that pattern by, 'Well, what have you done to address this?', it puts them off guard and people typically stop. You're confronting them, but you're doing it not by saying, 'You're chronically complaining.' You're forcing their hand like, 'OK, well tell me what you've done.'"

**THE
HEALTH
EFFECTS OF
CHRONIC
COMPLAINING
ARE OFTEN
FELT MORE
BY THE
LISTENERS**

Be honest about your needs. When you have things to do, tell the complainer that you must cut the conversation short. For example, if you've got a big work deadline and a complaining colleague, politely excuse yourself to prepare your project.

You can also be honest about your need to preserve your mental health, especially if it's someone who's complained many times before.

"Go into what we call 'honest expression' - an observation, a feeling, a need and a request," Killian says. "Such as, 'I'm hearing you say that you're really upset about [how rude the neighbours are] and I think





I've heard you talk about this, easily, ten times before, maybe more. And I am really frustrated and confused. I'm wanting some understanding [I've said many times that I don't like the neighbours, either]. What would you really like? What could help you feel more relaxed and calm about this? ... Because I really want to enjoy our time together."

Have a heart-to-heart. When someone close to you – your partner, sibling or best friend – stresses you with constant complaints, it may be time to talk about the problem; if you bottle up your feelings and continue listening to repeated complaints, you may grow resentful or start avoiding the person. Broach the topic gently.

“Talk about the effect it’s having on you, not pointing a finger at the other person,” Kowalski says. “You’re still acknowledging the other person’s behaviour, but it’s being done in terms of ‘I’ and ‘me,’ rather than ‘you’re doing x, y or z.’”

Try to avoid using the word ‘complaining’ when you talk to your complainer. “‘Complaining’ is such a loaded term and it has such negative connotations,” Kowalski says. “The way I would approach that person would be to say, ‘It seems like you’ve been a lot more dissatisfied in the last six months or two years. What seems to be going on with that, and how can we get that dissatisfaction to decrease?’ Because ‘dissatisfaction’ is not nearly as loaded a term.”

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Humour on the Job



Don't I Know You From Somewhere?

My friend's dad, a professor, travels a lot. Once, when returning from a conference in Australia, he spotted a familiar-looking man but didn't know where he knew him from.

So he confronted him.

FRIEND'S DAD: You look familiar. Were you at the conference this week for international trade law?

MAN: Uh, no, I wasn't.

FD: I definitely know you. Are you in law?

MAN: No, I'm not.

FD: Well, I must have seen you at a conference somewhere.

Which university are you with?

MAN: I don't work at a university.

FD: Well, what's your name, at least?

MAN: Matt Damon.

not_a_frog on reddit.com

Keep Smiling

As a brain wave technologist, I often ask post-operative patients to smile to make sure their facial nerves are intact. It always struck me as

odd to be asking this question right after brain surgery, so a colleague suggested I ask patients to show me their teeth.

Armed with this new phrase, I said to my next patient, "Mr Smith, show me your teeth."

He shook his head. "The nurse has them."

SUBMITTED BY EMILY MURPHY

Essential Requirement

I asked the kids in my nursery school class what they needed in order to grow up nice and strong. One little girl answered, "Birthdays!"

SUBMITTED BY ABIGAIL GEORGE



- **Nothing ruins a Friday more than the understanding that today is Tuesday.**
- **Feeling stressed out? Make a nice cup of hot tea and then spill it in the lap of whoever's bugging you.**
- **The only thing worse than seeing something done wrong is seeing it done slowly.**

THE CUSTOMER IS (NOT) ALWAYS RIGHT

Customer's child is doing a project on dinosaurs. Customer cannot believe our bookstore doesn't have a single book with actual photographs of real dinosaurs.

@WATERSTONES

While I was working at a petrol station, a guy asked me for a refund on petrol he had just pumped because he changed his mind.

@OBSCUREAARON

I work at a pet supply shop. A customer once phoned to set up a delivery. Among the items he wanted was a dog toy, but he didn't know which one. I had to pick out toys and squeak them into the phone for him until he heard the 'right one'.

@KRISTINNEUMAN

I watched a woman demand that my colleague give her a haircut. I work at a bookstore. @LINDSEYFEVER

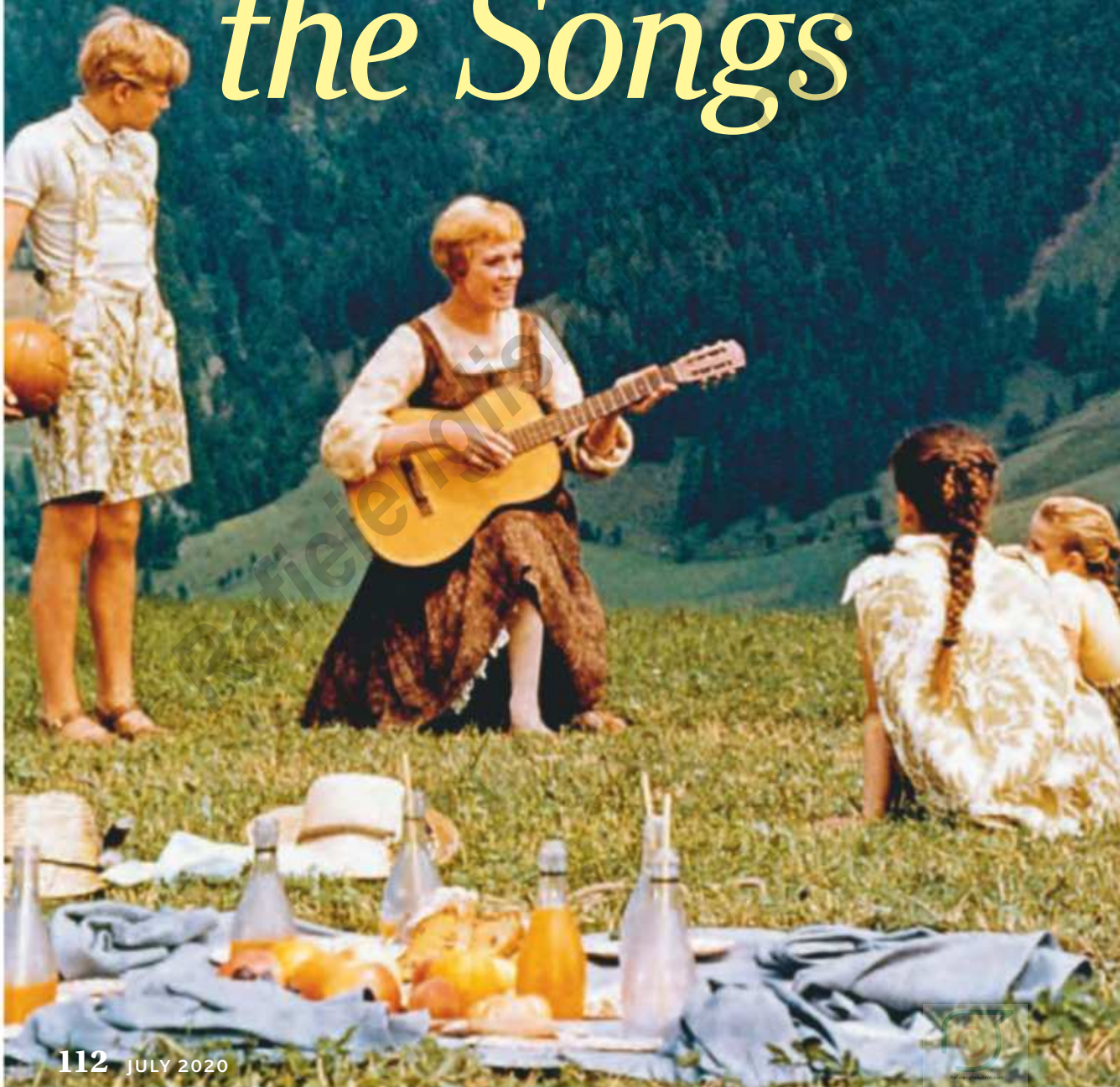
When I worked at a video store, a woman asked if we had a copy of 'Three Dalmatians'. To clarify, I asked, "Three Dalmatians?"

She replied angrily, "I don't know, there could be more."

@PANICKEDIDIOT



The Story Behind the Songs



What happened to the family portrayed in the 1965 classic film *The Sound of Music* still intrigues generations of fans

BY *Robert Kiener*



Julie Andrews
starred as Maria
in the 1965 film

I'm on my way to have lunch with Johannes von Trapp, the youngest sibling of the famous singing von Trapps, the Austrian family on whom the blockbuster musical, *The Sound of Music*, was based. Twelve von Trapps settled in the picture-postcard town of Stowe, Vermont, after the family left its home in Salzburg more than 80 years ago. "Sure, I'd love to show you around," Johannes had told me when we spoke on the phone.

Now 81 and nearing retirement, Johannes still helps oversee the Trapp Family Lodge, the resort the family built up in northern Vermont after arriving in the US.

I've come prepared. As I drive through the forested mountains, I slip *The Sound of Music* into my car's CD player. Within seconds, I am singing – off key, as usual – along with Julie Andrews: "The hills are alive with the sound of music. With songs they have sung for a thousand years ..."

I spot a sign for the Trapp Family Lodge, which sits on a steep hillside. Minutes later I meet Johannes, who is tall, lean and blue-eyed. It's easy to imagine him when he was younger, decked out in Austrian garb, singing along with his brothers and sisters.

He smiles graciously when I confess how I've been mangling the lyrics of the musical that made his family world-famous. "We get a lot of that up here," he tells me as we each sip on a von Trapp Dunkel lager in the von Trapp Brewery and Bierhall.

Johannes says that some of the movie's more zealous fans come to the Alpine-style family hotel expecting to be greeted by seven children singing 'Do-Re-Mi'. As he explains, "The musical is 60 years old but we still get visitors coming into the lobby and asking, 'Where are the singing von Trapp children?'"

He laughs and adds, "It's as if they believe we never grew up or were frozen in time."

As if on cue, a visitor comes to our table and gushes to Johannes, "*The Sound of Music* is my favourite movie of all time," and asks for an autograph and a selfie.

"See what I mean," Johannes tells me as he smiles broadly. "At least he didn't ask me to sing."

The *Sound of Music* has been called "the world's favourite musical". On the release of the movie in 1965, the *Hollywood Reporter* described it as "one of the all-time great pictures





The von Trapps gathered for a reunion at the original Trapp Family Lodge in 1965. Johannes can be seen second from left in the back row

[that] restores your faith in movies.” The film won five Oscars, its soundtrack has sold 20 million copies worldwide, and it has been seen by a mind-boggling one billion-plus people. Today, it is the most viewed musical and third most successful film of all time, after *Gone With the Wind* and *Star Wars*.

While countless books, articles and documentaries have been produced about *The Sound of Music*, less has been revealed about the real-life Austrian family on which the movie was based. In the film, Captain Georg von Trapp, a highly decorated Austrian naval hero, is reluctant to let the children sing in public, but in reality, he and his second wife, Maria, formed a singing group, the Trapp Family Choir,

that toured Europe in 1937 and 1938.

In both the film and real life, the anti-Nazi von Trapps left Austria after the *Anschluss*, when Germany annexed Austria. Georg had been instructed to

accept a German naval commission, and the family decided to leave their homeland. As Georg tells Maria in the movie, “To refuse them would be fatal ... and joining them would be unthinkable.”

But in the movie’s famous final scene, nine von Trapps* are shown hiking through the Alps on their way to Switzerland. “The family

*The movie version featured only the seven children that the captain had with his first wife; he had three more with Maria.



members did indeed escape from Hitler and the Nazis in 1938, the year before I was born," says Johannes, "but they merely boarded a train in Salzburg and made their way to Italy and eventually America."

I ask, "So the climactic scene didn't really happen?"

"Let's just say that was the Hollywood version," Johannes says with his blue eyes sparkling. "If our family had walked over the mountains from Salzburg they'd have ended up in Berchtesgaden, Germany, close to Hitler's Eagle's Nest mountaintop retreat!"

He pauses for a beat, smiles warmly, and adds, "But it makes for a more dramatic story, doesn't it?"

The von Trapp Brewery and Bierhall are part of the family's efforts to expand the appeal of the Trapp Family Lodge beyond *Sound of Music* fans

Dramatic indeed. But so is the family's real-life, post-Europe story. After leaving Austria while Maria was pregnant with Johannes, the von Trapps arrived in the US in 1939

with less than four dollars. Georg had lost his fortune in a bank failure, but the family prospered on an extended concert tour across America.

Audiences loved the Austrian family wearing their native costumes and performing their traditional music. As *The New York Times* noted, "There was something unusually lovable about this little family aggregation." In time the entire 12-member family would become "the most heavily booked attraction in US concert history."

PHOTO: JUDD LAMPHERE/JAM CREATIVE



In 1942 the family settled in Stowe, a ski town and summer resort established in 1794. They bought a tumble-down farmhouse and 270 hectares of land that boasted drop-dead views of Vermont's Green and Worcester mountains. It reminded them of Austria.

Two of the brothers, Rupert and Werner, joined the US Army and served in the 10th Mountain Division as ski troopers. Other family members married and moved away; one worked as a teacher, another became a missionary, another a doctor.

Georg died in 1947 and the Trapp Family Singers finally disbanded in 1956 after performing in more than 2000 concerts throughout 30 countries. The family members who remained in Stowe helped Maria run the 27-room family home and lodge.

To help support the family after her husband died, Maria wrote a family biography and sold the rights for less than US\$10,000 to a German publisher, who made two movies about the family. That publisher in turn sold the rights (for much more) to Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein as the basis for their Broadway musical, *The Sound of Music*, which premièred in 1959, ran for three years and won five Tony Awards. Then in 1965 came the Hollywood version of the musical.

As Johannes remembers, "Everything, and I mean everything, changed!" Thanks to its worldwide success, the von Trapps, especially

Maria, who was portrayed by Julie Andrews in the film, became instant celebrities. The lodge prospered.

Until she died in 1987, Maria was the public face of the family, granting countless interviews and appearing on television specials. "She was the driving force that kept us together through the hard times," says Johannes. Mary Martin, who played Maria on Broadway, said of her, "The family didn't just climb that mountain to escape. She pushed them, all the way up."

As I join Johannes for a walk around the grounds of the lodge, which was rebuilt after the original burned down in 1980, he admits that the publicity generated by the movie was, and is, "a mixed blessing".

He explains, "Don't get me wrong, *The Sound of Music* is a fabulous movie, a tour de force that resonates with lots of people, but it doesn't really accurately represent who my family was. My father, for example, was not the stern, demanding martinet portrayed in the film. He was much more loving, informal and caring. And the music we performed was, well, a bit more sophisticated than 'Doe, a deer, a female deer.'"

The lodge's piano player knows to keep an eye out for Johannes, who has warned him, "Please no 'Do-Re-Mi' or 'Edelweiss' when I'm around." Guests often request songs from the musical, and the pianist will oblige. However,

if he spots Johannes he will quickly switch to playing 'Desperado' by the Eagles, his favourite, or another tune.

"It's not that I hate 'Do-Re-Mi'," says Johannes with a wry smile. "I've just heard it a million times."

All of Johannes' siblings, except his sisters Rosemarie, 91, and Eleonore, 88, who live locally, have passed away. He has run the lodge since 1969. "I never wanted to turn this into a *Sound of Music* theme park," he says. "I've tried to make it express my family's tastes and values."

True to his roots, Johannes built a cross-country ski centre at the lodge and established a successful \$15 million brewery that offers classic Austrian, South German and Bohemian beers. "I knew we couldn't rely forever on the movie to keep bringing us paying guests," he explains.

Johannes recently handed off much of his management responsibilities to his son Sam, daughter Kristina and her husband Walter Frame. The siblings decided to establish a history tour that tells the story of both the family and the movie. "I grew up with a 'too cool for school' attitude about the movie and kept it at arm's length," admits Sam, 47. (He has seen it only two times.) "But it didn't take me long to realise how important the movie is to so many people."

He remembers an airline employee who recognised his name and told

him how *The Sound of Music* had influenced him to leave a lucrative job and return home to take care of his ailing mother. "He said that the movie had shown him how important the love of family was," says Sam.

"We hear sentiments like that all the time. It never fails to amaze us that this movie, and our family's story, has had such a hugely positive influence on people. It showed us that being a von Trapp is a privilege."

While the movie may lure some people to the lodge, the family banks on customers returning year after year because of the property's outdoor offerings, from mountain biking to cross-country skiing to hiking. The lodge is jam-packed with memorabilia of the family and *The Sound of Music*, and the gift shop sells everything from Edelweiss jewellery to Trapp Family Farm maple syrup.

Tourists invariably ask, does Sam or his sister sing? Sam, an accomplished skier and former fashion model, winces a bit and says, "My father and mother are great singers. Me, not so much."

Sitting in the crowded Bierhall, Johannes admits that he has changed his opinion of *The Sound of Music* over the years. "I've mellowed," he explains. "I realise the film wasn't meant to be a realistic history of my family, and I've come to appreciate that it expresses universal themes such as love of country, love



Johannes von Trapp and his wife Lynne with their children and grandchildren. Son Sam and daughter Kristina (pictured in the middle of the back row) now run the family lodge

of a man and a woman, love of family and so much more. And it has meant so much to so many people.

“There’s a story I tell ...” He stops mid-sentence, wipes a tear from his eye and explains, “Every time I tell this story, I tear up a bit. Sorry.”

Johannes was visiting his mother, Maria, at the Trapp Family Lodge on an autumn afternoon in the 1970s. They were sitting on her balcony, which looked out onto the family’s private cemetery some 60 metres away.

He continues: “We had recently fenced off the family cemetery because visitors had trampled the flowers. Suddenly, I saw a man climb over the fence and thought, *Not again! What’s he doing?*”

He pauses once more, blinks back a tear and explains, “I realised he was wearing a service dress white uniform. He was a US Navy officer. He went up to my father’s grave, stood there at attention and saluted.

He held his salute for a moment, slowly lowered his arm and then did an about-face. Then he climbed back over the wall and walked away.

“I was incredibly moved. In fact, I was speechless,” remembers Johannes. “But I soon realised that if it had not been for *The Sound of Music*, my father’s story wouldn’t be as well known as it was then and continues to be. It also proved to me that there are people who respect my family for what we are and what we’ve done. That means the world to us.”



A Friend Called

PIP



BONUS READ

A devoted and clever family pet is proving to be a blessing for a teenager and her family

BY *Kate Leaver*

FROM THE BOOK **GOOD DOG**

SOMETIMES, YOU'VE JUST GOT TO DO WHAT'S required in order to get the dog you want. Especially if you're not old enough to be making such a big decision for yourself and your family. For eight-year-old Katie Gregson, that required getting approval from both her parents. Katie's mother, Christine, was fairly easy to persuade, though; she can't help feeling maternal towards small living creatures, so Katie simply kept showing her photographs of puppies until she caved. Her dad, David, was a bit harder to crack. He'd had a dog before – a border collie – and when she died, he swore he could never go through that anguish again. So when his daughter began begging him for precisely that breed of dog, he didn't think he could do it. No, he said, again and again, a difficult word for a doting father to say.

READER'S DIGEST

Katie adapted and upgraded her campaign. She started getting stuffed-toy dogs and sticky-taping them around their home. She taped stuffed-toy dogs to the microwave, to the TV, to the wall. Meanwhile, she kept on nagging, begging and pleading for a border collie pup to call her own.

She was determined – and she persisted until the job was done. It took two years, but eventually David agreed to get a dog. A border collie puppy, even after all of David's promises to himself to the contrary.

And so it was that sweet, wiry Pip came to live in the Gregson family home. Katie was ten when she first went to see Pip, an eight-week-old bundle of puppy who tumbled towards her, all tiny, tentative legs and wet button nose. Pip was there with her brother, who promptly ignored the Gregsons. Pip, however, tottered straight on over to Katie, Christine and David when they arrived, obviously choosing, as dogs so often do, the people she'd live with for the rest of her life. Katie adored her from the moment they met, and, really, they haven't spent much time apart since.

Katie's now 17 and Pip is more than just a pet. Around the time she got Pip, Katie and Christine had read about diabetic alert dogs. These dogs are specially trained to detect when their human has either low or high blood sugar levels. They learn, over time, to alert someone when they smell a change in that person's blood

glucose levels, to prevent them from having a hypoglycaemic (low blood sugar) and hyperglycaemic (high blood sugar) episode. A couple of years after she arrived, Pip started learning.

Katie lives with type 1 diabetes. She was diagnosed with the condition at two years old, making her one of the youngest patients to ever be diagnosed with the condition at her local hospital. At the time, of course, she didn't have a way to properly communicate that she was feeling unwell or say what was the matter, so Christine and David despaired every time she'd wail.

Eventually, she came into the hospital in a critical condition – diabetes can be extremely dangerous when it's left untreated. She had dangerously high blood sugar because her body was not producing insulin. Later, she'd have wildly differing highs and lows in blood sugar.

While she was a child, Christine and David were in charge of administering her insulin, which they did with the jab of a needle multiple times each day. When Katie reached her teenage years, she started looking after herself. She's fiercely independent, she says, and it's been important to her for years that she is in control of her own condition. Type 1 diabetes is an auto-immune condition, so the incarnation of the illness has nothing

to do with her lifestyle choices. It's because her pancreas doesn't do its job, and can occur in anyone, however fit or healthy. Katie has to regularly check her blood sugar levels, maybe ten times a day, pricking her little finger and then using a small remote control to administer the correct amount of insulin into her blood stream via an insulin pump that's embedded in her skin. While she can eat what she likes, she has to be doing the maths on how much insulin she'll need to counteract her latest snack. It's tough, but so is she. For someone so young, she's resilient and determined and calm.

Katie has some help managing her condition now, though. At first, she had planned to keep Pip just as her companion. She taught the pup all the basic obedience commands, so Pip's a tremendously well-behaved dog who sits, stays, waits and comes at the utterance of a particular word. Pip can do more than 50 tricks, too; such as weaving between your legs or jumping over you. By the time she got Pip, Katie had watched a lot of the television show, *Britain's Got Talent*, and was inspired by the clever dogs who'd do various tricks, so she set about training her own show dog.

Soon after, she started doing a bit of research into diabetic alert dogs. There wasn't much information around at the time. She found a video on YouTube in which someone had taught their dog to smell whether the owner had high or low blood sugar levels. Katie watched the clip obsessively, taking inspiration for her own training regime.

Katie set about training Pip to tell when something was wrong with her blood sugar, all by herself. She followed the protocol from the YouTube video, which meant making samples of her saliva when she had high and low blood sugar. She put some of her saliva on cotton wool pads – one taken when she had high blood sugar, one taken when she had low

Diabetic alert dogs are specially trained to detect when their owner has either low or high blood sugar levels

blood sugar – and she placed them each in a small pot. She put those pots in the freezer. Then she'd take out the pots, show them to Pip and reward her with praise and a treat every time she showed any interest in the pot. She kept doing this every day for six months.

Her first objective was to encourage Pip to be curious about these scent pots. From there, she prompted Pip to make a fuss when she smelled the pots, and rewarded her for every

bark or squirm. Then she'd hold the pots up to her mouth to indicate to Pip that the smell was associated with her. Over a period of about 18 months, Pip learned to detect that smell, associate it with Katie and alert someone when she smelled it. When she was ready, Katie got rid of the pots and knew she could rely on Pip to sniff out any change in blood sugar. When Katie was younger, the idea was to get Pip to alert Katie's parents if her blood sugar was too high or too low so they could come and help.

Katie was 13 by the time Pip knew how to sniff changes in Katie's blood sugar and alert Christine and David.

Katie has her waking hours covered. She checks herself constantly when she's up and about during the day, so she doesn't rely on Pip so much then. It's at night time, when Katie's asleep, that Pip does her most important work. Pip lies curled up in her own bed in Katie's bedroom, and basically stays half-awake all night, alert in case there's a change in Katie's smell. If she smells a shift in Katie's blood sugar, she belts out of the bedroom, scampers down the stairs, pushes open the door to Katie's parents' room and waggles from one

side of the bed to the other until one of them wakes up and goes upstairs to help. She doesn't bark, but instead places her body in their personal space until they take notice. She's also found out that whacking her thick tail against the wardrobe is an effective, noisy way to rouse Christine and David. Once they're awake, they go into Katie's room, wake her and get her to adjust her insulin to prevent her from slipping into a coma or needing further help.

At night time, when Katie's asleep, Pip does her most important work, constantly on the alert for changes

Pip could, presumably, be trained to wake Katie, now that Katie's old enough to deal with insulin administration herself, but Pip's entrenched habit is to seek out Christine and David and make the alert. She does it when they're all at

home together and awake, too. If they're lounging around at home in the evening and Katie's blood sugar changes, Pip will jump onto one of them and stand with her full weight on their belly or chest or lap until they get up to help Katie.

David says that he and Christine are woken by Pip at least once a week these days, so it's an extremely helpful and important routine Pip's got going. She's basically a shift-worker, awake during the night when



Border collie Pip is not only Katie Gregson's best friend but her lifesaver

everyone else is asleep, constantly on alert for changes in Katie's blood sugar. When Katie gets up in the morning, Pip gives herself permission to sleep. She curls up and snoozes through half the day, often not getting out of bed until noon. She can be slow and groggy throughout the day, taking the time when Katie is at her new job to recover from her evening guard duties.

It was difficult training Pip. There were days when Katie almost gave up, days when it seemed like a patently ridiculous idea that this could ever work. She did give up, once, for three weeks. She just decided that perhaps Pip wasn't cut out for this kind of work, that perhaps it wasn't going to be possible, after all the hours they'd spent trying to learn together. And

that's exactly when it clicked for Pip and she started to understand what she had to do. All of those hours finally paid off, and she showed Katie and her family what she could do.

It was life-changing to have someone who can watch over Katie at night when she's sleeping. That's when some of her most severe and dangerous episodes happen, so it's invaluable to have a four-legged night nurse on duty each night in her bedroom.

Katie had a lot of time for dog training through her school years because she was home-schooled from the age of 11. When she was growing up she had a chronic pain condition that affected her shoulder and arm as well as the type 1 diabetes, and her school

SERVICE DOGS ASSISTING PEOPLE WITH DIABETES

Pip is remarkable and this job couldn't be done by any old dog. Dogs have different capabilities, varying between breeds, but we do have some proof that suggests many dogs could learn this sort of thing.

Academic Linda Gonder Frederick at the University of Virginia did a study with 36 diabetic-alert dog owners; 23 of whom were the parents of a child with diabetes, and 13 adult diabetics themselves. The majority – 61 per cent – reported that they worried far less about the incidence of hypoglycaemia and

hyperglycaemia in their lives since having a specially trained diabetic alert dog. Seventy-five per cent of these owners said their dogs improved their quality of life. The same percentage said the dogs enhanced their ability to participate in physical activity.

These dogs may be more effective, timely alerts than other traditional medical technology we rely on to tell us whether we're high or low on blood sugar. A typical blood glucose monitor can detect an abnormality in blood glucose 15 minutes after the level is too low or two high.

Diabetic alert dogs can typically alert a person to that change 30 minutes before it reaches danger point. They can also detect that change before the onset of any symptoms, which is especially important for people who are no longer aware of their own changes in behaviour. Over time, diabetic patients can become unaware of the signs of an episode of hypoglycaemia.

Imagine how much calmer you'd feel having a creature sitting nearby who can identify, before you are aware, that you need to adjust your insulin.



told Christine and David that they could not guarantee her safety during school hours. David had retired by then, so he and Christine took it upon themselves to teach her. Katie could make time during the day, in the evenings and on weekends, then, to spend with Pip, teaching her and coaxing her into being the diabetic alert dog she needed.

Not a lot of people have heard of diabetic alert dogs but that could be changing as we start entertaining the idea that dogs can be extremely helpful, effective and conscientious assistants when they're trained to do something specific and practical.

As we've seen with Katie and Pip, it's possible to train an ordinary pet dog to do an important job. Pip potentially saves Katie's life once a week. Pip is also just a delight. She's a genuine, beloved member of the Gregson family. She now has a best mate, too, a poodle called Coco.

Pip's sleeping routine is a bit unconventional, but she lives a happy, active, loving life with her humans. She takes her job as a diabetic alert dog very seriously and she does herself very proud. So does Katie, who dreams of opening her own dog-training business one day. We know well enough by now the happiness a dog can bring to a person's life. And how completely wonderful that they also provide safety, comfort and reassurance. **R**



This is an edited extract from *Good Dog* by Kate Leaver, published by HarperCollins. Available from all good bookstores. To read a review of this book, go to page 130.

Not in Their Good Books

Staff at a UK library were left with a 'nightmare' job after a well-meaning cleaner restacked the bookshelves in order of book size after cleaning them. The staff at Newmarket Library in Suffolk discovered the shelves lined with books arranged from largest to smallest – and their alphabetical organising system upended. The building was undergoing a deep clean while it was shut due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "It looks like libraries will be closed for a while so we'll have plenty of time to sort the books out," a library spokesman said at the time, noting workers found humour in the mishap. [BBC.COM](https://www.bbc.com)



What's New in RD Talks

Sit back and enjoy the audio versions of the most engaging stories to have appeared in Reader's Digest magazine.



A BROTHER'S LOVE

Burned beyond recognition, Franck's only hope to save his life was his identical twin brother – and a groundbreaking medical procedure.



THE HAUNTED HOUSE NEXT DOOR

The Broaddus family couldn't wait to move into their dream home. Until ominous letters began arriving in the mail.



LETTING GO

If we could choose one thing to outlast all others, what better choice would there be but love?



RESCUE AT 45,000 FEET

Skydiving instructor Sheldon McFarlane thought trainee jumper Christopher Jones's first solo jump would be routine. It was anything but.



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RD RECOMMENDS



Top End Girl **Miranda Tapsell** HACHETTE

Australian stage and screen actor (*The Sapphires*; *Love Child*) Miranda Tapsell is a Larrakia Tiwi girl who prides herself on her Aboriginality as well as her love for Darwin, the Tiwi Islands and the 'Top End' – the continent's northernmost area. She is also passionate about romantic comedies. Always up for a challenge, the year she was to marry she also co-wrote, produced and starred in a film about a wedding, *Top End Wedding*. Tapsell admits she never does things by halves. That year she also wrote this memoir. Down-to-earth, funny and wise, Tapsell's memoir is about being bold, black and brave in work, life and love.



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

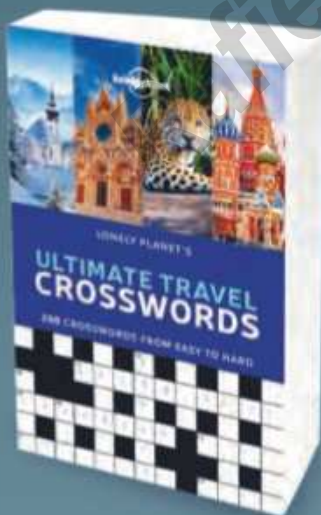
COMPILED BY DIANE GODLEY



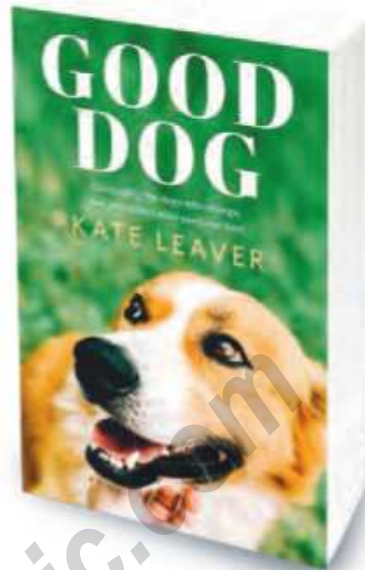
Ultimate Travel Crosswords

Lonely Planet

With more time to spend at home, keep your mind sharp with Lonely Planet's *Ultimate Travel Crosswords*. Featuring perplexing questions on everything from wildlife and geography to transport, culture, food and history, it's the perfect alternative to a night watching Netflix. Pit your worldly knowledge against



your family or simply challenge yourself. Split into three sections – easy, medium and hard – *this* book has 200 crosswords for you to tackle, with clues to confound and entertain adults and children alike.



Good Dog

Kate Leaver

HARPERCOLLINS

Good Dog is a celebration of the remarkable cross-species friendship between humans and canines. Covering the science and history of our relationship with dogs, the book focuses on the role that they can play in enriching our lives and improving our mental and emotional health. Author Kate Leaver tells ten powerful personal stories about dogs and their owners, including Missy the pug and her ten-year-old autistic owner Cody, and Jingles, a prison dog who works in therapy and rehab. **For an edited extract from this book, see our Bonus Read 'A Friend Called Pip' on page 120.**

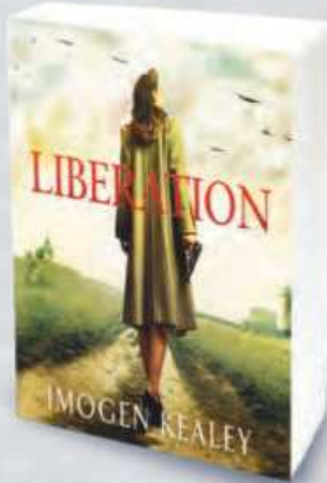


Fiction

Liberation

Imogen Kealey
HATCHETTE

This fast-moving action thriller is inspired by the true story of World War II heroine Nancy Wake, a courier for the French Resistance and later a saboteur and spy parachuted back into France. Born in New Zealand and raised in Australia, Wake, initially a journalist, is credited with helping Allied airmen escape from occupied France. The Gestapo named her the 'White Mouse' because she was so difficult to catch, placing a large bounty on her head and capturing and torturing her wealthy French husband, Henri. While some of the characters are imaginary, some events are invented and the author changes the real timeline to suit the plot, lovers of historical fiction will find *Liberation* a riveting read. *M.Egan*

**The Lost Love Song**

Minnie Darke

PENGUIN RANDOMHOUSE

I'm not usually one for romance novels, but this charming read about second chances and the power of music by the author of *Star-crossed* is refreshing and beautifully crafted. Classical pianist Diana Clare writes a love song to her fiancé Arie while overseas on tour, but she is never able to play it to him. However, the song is overheard in a Singapore hotel, and travels from ear to ear around the globe, playing a major role in several love stories: reconciling a father and daughter, reuniting two brothers, and as a springboard for young love. It also finds the nomadic poet Evie, who unwittingly brings the song back to Melbourne. An uplifting jaunt of a novel.



The Women's Pages

Victoria Purman

HARPERCOLLINS

Based on real life experiences, *The Women's Pages* tells the story of Tilly Galloway, a reporter at a Sydney newspaper during World War II. When the war comes to an end – and servicemen are returning to their previous careers – Tilly is relieved of her gig in the newsroom and sent to the 'Women's Pages', where she struggles to write the frivolous advice column about fashion and make-up, while her friend attempts to cope with the stranger her ex-POW husband has become. A richly crafted novel that graphically depicts life during those harrowing years. A touching tale and enthralling read.



Nothing Can Hurt You

Nicola Maye Goldberg

RAVEN BOOKS

After a college student is murdered, and her boyfriend is acquitted on grounds of temporary insanity, the case haunts a diverse group of people who search for meaning and retribution. There's no denying that this psychological thriller has all the requisite twists and darkness, from a young character collecting classmates' baby teeth to another writing to a serial killer in prison. The writing, too, is lyrical and captivating at times. However, the sheer number of the disparate voices affected, and the bouncing from one's experience to the next, makes it difficult to engage with the characters fully.

M.Egan.





Podcasts

**Home Cooking**

Chef Samin Nosrat and podcaster Hrishikesh Hirway responded to the Covid-19 lockdown by creating a podcast about eating at home using pantry staples. Each episode is themed, with 'Bean There, Done That' suggesting ideas for legumes.

**Strange Encounter on Coho Creek**

Deep in the Alaskan wilderness, a gold prospector forms a connection with a wolf, caught in the jaws of a steel trap, and her cubs. It's "a reminder that there are things in nature that exist outside the laws and understanding of man".

**Trashy Divorces**

If you are in the mood for a gossipy podcast about bad relationships, *Trashy Divorces* dishes the dirt on celebrity divorces. Now in season six, it has aired the dirty laundry of many Hollywood stars and quite a few other famous folk.

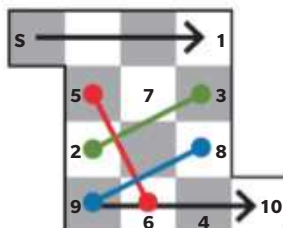
HOW TO GET PODCASTS To listen on the web: Google 'Home Cooking' and 'podcasts', for example, and click on the play button. **To download:** Download an app such as Podcatchers or iTunes on your phone or tablet and simply search by title.

TO LISTEN TO RD TALKS GO TO

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Puzzle Answers See page 138**FIRST IN**

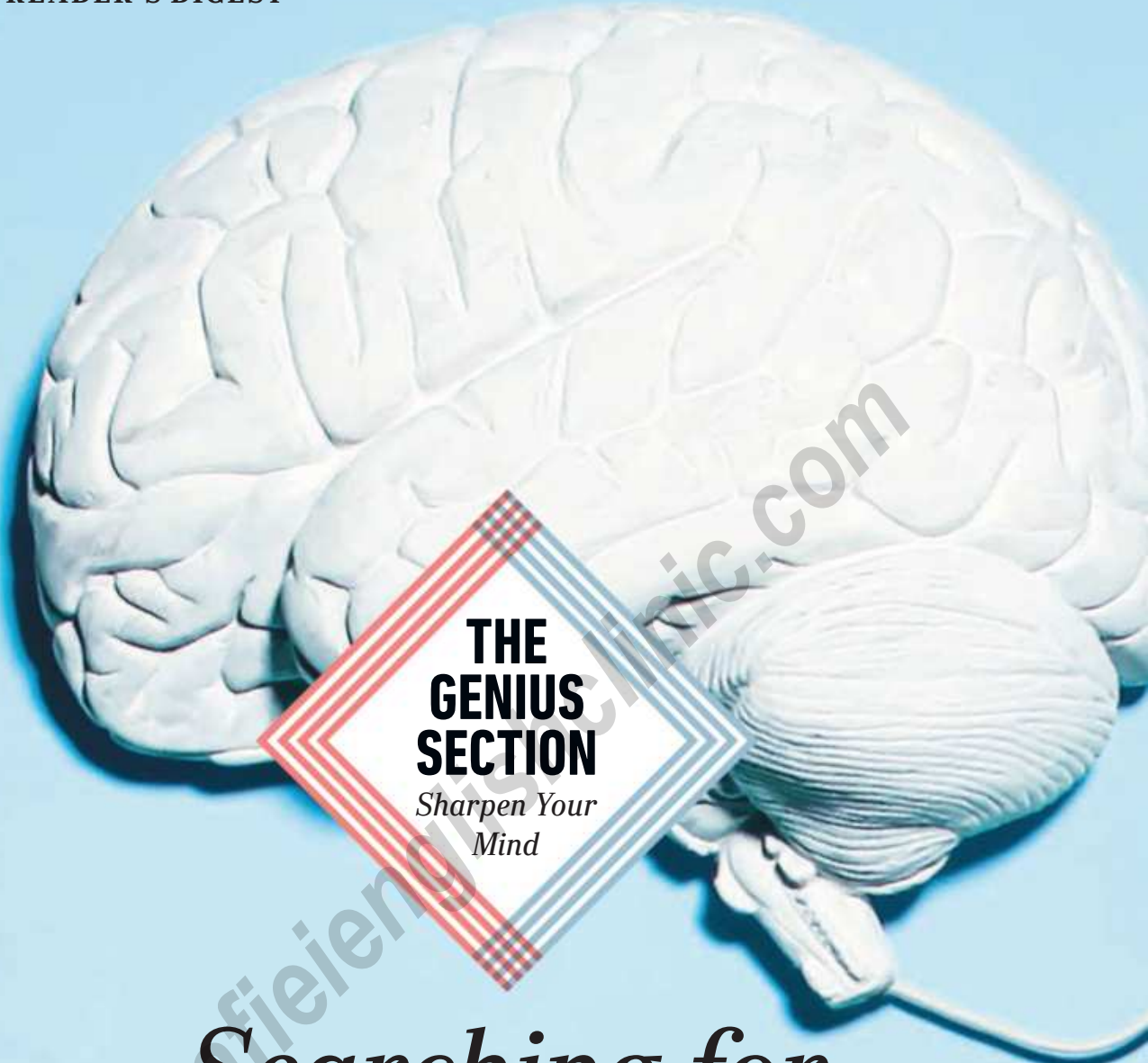
B	D		A	C
	B	C	D	A
C	A	B		D
A		D	C	B
D	C	A	B	

ROOK, BISHOP, KNIGHT**MOVING DAY**

7	12	18
15	26	42
47	80	125

SUDOKU

5	7	3	4	2	8	9	6	1
9	2	8	6	1	7	5	4	3
4	6	1	3	5	9	8	7	2
8	3	4	9	7	1	6	2	5
2	1	5	8	4	6	3	9	7
6	9	7	5	3	2	1	8	4
1	4	6	7	8	3	2	5	9
3	5	9	2	6	4	7	1	8
7	8	2	1	9	5	4	3	6



**THE
GENIUS
SECTION**
*Sharpen Your
Mind*

Searching for
LEARNING

How to avoid being clickbaited by your own brain

—
By Daniel T. Willingham

ADAPTED FROM **THE NEW YORK TIMES**



You can learn anything on the internet, so why do I so often learn things I don't want to know? When I'm surfing the web, I want to be drawn in by articles on Europe's political history, but I end up reading trivia such as a menu from Alcatraz prison. Why am I not curious about the things I want to be curious about?

Across evolutionary time, curious animals were more likely to survive because they learned about their environments; a forager that occasionally skipped a reliable feeding ground to explore might find an even better place to eat.

Humans, too, will forgo a known payoff to investigate the unknown. In one experiment, subjects were asked to choose one of four photos, each carrying some chance of paying a cash prize. Photos repeated, so subjects learned to pick the best-paying, but when a novel

photo popped up, they chose it more often than the odds dictated they should. This preference for novelty is the reason manufacturers periodically tweak product packaging.

But it's good to know about your environment even if it doesn't promise a reward right now; knowledge may be useless today but vital next week. Therefore, evolution has left us with a brain that can reward itself; satisfying curiosity feels pleasurable, so you explore the environment even when you don't expect any concrete payoff. Infants prefer to look at novel pictures compared with familiar ones.

What's more, curiosity doesn't just ensure new opportunities for learning; it enhances learning itself. Curiosity causes a brain state that amplifies learning.

A function of curiosity - to heighten memory - is the key to understanding why we're curious about some things and not others. We feel most curious when exploration will yield the most learning.

Suppose I ask you, "What's the most common type of star in the Milky Way?" You'll obviously feel no curiosity if you already know the answer. But you'll also feel little interest if you know nothing about stars; if you learned the answer, you couldn't connect it to other knowledge, so it would seem nearly meaningless. We're most

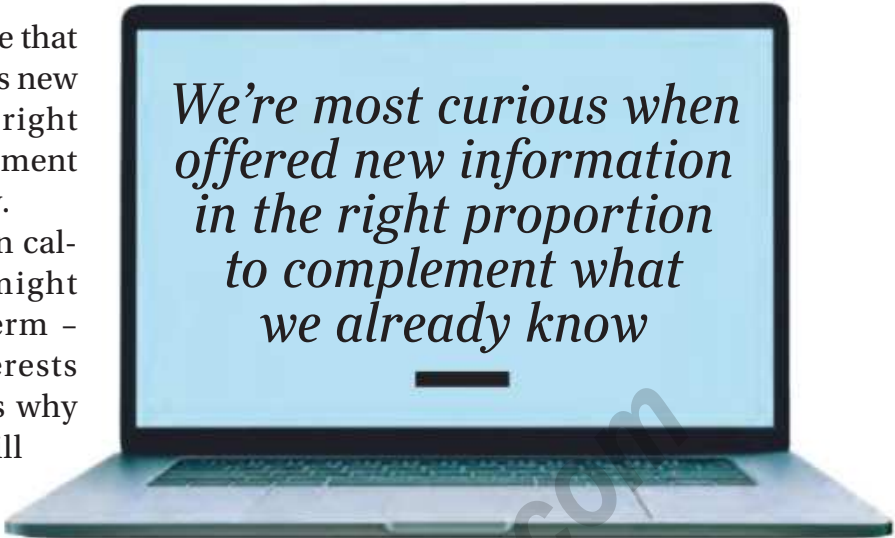
READER'S DIGEST

curious when we sense that the environment offers new information in the right proportion to complement what we already know.

Note that your brain calculates what you might learn in the short term – your long-term interests aren't a factor. That's why a cardiac surgeon will nevertheless find a conference presentation on the subject boring if her brain decides that it won't add to her knowledge. Conversely, when she watches a documentary on type fonts, her brain may calculate that this will be a rich source of information.

It's that disconnect between long- and short-term interests that makes frothy internet articles so frustrating. The feeling of curiosity promised you'd learn something and, admittedly, you did – now you know French citizens' favourite macaron flavour – but you're disappointed because your new knowledge doesn't contribute to your long-term interests. You've been clickbaited by your own brain.

If following curiosity results in disappointment, maybe it shouldn't be allowed to take the lead. Why not just search for topics you truly want to learn about? That sounds logical, but some searches will yield thousands of hits and no way of knowing which offers the just-right match to your




We're most curious when offered new information in the right proportion to complement what we already know

current knowledge that will maintain your curiosity.

If you wish for more serious reading when you surf the web, the opportunistic approach is actually fine. You just need to frequent better foraging grounds.

Many websites that snare your time feature scores of stories on the front page, banking that one will strike each reader's sweet spot of knowledge. So visit websites that use the same strategy but offer richer content: for example, JSTOR Daily or ScienceDaily.

Albert Einstein famously advised a young student to “never lose a holy curiosity”. Given our evolutionary history, there's little danger any of us will. The challenge is changing its focus from the momentary to something more enduring. 

THE NEW YORK TIMES (OCTOBER 18, 2019), © THE NEW YORK TIMES, NYTIMES.COM.



FAMILY FUN

Spot the Difference

There are ten differences. Can you find them?



City Lights

How many lights should be burning in skyscraper 5?

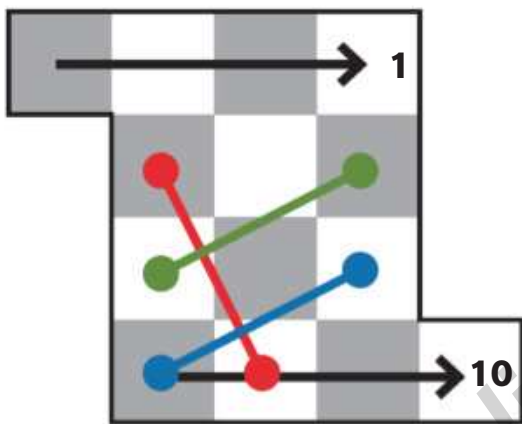


Check your answers for Family Fun on page 142.

PUZZLES

Challenge yourself by solving these puzzles and mind stretchers, then check your answers on page 133.

START



FINISH

Rook, Bishop, Knight
Moderately Difficult

Trace a path from start to finish. The first move of the path is a rook's move (any distance horizontally or vertically); the second is a bishop's move (any distance on a 45-degree diagonal); and the third is a knight's move (an L-shape). You must then cycle through those three types of moves again, in the same order, until ten moves are made. No square can be the end point for a move more than once. The three knight's moves are shown in blue, green and red. The first and last move are given in black. Can you determine the path?

Moving Day Easy

The number on each box represents the physical weight of that box. Each box can support no more than half of its own weight sitting on top of it, whether that's from one or two boxes. Each box with a red number is fragile and cannot have another box on top of it. You have enough room in your moving truck for three stacks of three boxes. How can you stack these ones to fit them in?



(ROOK, BISHOP, KNIGHT; AND MOVING DAY) DARREN RIGBY; (FIRST IN) FRASER SIMPSON



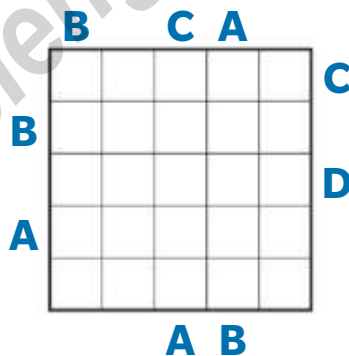
				8	9		1
			1		5	4	
6		3		9		7	
					6		
		5	8	4	6	3	
		7					
	4		7		3		5
	5	9		6			
7		2	1				

Sudoku To Solve This Puzzle

Put a number from 1 to 9 in each empty square so that: every horizontal row and vertical column contains all nine numbers (1-9) without repeating any of them; each of the outlined 3 x 3 boxes has all nine numbers, none repeated.

First In Moderately Difficult

Place the letters A, B, C and D into this grid so that each letter appears exactly once in each row and column, with one cell in each row and column left blank. Each letter outside the grid indicates the letter that must appear first in its respective row or column (reading inwards from the edge of the grid closest to the letter and skipping any blank cells).



Can you complete the grid?

BRAIN POWER
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ジュースアップ
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TRIVIA

Test Your General Knowledge

BY Paul Paquet

- 1.** To raise money for charities, who handwrote an 800-word prequel to her bestselling book series? **1 point**
- 2.** According to its former minister of tourism, which country is known abroad for its three 'Rs': reggae, romance and running? **1 point**
- 3.** Main-sequence stars fuse hydrogen into helium in their cores. What's the closest one to Earth? **1 point**
- 4.** Razzie awards are meant to go to bad movies, but who got nominated for directing the now widely respected film *Scarface*? **2 points**
- 5.** Mauritius is the only African country where the most commonly practised religion is what? **1 point**
- 6.** Structures in Tokyo; Las Vegas; Shenzhen; and Paris, Texas all look like what French monument? **1 point**
- 7.** Which country's late monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, received recognition for his rainmaking technology? **2 points**
- 8.** Which is the largest capital city in the world (by population)? **1 point**
- 9.** At what age did Jacinda Ardern become New Zealand's prime minister? a) 32. b) 37. c) 39. **1 point**
- 10.** Queen Mary Tudor of England is better known to history by what name? **2 points**
- 11.** The 'Eddie Murphy Rule' banned certain kinds of insider trading in commodities markets. It was inspired by his role in what film? **2 points**
- 12.** What two Renaissance artists were commissioned to paint rivalling frescoes at the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence? **2 points**
- 13.** Malaysia is a leading producer of tin. True or false? **1 point**
- 14.** The first time someone bought real-world goods with bitcoins, 10,000 of them (worth about US\$90 million at current prices) were exchanged for what? **2 points**



16-20 Gold medal 11-15 Silver medal 6-10 Bronze medal 0-5 Wooden spoon

Answers: 1. J.K. Rowling. 2. Jamaica. 3. The sun. 4. Brian De Palma. 5. Hinduism. 6. The Eiffel Tower. 7. Thailand. 8. Tokyo, with a total of over 38 million residents, if the entire metro area is included. 9. b) 37. 10. Bloody Mary. 11. *Trading Places*. 12. Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. 13. True. 14. Two pizzas.

WORD POWER

Time to Go Dutch

With its long history as a seafaring nation, the Netherlands has exported more than just tulips. Test your knowledge of the words it has contributed to the English language

BY Rob Lutes

1. crimp – A: restrict spending.
B: compress into small folds.
C: climb.

2. bung – A: stopper for a container. B: mechanical spring.
C: insect nest.

3. cruller – A: flat-bottomed boat.
B: felt hat. C: small cake made from a twisted strip of dough.

4. avast – A: nautical command to stop. B: large estate. C: north wind.

5. beleaguered – A: subjected to constant trouble. B: divided into small groups. C: well-equipped.

6. polder – A: head bandage.
B: tract of low land reclaimed from the sea. C: hearty meat stew.

7. maelstrom – A: challenging path. B: raging fire. C: powerful whirlpool.

8. freebooter – A: lazy person.

B: pirate. C: wanderer.

9. bulwark – A: strong protection.
B: marsh. C: nonsensical statement.

10. boodle – A: small sack for clothes. B: fruit-filled pastry.
C: money.

11. bumpkin – A: buoy.
B: unsophisticated person from the countryside. C: horizontal bar on the front of a tractor.

12. foist – A: impose something unwelcome. B: leap. C: brag.

13. bogart – A: commit art forgery.
B: drain. C: use without sharing.

14. blunderbuss – A: dangerous journey. B: careless person.
C: fantastical story.

15. bruin – A: bear.
B: leather waistcoat.
C: uninhabitable structure.

Answers

- 1. crimp** – B: compress into small folds. For an 1980s-themed party, Mandy learned how to crimp her locks with a hair iron.
- 2. bung** – A: stopper for a container. The shipment arrived safely, a bung keeping the precious antidote in the bottle.
- 3. cruller** – C: small cake made from a twisted strip of dough. Vijay arrived at the party with a box of crullers from the local bakery.
- 4. avast** – A: nautical command to stop. “Avast!” shouted the captain, but the crew ignored him and continued heading for shore.
- 5. beleaguered** – A: subjected to constant trouble. The beleaguered principal received notice of yet another cut in the school’s funding.
- 6. polder** – B: tract of low land reclaimed from the sea. Jan’s cattle grazed on a polder that was three metres below sea level.
- 7. maelstrom** – C: powerful whirlpool. Faidra swam with all her strength, barely escaping the deadly maelstrom just off the shore.
- 8. freebooter** – B: pirate. Legend has it that freebooters plundered most of the island’s treasures in the late 17th century.
- 9. bulwark** – A: strong protection. The long-serving mayor, with his pro-environmental focus, was a bulwark against overdevelopment.
- 10. boodle** – C: money. The robbery completed, the gang split the boodle five ways and made for the border.

- 11. bumpkin** – B: unsophisticated person from the countryside. Declan’s folk songs about lovable bumpkins earned him legions of fans.
- 12. foist** – A: impose something unwelcome. Shaun’s tendency to foist his own responsibilities on his colleagues made him unpopular.
- 13. bogart** – C: use without sharing. Kym bogarted the popcorn, rarely passing the large bag to her friends sitting next to her in the movie theatre.
- 14. blunderbuss** – B: careless person. Kareem resented his boss, a blunderbuss with a poor track record who wouldn’t be in charge were it not for nepotism.
- 15. bruin** – A: bear. The librarian read the children a story about a friendly bruin who helped a girl find her way home.

VOCABULARY RATINGS 5-8: Fair
9-11: Good **12-15:** Word Power Wizard

Family Fun Answers See Page 137



City Lights: 14. Starting at skyscraper 1, there is always one more light burning.

Reader's digest



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